

# THE FAITH OF MILLIONS

The Credentials of the Catholic Religion

by

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With a Preface

by

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and an Introduction by

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"Faith of Millions", "The Credentials of the Catholic Religion", by the Reverend John A. O'Brien, Ph.D., LL.D., pp. 270-271

"THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST -- ANOTHER CHRIST"

"The third great power of the priestly office is the climax of all. It is the power of consecrating....For in this role the priest speaks with the VOICE and the AUTHORITY OF GOD HIMSELF. When the priest pronounces the tremendous words of consecration, he reaches up into the heavens, BRINGS CHRIST DOWN FROM HIS THRONE, AND PLACES HIM UPON OUR ALTAR TO BE OFFERED UP AGAIN AS THE VICTIM FOR THE SINS OF MAN . . . not once BUT A THOUSAND TIMES! The priest speaks and lo! CHRIST, THE ETERNAL AND OMNIPOTENT GOD, BOWS HIS HEAD IN HUMBLE OBEDIENCE TO THE PRIEST'S COMMAND . . . FOR THE PRIEST IS AND SHOULD BE ANOTHER CHRIST."

"Faith of Millions", "The Credentials of the Catholic Religion", by the Reverend John A. O'Brien, Ph.D., LL.D., with a preface by his Eminence Cardinal O'Connell, Archbishop of Boston, and an introduction by His Eminence Dennis Cardinal Dougherty, Archbishop of Philadelphia, and bearing the Imprimatur of John Francis Noll, D.D., Bishop of Fort Wayne, pp.268-269

"The second great power of the priestly office is that of PARDONING. When the PRIEST raises aloft his right hand and pronounces the words of pardon over the sinner in the tribunal of confession, THE SHACKLES OF SIN ARE TORN FROM THE SOUL OF THE PENITENT. THE PRIEST PARDONS AS EFFECTIVELY AS IF THE WORDS FELL FROM THE LIPS OF CHRIST...THE HAND OF THE PRIEST REACHES UP BEYOND THE HORIZON OF THE SKY, AND WITH GOLDEN KEYS UNLOCKS THE TREASURY OF GOD'S MERCY AND FORGIVENESS AND APPLIES THEM TO THE SOULS OF MEN."

Nihil Obstat

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✠ JOHN FRANCIS NOLL, D. D.,

Bishop of Fort Wayne

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*A Sublime Office*

Having presented the evidence from Scripture and the writings of the early Fathers as to the divine origin of the priesthood and its essential powers, let us now briefly consider the dignity of the office, and the benefits which accrue to human society from its exercise. The priest is singled out by God who chooses him to be His ambassador to men. The words which Christ addressed to the Apostles after the Last Supper may be applied to all His priests: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and have appointed you, that you should go, and should bring forth fruit; and your fruit should remain." <sup>1</sup> It was this same divine teaching which St. Paul re-echoed when he declared to the Hebrews: "Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was." <sup>2</sup>

The priest is called by God not only into the line of Aaron, into the tribe of Levi, into the family of Samuel, into the priesthood of Melchisedech, but into the discipleship of Jesus Christ. He is made a member of that goodly company of disciples whose sound has gone forth unto the ends of the earth. Throughout nineteen hundred years they have borne the teachings of the Divine Master into every race and every land from the frozen snows of the Arctic to the burning sands of the Sahara, and even unto the far-distant shores washed by the waves of the Australasian seas.

"Behold!" said Christ, "I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world." With these words echoing in their ears, the Apostles went out into the countries of the then known world, preaching the gospel fearlessly to every creature. They quailed not before the lions in the Roman arena, nor before the pitch and tar with which they were to be burned alive to illumine the gladiatorial contests of the Romans. Why? Because they realized that they were speaking not in their own names, but in the name of Jesus Christ. Because they realized that they were His divinely appointed ambassadors, clothed by the Master with plenipotentiary power to speak and teach in His name. That is why St. Paul

1. John, 15:16.

2. Heb., 5:4.

was able to say with truth: "Let a man so regard us as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God." 1

### *Power of Pardoning*

The second great power of the priestly office is that of pardoning. When the priest raises aloft his right hand and pronounces the words of pardon over the sinner in the tribunal of confession, the shackles of sin are torn from the soul of the penitent. The priest pardons as effectively as if the words fell from the lips of Christ. It is a power which transcends that of kings and emperors. The power of kings is over the bodies of men. But they stand impotent before the kingdom of the soul. The hand of the priest reaches up beyond the horizon of the sky, and with golden keys unlocks the treasury of God's mercy and forgiveness and applies them to the souls of men.

The priest preserves inviolate the secrecy of the confessional even at the cost of life itself. Under no circumstances does he ever reveal the slightest imperfection breathed into his ear in confession. The sacrifice which every Catholic priest stands ready to make to preserve this trust inviolate is illustrated by the following historical incident. In 1899 Father Dumoulin, a French priest, was charged with the crime of murder. The sexton had murdered and robbed a wealthy woman. To throw suspicion from himself he dipped the smoking revolver in the victim's blood and placed it in Father Dumoulin's room. Then to seal the lips of the priest, he went to confession to Father Dumoulin, accusing himself of the murder.

