

THE EMANCIPATION OF INDIFFERENCE

LET the words I shall say be directed and recommended to you by the following weighty principle of St. Thomas Aquinas :—

‘ Excellence of the person never diminishes sin ; but on the contrary increases it. Therefore a sin is not less grievous in a believer than in an unbeliever ; but much more so.

‘ For the sins of an unbeliever are more deserving of forgiveness, on account of their ignorance,’ according to I Tim. 1, 13. *I obtained the mercy of God because I did it ignorantly in my unbelief ;* whereas the sins of believers are more grievous on account of the sacraments of grace, according to Heb. X, 29. *How much more do you think he deserveth worse punishments . . . who hath esteemed the blood of the testament unclean by which he was sanctified.*¹

The two previous speakers in dealing with Atheism and Protestantism have been happy in finding that their contributions to our Emancipation joy have not led them into even the shadow of criticism of their fellow-Catholics. Atheism is not a weed within the true fold ; nor is Protestantism a mode of Catholic ill-health. Sometimes an ardent Catholic apostle or an over-logical Catholic apologist will ask in irony if his inconsequent Catholic hearers really believe in God or really reject Luther or Elizabeth. But if a speaker at this Congress was to deal with the emancipation of Catholic Atheists or of Catholic Protestants his words would raise a laugh or a protest. Those would protest who had not the wit to avoid taking his words literally ; and those would laugh who saw in the speaker’s exaggeration a sally of burlesque wit.

But if Atheism and Protestantism are outside the true faith and even the true fold, Indifference is to be found not only outside the true Fold, as the devil and the world are outside a man, but within the true Fold, as the flesh is within a man.

¹*Summa Theologica* : Part I^a II^{ae} : Qu. 89. Art. 5—Eng. Trans.

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To make our subject-matter clear we must divide indifference into intellectual indifference and volitional indifference.² Intellectual indifference, in its extreme form, is a failure to assent when it is necessary to assent. Volitional indifference in its extreme form is failure to act when it is necessary to act. The psychology of these extreme forms of intellectual and volitional indifference leads us to realise the many preliminary failures which may condition the final failure to assent or act. There are many stages of indifference between this final form and the initial inattention to facts or statements of facts. Thus failure to give intellectual assent may sometimes spring from a culpable failure even to understand; and failure to act may spring from a culpable failure even to desire. Moreover intellectual failure to assent will lead to volitional failure to act; according to the psychological principle *Nil volitum quin praecognitum* : we will only what we know.

The difficulty of our subject 'the Emancipation—or Freeing—of Indifference' is heightened by the further fact that some kind of indifference is of the very essence of Freedom and therefore of Emancipation. To be emancipated from all indifference would mean being freed from all freedom. If we would avoid this inconsequence we must know the wrong indifference which we must be freed from, and must choose the right indifference which we must be freed to. Our intelligence must not be indifferent to the truth; our will must not be indifferent to goodness; but mind and will must be indifferent only to the indifferent.

These difficulties, which are in the nature of all human indifference, present a peculiar difficulty when found in the indifference of these islands. It was the

²We use the phrase 'volitional indifference' and not moral indifference for two reasons: (1) Because it is more accurate; (2) because intellectual indifference may be morally culpable.

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French Abbot Peter of Celles in the twelfth century who thus described England to the monk Nicholas of St. Albans: 'Your English vagueness must not be irritated by sober French solidity. England is an island surrounded by water. Hence its inhabitants are not unnaturally affected by the properties of this element; and with the greatest speed are often turned to thin and subtle phantasies, comparing and even preferring their dreams to visions. And if this is the nature of their land, where is the fault of their nature? Of a truth I have found dreamers to be English rather than French.'³

Whether we think this to be mere Gallic cock-crowing or ascertained fact we cannot forget how the indifference of compromise even in religion has been valued as a national characteristic. Again, in matters of philosophy, these islands with their mystic sea-fret have yielded the subtle idealism of Berkeley. David Hume is the authentic father of modern scepticism. Thomas Huxley gave the nineteenth century, and indeed the twentieth century, the word, if not the thing, Agnosticism. None of these three attitudes towards the world of matter and spirit was other than a subtle self-contradictory compromise which left the mind indifferent towards some spheres of truth.

The insular variety of indifference has not been merely academic 'snapdragon in the crumbling walls of an Oxford College'; it has been fungus in the minds of average English folk. No modern language contains as the English language contains a vocabulary of the ambiguous. Thus no modern language can translate by a word our word 'to ignore.' The word 'ignore' comes to us from the Latin word 'ignorari.' But whereas the Latin word means merely ignorance, and more precisely culpable ignorance, the English

³Migne. *Pat. Lat.* CC.II : Ep. CLXXI, p. 614.