Circumstantial evidence pointed to the priest. Knowing how secure he was behind that sacramental seal, knowing that the priest could not open those lips to reveal the guilty person even to save his own life, the sexton gave testimony convicting the priest. He was given a sentence that was worse than death—life imprisonment at hard labor on Devil's Island under the tropical sun, whither France sends her worst criminals. Suffering the loss of his good name, the ostracism of his friends and a public ignominy that was more painful than death itself, Father Dumoulin, like the good priest, remained faithful to his trust.

1. I Cor. 4:1.

For twenty-five years he toiled under the burning rays of the tropical sun among the outcasts of mankind, guarding ever the secret in his bosom. In those twenty-five years he saw his mother die of a broken heart, carrying to her grave the blight of her son's imprisonment. Twenty-five years of grinding convict toil had left him with grey hair, a face deeply lined, a body broken and bent, on the edge of the grave.

In a wretched hovel in a slum district in Paris a man lying on a bare cot is calling hysterically for a priest before he dies. As the priest enters, he shouts aloud: "I am guilty of the murder for which Father Dumoulin was condemned. I sealed his lips with confession and threw the guilt on him." Unwilling to face his God with that foul crime upon his soul, he seeks forgiveness through the very agency of confession whose inviolable secrecy he had perverted to convict an innocent priest. What a tardy retribution, that could not undo those twenty-five years of mental torture, that could not recall the dead from their graves, nor reveal to them his innocence. And yet that is precisely what every priest in Christendom would willingly undergo rather than reveal the tiniest venial sin breathed into his ear in confession. Such is the absolute, impenetrable and inviolable secrecy with which a priest guards the contents of every confession.

#### *Power of Consecrating*

The third great power of the priestly office is the climax of all. It is the power of consecrating. "No act is greater," says St. Thomas, "than the consecration of the body of Christ." In this essential phase of the sacred ministry, the power of the priest is not surpassed by that of the bishop, the archbishop, the cardinal or the pope. Indeed it is equal to that of Jesus Christ. For in this role the priest speaks with the voice and the authority of God Himself.

When the priest pronounces the tremendous words of consecration, he reaches up into the heavens, brings Christ down from His throne, and places Him upon our altar to be offered up again as the victim for the sins of man. It is a power greater than that of monarchs and emperors. It is greater than that of saints and angels, greater than that of Seraphim and Cherubim. Indeed it is greater even than the power of the Virgin Mary. For, while the Blessed Virgin

was the human agency by which Christ became incarnate a single time, the priest brings Christ down from Heaven, and renders Him present on our altar as the eternal Victim for the sins of man—not once but a thousand times! The priest speaks and lo! Christ, the eternal and omnipotent God, bows His head in humble obedience to the priest's command.

Of what sublime dignity is the office of the Christian priest who is thus privileged to act as the ambassador and the vicegerent of Christ on earth. He continues the essential ministry of Christ—he teaches the faithful with the authority of Christ, he pardons the penitent sinner with the power of Christ, he offers up again the same sacrifice of adoration and atonement which Christ offered on Calvary. No wonder that the name which spiritual writers are especially fond of applying to the priest is that of "altar Christus." For the priest is and should be another Christ. The priesthood is a sublime ministry, more meet for angels than for weak and sinful men. Truly indeed did Isaiah proclaim with prophetic insight six hundred years before Christ the grandeur of the Christian priesthood in those inspired words: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings and that preacheth peace; of him that showeth forth good, that preacheth salvation, that saith to Sion: Thy God shall reign." 1

#### *Altar and Priest*

Is it not apparent to every person, regardless of religious affiliation, who has followed this discussion with an open mind, that the Christian priesthood is an institution founded by Jesus Christ whereby men receive the power and authority to preach the gospel, to reconcile sinners and to offer sacrifice to the Most High? When Luther discarded the office of the priesthood, the confessional as a tribunal for the reconciliation of sinners, and the altar with its august sacrifice of the Mass disappeared. Now in the churches of our separated brethren there remain but the four bare walls and a pulpit. While the highest element of worship, the offering of sacrifice, has completely vanished, even the other elements of worship are fast disappearing. Listen to the words addressed by Dr. Edmund S. Conklin to the ministers of our

1. Isaiah, 52:7.

country: "After no small amount of observation, reading, and careful inquiry, I am forced to the conclusion that worship as a religious exercise is disappearing from Protestant Churches." 1

Is it not apparent that this decay of worship in the Churches of our non-Catholic friends is due primarily to their abandonment of the priestly office? Is it not also apparent that the great decline in church attendance deplored by ministers throughout the country is traceable to the discarding of the priesthood and the consequent disappearance of sacrifice and worship? More and more such churches are ceasing to be temples for the worship of God and are becoming lecture halls for the discussion of political, social and economic problems. But man does not live by bread alone. In the unfathomable depths of his nature, he strives now, as in the days of Cain and Abel and of Melchisedech, to offer sacrifice and worship to his God and Maker. Deep still calleth unto deep.

In the priesthood of the Catholic Church he will find a divinely established agency, through which that deep and ineradicable hunger of his nature will find adequate satisfaction. In that Church the searcher after truth will find not only preaching and prayers and the singing of hymns, but more than that—altar and priest, worship and sacrifice. For in the memory of the priest within that Church there echo the solemn words addressed by Jesus Christ to His first priests, the Apostles, at the Last Supper: "Do ye this in commemoration of me." In faithful compliance with that divine command, the priest offers up each day in all the countries of the world the august sacrifice of the Mass, saying in the words of the psalmist: "I will take the chalice of salvation and I will call upon the name of the Lord."

1. The Christian Century, July 11, 1934.