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word means knowledge, but a knowledge that is firmly set aside by the will. All this betokens a volitional indifference which has left its mark in the speech of average English folk.

Again, our insular variety of indifference is manifested by our peculiar use of the words 'material' and 'immaterial,' flat contrary to the accurate and original meaning of the words. Thus if, even in thought, the world of being is divided into material beings and immaterial beings, it is clear that the immaterial or spiritual beings are the more real or true, and the material beings are the less real or true. Hence if we say 'X is material and Y is immaterial,' we mean that Y, the immaterial is more real and true than X, the material. Yet if a modern Englishman says 'This argument or fact is immaterial' he means that far from being real and true it is so unreal as to be negligible.

Lastly we may trace our national variety of indifference in the ambiguous use of the word 'essential,' which has come to mean necessary. The essence of a being is within that being. But the necessity of a being may be outside. Yet we often hear in our modern English speech such an indifferent phrase as: 'Money is essential to happiness,' when the phrase accurately expressing the speaker's mind should be 'Money is necessary to happiness.'

This preliminary study on the difficulties of our subject in itself and in our English circumstances may enable us to be tolerant of the intellectual and volitional indifference which is now perhaps the greatest obstacle to the spread of our Catholic truth. Just as food in tabloid or in liquid form may provoke a deadly indifference to solid food, so may the many mechanical appeals to the ear and eye induce a deadly indifference to the toil of thinking. Nowadays even the initial act of attention needs something akin to intellectual heroism. The further acts of reasoning, hearkening,

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assenting are a further heroism which seems to cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war against nine-tenths of our printed matter. How little can be done to arouse the average indifference when a child before its teens may have heard and seen all the mechanised masterpieces of sacred and profane literature. Yet, as every craftsman knows, there is no easy way of doing hard things; but if there is a quick way of doing hard things it is only the way of hard work.

Psychologically speaking, one of the chief means for emancipating intelligence from this indifference is by creating an interest. As the scholastics would say: 'Love seeks to know its beloved.' Indeed the divine love which is called charity never ceases to hunger and thirst for further knowledge. *Fides quaerens intellectum*—the faith that lives by love lives only to know more and more of the beloved. It is here that the Catholic Evidence Guild is working so effectively to quench the indifference of average folk. When Catholics of both sexes, all classes and almost of all ages stand up in public places proclaiming the same great philosophical and religious truths, interest is aroused. Minds are moved to think, like the mind of the old Oxford ploughman who was heard saying to his wife after an evidence lecture, 'I reckon I'll go again. It be the old religion; and I see no reason why it ba'int the true 'un.'

The volitional indifference of those outside the fold is naturally more widespread than even intellectual indifference. The very considerable burden laid upon those who begin to suspect that the Catholic Church is the true Church accounts for the comparative fewness of the souls who follow that truth to its expression in life. Two general reasons and one special national reason account for the hiatus between even the desire and the will to follow the truth. First, the truth, as taught by the Faith, lays the burden

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of the Creed on the mind and the burden of the Decalogue on the Will. To the natural man this Creed and Decalogue are a bitter yoke and a heavy burden. Only the grace of God can make them a sweet yoke and a light burden.

Secondly, to the modern machine-ridden mind, the Church, even when it is most whole-heartedly believed and obeyed, seems a ruthless, irresistible piece of ecclesiastical machinery. Faith seems a giving up of reason. The unhappy word 'submission' calls up the idea of a human being bowing down and lowering himself for the luxury of intellectual peace; when indeed Faith is a heroic *sursum corda*.

Lastly to these two general reasons for the volitional indifference outside the Church is added the special national difficulty nationally crystallized in such phrases as 'Bloody Mary,' or 'the Fires of Smithfield.' The present writer will never forget how his blood ran cold and his hopes ebbed one evening in Hyde Park when his appearance on the platform was the signal for a piercing tenor voice shrieking out, 'You burned us at Smithfield—and you'd burn us again. You burned us at Smithfield—and you'd burn us again.' My blood was not warmed nor did my hopes flow back by remembering that for the moment I was standing within a stone's throw of the spot where the triangular Tyburn Tree ran red with Catholic blood. I was confronted with an existing, widespread state of mind that effectively braked all desire or will to know Catholic truth.

Here again the mission of the Catholic Evidence Guild is an emancipation of this volitional indifference. The sight of a platform on which, under the shadow of the Cross, stands not the professional priest, but the lay-man or lay-woman, and even the young lay-man and young lay-woman with their confident conviction and undeniably patient good humour is an argument

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against the burdensomeness of Creed and Decalogue; it scotches the suspicion that Catholics are ecclesiastically machine-ridden; it is, if not a historical, at least an effective psychological extinguisher of the Smithfield fires.

Hence the Catholic Evidence Guild with its zealous band of convinced Catholic lay-folk speaking in the open and encouraging thought as well as disarming prejudice, is one of the most effective Catholic activities for emancipating the intellectual and volitional indifference of those outside the Fold.

But there is inside the Fold an indifference which cannot be passed over even in the day of Centenary rejoicings. If the crusade against non-Catholic indifference is so necessary that the innumerable sacrifices of the Catholic Evidence Guild came into being perhaps too late, what shall we say of the need of a crusade against Catholic indifference? St. Thomas Aquinas gives us a deepened sense of responsibility by reminding us, with apostolic frankness, that, other things being equal, the sins of Catholics are worse than the sins of non-Catholics. Indifference inside the Fold would then be a worse defect of intelligence and will than indifference outside the Fold. Perhaps we see the danger of this Catholic indifference in the apocalyptic rebuke of the Laodicean lukewarmness. The Amen, the faithful and true witness, found the church of the Laodiceans satisfied with its knowledge and its works. Yet its intelligence was blind, its will and works were poor and naked. It was so self-satisfied that God was beginning to vomit it out of His mouth.

What could be said of our Emancipation sincerity if in this matter of Catholic indifference we seemed indifferent towards fearless and accredited forth-tellers of the truth? Let us then supplement St. Thomas Aquinas on the grievousness of Catholic sins by John

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Henry Cardinal Newman on the indifference of Catholics. It was in 1863, a year before his *Apologia*, that, on his knees and before God, John Henry Newman wrote the following words :—

‘ Everywhere with Catholics to make converts is doing something and not to make them is “ doing nothing.” But I am altogether different—my objects, my theory of acting, my powers, go in a different direction, and one not understood or contemplated at Rome or elsewhere. . . . To me conversions were not the first thing, but the edification [building up] of Catholics. So much have I fixed upon the latter as my object, that up to this time the world persists in saying that I recommend Protestants not to become Catholics. And when I have given as my true opinion that I am afraid to make hasty converts of educated men lest they should not have counted the cost and should have difficulties after they have entered the Church, I do but imply the same thing that the Church must be prepared for converts as well as converts for the Church.

‘ . . . Catholics in England, from their very blindness cannot see that they are blind. To aim, then, at improving the condition and the status of the Catholic body, by a careful survey of their argumentative basis, of their position relatively to the philosophy and character of the day, by giving them juster views, by enlarging and refining minds, in one word by education is (in their view) more than a superfluity or a hobby, it is an insult. It implies that they are deficient in material points. Now from first to last, education in this large sense of the word has been my line and the offence it has given by insisting that there was room for improvement among Catholics has seriously annoyed the governing body here and in Rome.’ [The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman, by Wilfrid Ward—London, 1912. Vol. I, pp. 584-585].

It is to the credit of Rome that in spite of these plain-spoken, if not prophetic words, John Henry Newman died a Cardinal of the Roman Church. His fearless utterance, which reminds us of him who withstood Cephas to the face was met by the same Roman gratitude which made Cephas honour Paul’s writings as the very Scriptures themselves.

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Far be it from the present writer to forget his position so utterly as to criticise or judge. Yet fidelity to such authentic Catholic wisdom as that of Aquinas and Newman lays on us the duty of examining our conscience in the hard matter of Catholic indifference.

First, the intellectual indifference of Catholics raises many questions. As a group the Catholic body in this land has been the most active in supporting the present national compulsory system of education. In co-operating with modern educational methods we cannot be accused of indifference. Yet, as we have seen, the problem of indifference is not that of a choice between indifference and zeal, but between right and wrong indifference. The late pronouncement on education by the Hierarchy of England and Wales has reminded us that 'it is no part of the normal function of the State to teach . . . that the teacher never is and never can be a civil servant, and that whatever authority he may possess . . . comes to him from God through the parent.' Yet whilst not indifferent to the book-learning organised from Whitehall, we Catholics have been somewhat indifferent to the wider education of our Catholic children's minds.

Even our secondary and higher education has been so timid of indifference to Examination Education that the philosophy, history and literature of Catholic England is still largely an unknown world to our young men and women.

Let me give another example. Some years ago the present writer realised how infallibly the Petrine or Papal question and the whole question of Faith and Reason must come up before the modern mind. Whilst terrified by the signs of Catholic indifference he recalled with gratitude that the Holy Spirit had mercifully prepared the Church for the future conflict by the Decrees of the Vatican Council. He over-trustfully convinced himself that these infallible Decrees—the

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most important documents of the nineteenth century—would so appeal to Catholics as to demand being printed. His over-trust rested largely on the fact that the Vatican Decrees contained hardly more words than a page or two of a daily paper—or of a penny pamphlet of the Catholic Truth Society. In his trust that the Catholic intelligence of this country would have a Catholic—or if you will, a scholarly—instinct for the best, he offered his transcript of the Decrees to the then Committee of the Catholic Truth Society, in the hopes that these authentic infallible statements on the Faith and on the Church might be considered as worthy of being printed as short stories of edifying piety. But no doubt the Committee knew their Catholic audience, and refused to publish the Decrees of the Vatican Council.

I have just mentioned the Statement of Principles on Education drawn up by the Hierarchy of England and Wales in Low Week. The present speaker has already said and here re-says his opinion that these seven Principles on Education are probably the most important social documents issued in England since the time of Magna Charta. Yet not only has no attention been given to them by the non-Catholic Press, but next to no attention has been given by the Catholic Press. Indeed it is bewildering to know that one of our leading papers left out a most important phrase in this official document—that notice of the omission has been given in another Catholic journal—and that as far as I know, the Catholic paper has not thought it necessary to supply the omission. I am not for the moment condemning this paper. Perhaps it knows its Catholic audience sufficiently to judge that in their intellectual indifference they have not noted the omission and would not be interested in any correction. And if this far from optimistic judgment on Catholic indifference is correct, we may have a clue to the fact

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that, as far as I know, there is little possibility of putting these seven principles of some three hundred words in the hands of our Congress crowds.

A straw showing what way blows the wind of Catholic intellectual indifference is our treatment of what is called the Penny Catchism. On almost every ground this book is one of the ten greatest books in the English language. Its first page contains more philosophy, *i. e.*, more of the highest Greek culture than either Oxford or Cambridge could be expected to teach. Yet this noble book is never to be seen except in paper rags. It is always the Penny Catechism. No one—not even the artist with the private hand-press—has thought it well to give this noble book type and binding equal to its worth.

It is here that the Catholic Evidence Guild is indirectly emancipating Catholics from their intellectual indifference. I say indirectly because the Guild has never looked on its mission as one to Catholics, but to non-Catholics. Yet it was the Guild's desire to provide the Guild speakers with a most thorough intellectual training in the Faith, and to help that training with a serviceable New Testament that led to the publication of the Layman's New Testament, a book which goes a long way towards acquitting our contemporary Catholics of the charge of intellectual indifference.

But the intellectual indifference of Catholics is not so immediately a danger as the volitional indifference of Catholics. The besetting weakness of fallen man lies in this: that, being wounded more in his will than in his mind, he knows more than he will do; and sees further than he will go. Of course, in order to excuse his not going and his not doing man will affirm his not seeing. Yet God's holy mountain, though hard to climb, is still harder to deny.

We must resolutely ask ourselves if there is any sign of Catholic volitional indifference. In other words

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‘Are Catholics sluggish in carrying out the practical principles of their faith?’ And does this sluggishness in carrying out principles engender a sluggishness in knowing the principles?

Let me therefore remind you of the words of Pope Leo XIII in the *Rerum Novarum*: ‘*The condition of the working people is the pressing question of the hour, and nothing can be of higher interest to all classes of the State than that it should be rightly and reasonably adjusted.*

‘All agree and there can be no question whatever that some remedy must be found and found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so hardly and so unjustly on the vast majority of the working classes.’

Here we have an authoritative statement of *the pressing question of the hour*. In other words we are asked to consider the main objective of the Church at the present moment. And the Pontifical wisdom which gave us this diagnosis has also given us the outlined remedy. Yet after nearly forty years since this Pontifical wisdom we are not yet agreed on speaking plainly. It would almost seem as if there was no social doctrine which Catholics of all political parties should accept. Indeed it would almost seem quixotic to imagine a general Congress of Catholic Conservatives, Catholic Liberals, Catholic Labourites framing a minimum programme which they would make the condition of allegiance to their political party. Again, what Catholic politician will insist on his party accepting the Seven Principles of our Hierarchy?

A strange confirmation of this wide-spread Catholic volitional indifference comes from the mouth of one of our late scholars, Monsignor Moyes. He is reported to have said, ‘I dare not preach the *Rerum Novarum* from this pulpit. It would be taken for Socialism.’

A confirmation of this confirmation comes from the present speaker’s experience of some twenty-five

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years. In season and out of season during all that time he has spoken on the *Rerum Novarum*, never giving, what indeed he was neither entitled nor qualified to give, a merely political opinion. Yet he has never given such a theological presentment of the *Rerum Novarum* without being taken as an advocate of Socialism.

This insight into the volitional indifference of Catholics towards 'the pressing question of the hour' enables us to see, with not a little alarm, certain other features of our Catholic life. We are probably shirking the task of leaving the flesh-pots of Egypt for the freedom of worshipping God in the desert. Are we trying to make the best of circumstances which, in the concrete, would be called the proximate occasions of sin? Chastity is not easily practised in a brothel, nor can any but heroic virtue live in the proximate occasions of sin, without falling into sin. Under the present arrangement of our country, as indeed of many other countries, normal conjugal chastity with its average parenthood has now become heroic virtue. If, on the one hand, the Catholic husband and wife have the average family, they must heroically face an unprovided future. If, on the other hand, they choose, as they are allowed to choose, to regulate their family, they must heroically face conjugal abstinence! In other words the average soul is asked for more than average virtue, and that not once in a lifetime but for all their married life.

How indifferent to human suffering must we priests seem when we merely denounce all interference with conjugal relations, and when we seem to lay—as we have no right to lay—upon all married folk the duty of having a large family! On the other hand, how worldly wise and how sympathetic must seem the attitude of those who advocate the sinful methods of birth-prevention.

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formulae as $x = (2 + 2 = \sqrt{3})$, or $x = (4 + 5 = 10)$, then we can hardly take seriously his statement that he used mathematics to test and exercise himself in his *méthode* 'parce qu'il n'est aucune science à laquelle on ne puisse demander des exemples aussi évidents et certains.' It would follow too, as Chevalier remarks, that it would not trouble him if mathematics only served 'à résoudre les vains problèmes dont les calculateurs et les géomètres ont coutume d'amuser leurs loisirs.'² Since Descartes was a mathematician and a great mathematician it was natural, though many from Plato onwards think unjustifiable, for him to introduce mathematical processes into his philosophy. It is for the philosopher to take those processes one by one, to examine and perhaps to reject them. To disqualify him, however, on a series of examples with which no mathematician outside an asylum would waste his time does not seem sufficient.

Furthermore, Descartes himself was perfectly aware of the limitations of mathematics and to whatever extent he made use of them in his philosophical system, he excluded them from his '*Méthode*.' In that work he writes :—

'Among the different branches of Philosophy, I had in my younger days to a certain extent studied Logic; and in those of Mathematics, Geometrical Analysis and Algebra—three arts or sciences which seemed as though they ought to contribute something to the design I had in view. But in examining them I observed in respect to . . . the analysis of the ancients and the *Algebra of the Moderns*, beside the fact that they embrace only matters most abstract, such as appear to have no actual use, the former is always so restricted to the consideration of symbols that it cannot exercise the Understanding without greatly fatiguing the Imagination; and in the latter one is so subjected to certain rules and formulas that the result is the construction of an art which is confused and obscure, and which embarrasses the mind, instead of a science which contributes to its cultivation. This made me

²Chevalier : *Descartes*, p. 155.

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feel that some other Method must be found which, comprising the advantages of the three, is yet exempt from their faults.²³

Such was Descartes' attitude towards the use of mathematics in his Method.

Father McNabb thinks, however, that the new science of algebra unfitted the mind almost to understand the word philosophy—an even stronger statement than Descartes' rejection of an art 'which is confused and obscure.'

Still the two points of view have something in common. Without, however, taking into account Descartes' statement, which must surely be read in its historical as well as its philosophical context, Father McNabb goes on to say that, 'if in the sphere of mere intellectual or imaginary activity there was no moral fault in assuming what was not possible or not true . . . there was moral fault in beginning the search for philosophical truth with a deliberate acceptance of untruth.' Whatever remains to be said of Descartes' doubt, in view of the insistence by Father McNabb on the deleterious effect of algebra on Descartes' thought, it may here be pointed out that the search for truth was begun by Descartes in 1619, when he was but 23. Even Descartes could not have already earned the title of Father of Modern Algebra which Father McNabb has given him. This much we might legitimately surmise if he had not himself told us that his entrance upon the period of doubt happened at a time when Algebra, as he then knew it, was in his opinion 'a confused and obscure art.'

Even more important for the moment than the extent to which mathematics entered into and disqualified his philosophy, is the question of the nature of Descartes' doubt. According to Father McNabb,

²³The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. 1, pp. 91-2. (Cambridge University Press, 1911.)

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Descartes looked upon [this] *universal doubt* as not mere possibility, but almost praiseworthy. 'Every mind could—and the scientific mind should—begin with doubting if anything was true'

This article is not an attempt to expound the philosophy of Descartes, but to point out, in justice to that writer, that the above and other similar statements are a misrepresentation of Descartes' own teaching. Just as in his mathematical examples Father McNabb has gone to extremes—even to absurdities—here he has had no hesitation in making of Descartes' *provisional and limited doubt*, a universal, all-embracing doubt. The simplest way to show this is to give Descartes' own words.

First of all, was his doubt universal? If we turn to his 'Discours sur la méthode' we find him saying :

'As regards all the opinions which up to this time I had embraced, I thought I could not do better than endeavour once for all to sweep them completely away, so that they might later be replaced, either by others which were better, or by the same, when I had made them conform to the uniformity of a rational scheme.'

We have to turn to other places in the 'Discours' to find exactly what he meant when he said that he endeavoured once for all to sweep away all the opinions which up to that time he had embraced. There are several very clear passages which define the limits he placed to his doubts. Having compared the method he was about to adopt to that of a man pulling down an old house in order to rebuild a new one on its site, he tells us that he formulated certain laws for himself, to serve him in the meantime.

'The first to obey the laws and customs of my country, adhering constantly to the religion in which by God's grace I had been instructed since my childhood.' These and various others he made for his

'Discourse on Method, Cambridge Translation, p. 89.

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guidance. Whereupon 'having thus *assured* myself of these maxims and having set them on one side along with the truths of religion, which have always taken the first place in my creed, I judged that, as far as the rest of my opinions were concerned, I could safely undertake to rid myself of them.'

For nine years, as he says, he travelled hither and thither observing life and the world. 'Not that, indeed, I imitated the sceptics, who only doubt for the sake of doubting, and pretend to be always uncertain for, *on the contrary*, my design was only to provide myself with good ground for assurance, and *to reject the quicksand and mud* in order to find the *rock* or clay.

Is this the attitude of a universal doubter? Is it not a process that anyone, taking stock of his opinions, and wishing to test his ideas, might quite sincerely follow?

Nor did he advocate it for others. 'Thus my design is not here to teach the method which everyone should follow in order to promote the good conduct of his reason, but only to show in what manner I have endeavoured to conduct my own.'

The foregoing passage might be dismissed on the grounds of modesty, not so the following: 'If my work has given me a certain satisfaction, so that I here present to you a draft of it, I do not do so because I wish to advise anybody to imitate it. Those to whom God has been most beneficent in the bestowal of His graces will perhaps form designs which are more elevated; but I fear that this particular one will seem too venturesome for many. The simple resolve to strip oneself of all opinions and beliefs formerly received is not to be regarded as *an example that each man should follow, and the world may be said to be mainly composed of two classes of minds, neither of which could prudently adopt it.* There are those who, believing

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themselves to be cleverer than they are, cannot restrain themselves from being precipitate in judgement and have not sufficient patience to arrange their thoughts in proper order Secondly there are those who having reason or modesty enough to judge that they are less capable of distinguishing truth from falsehood than some others from whom instruction might be obtained, are right in contenting themselves with following the opinions of these others rather than in searching better ones for themselves.'

The moral fault in beginning the search for truth with a deliberate acceptance of untruth cannot be laid to the charge of Descartes. He merely laid his opinions on one side in order that he might put them to the test.

The passages indicate clearly enough what is really Descartes' mind on the subject, and free him from the charge both of practising universal doubt and of regarding it as unconditionally praiseworthy.

This being the case, while we admit that what there is of ethical principle in Father McNabb's article stands, by itself, as sound, we cannot help feeling that he has been unfortunate in choosing Descartes as the peg upon which to hang certain criticism of universal doubt, and as the example condemned by the ethical principles he established. His incursion into mathematics has been no more fortunate.

It is not for his *doubt* that Descartes will always be discussed among philosophers, but for ideas, and principles, and a system diametrically its opposite.

JOSEPH McHUGH.