

intellect developed beyond our will? Are we emotionally mature, or do we still bang the door when we are thwarted? It is so easy to go to extremes, to love our friends and hate our enemies, to see everything in black and white. It is the natural tendency for the poles to separate. The task of the Christian is to bind the poles together through charity. And he must begin with his own unruly self. It is the work of a lifetime to balance the different parts of one's nature, so that the wholeness of mind, will and heart may reflect in some small measure the perfection of him in whose image and likeness we are all created.



## ON BEING A CATHOLIC IN THE ARMY

EX-OFFICER

*'We may not look to go to Heaven in feather beds.'*

ST THOMAS MORE

**A**FTER twenty-one years' commissioned service in the army, the writer's feelings are largely of regret. Regret at opportunities missed, duties neglected or perfunctorily performed; in short a lively sense of failure.

The failure was in part due to ignorance, and it is in the hope of assisting young officers that this paper is written. *Si jeunesse savait*. . . This is not the place for detailed statistics, even were there any accurate ones available, but this paper is written with the following premises in mind:

1. Catholics are about 14 per cent of the army.
2. Of Catholics in the army, very approximately, one third have abandoned their faith, one third practise intermittently, and one third practise as fully as circumstances and human frailty permit.
3. There is about one priest to two thousand Catholic soldiers.
4. The general religious climate in the services is the same as that in the country at large. Most soldiers would call themselves Christian, though on analysis, as the Incarnation is

regarded as an improbable theory at best, a vague theism is perhaps a better term.

Army life is, of course, one of routine. The routine is infinitely varied, and because the material with which an officer works is men, it is always an absorbing one. Nevertheless, the same things happen at the same time every day. This is invaluable to the practising Catholic as it provides pegs on which to hang his religious life. For example, in the last active regiment with which the writer served, it was the custom for officers to go to the mess at about 11 a.m. for coffee. The walk to the mess only took a few minutes, and you could use the time to say the Angelus. You were alone, the men were in the N.A.A.F.I., and it meant that the morning did have a momentary break from this world.

Unless very strict rules are made about what prayers are said, and when, and what reading is done, there is a very real danger of prayer fading out of one's life. The last printed word looked at each day should be the Bible: one or two verses from a pocket New Testament on training or service, a chapter perhaps or, to make a change, a psalm at other times. Aids to devotion will vary with personality. The writer used everything he could. A crucifix in one's room, a rosary in one's pocket, the private observance of certain saints' days by reading the little office, all helped. What one has to guard against is the gradual erosion of one's Catholicism, not the spectacular fall from grace.

In the mess religion is very seldom discussed. It is suggested that Catholics should never introduce the subject. They should avoid arguments because they will be arguing from different premises. At the same time it cannot be over-emphasized that the Catholic officer must 'know the answers'. The most outrageous things are said, in all good faith, about the Church. People really believe that Catholics are ordered to have large families, regardless of all other considerations. 'The end justifies the means' is firmly and sincerely held to be a part of Catholic teaching. These misconceptions seem unbelievable but they are widely and firmly believed by many. So when someone says, or implies, that nuns are shut up to keep them inside, one should have an answer. It is maddening to be told by someone who has just dismissed the doctrine of the immaculate conception as a fairy tale, in terms which make it obvious that he means the virgin birth, that Catholics don't have to think—but you will be told it. (A

suggested answer is that I go to a doctor to treat my body because he is an expert. Nevertheless only I can keep myself fit, and to do so, demands thought and some knowledge. Similarly the Church, through priests, gives expert advice but in no way absolves me from mental and spiritual effort.) But, on the whole, Catholics are better advised to avoid religious argument, though really inaccurate statements about the Church and the faith cannot, and must not, go unanswered.

The Catholic officer's duty to his men is fairly obvious. If there is a padre's hour, see that your platoon, troop or section go. If there is no padre's hour, try and start one. Padre's hour is a most disheartening business. If there is a priest, no one turns up except those whose duties at that time are so disagreeable that the effort of finding out 'where and when' is worth while. If there is a staunch body of good Catholics, there never seems to be a priest. If there is both, the regiment is immediately sent abroad or goes into camp.

Sunday mass is another matter. Never march the men—take a pride in the fact that those who go, go independently and are not inspected first. Any form of church parade is the worst thing for the faith that can happen—because it links the Church with the Powers-That-Be. May the day come when army chaplains abandon badges of rank. They could continue to wear their present officer type uniform, but should not be linked with a military hierarchy.

There are two types of Catholics in the army for whom we cannot pray enough. One is the lonely boy in the barrack room. One is the married Catholic, for whom separations, re-unions, money, education of children, and other complications are a very heavy burden. As an officer you can do little for the lonely boy in the barrack room—except set an impeccable example. See that he knows where his church is, who his priest is, and when mass and confession can be reached. As a married Catholic ex-officer, the writer will confine himself to saying that it was worth it!

Finally, it is worth while making enquiries about the Legion of Mary. Here, in the writer's opinion, we have the answer for Catholics in the services. It is very difficult to get going—sometimes. It is always worth trying. Catholics in the army have no easy row to hoe. It is possible, with perseverance and a stout heart, to do much good.

'Stand firm then, my dear brothers, immovable in your resolve, doing your full share in the task the Lord has given you, since you know that your labour in the Lord's service cannot be spent in vain.'



**BLESSED GILES OF SANTAREM, CONFESSOR**  
(Died 1765. Feast 14 May)

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.

**T**HERE is a legend that Giles in his early manhood bartered his soul for a knowledge of the dark secrets of nature with a view to obtaining a position of wealth and rank in the medical world. Setting out for Paris where he hoped to study medicine, he was accosted on the way by a charming stranger who persuaded him to abandon his journey to France and to turn aside to Toledo, where he spent seven years as an apprentice in the art of magic and agreed to trade his soul for the fulfilment of his ambition. He then resumed his journey to Paris where he obtained both riches and fame, performing miracles of healing; but being converted by a frightful vision he returned to Spain and sought the habit of the order at Valencia, where after seven years of the severest penance and the greatest agony of mind on account of his infamous bargain, he was rewarded for his perseverance by the miraculous return of the sacrilegious document that he had signed with his blood.

The story has no great antiquity and does not appear until the middle of the sixteenth century, three hundred years after the saint's death. Rejected by all the serious historians of the order, it re-appeared in the middle years of the nineteenth century in certain popular lives of Dominican saints, and that is the sole reason for relating it here. A study of the contemporary evidence concerning Giles is quite sufficient to rebut any claims the legend has to sober historical truth.

Giles was born in the castle of Vaozela near Coimbra, then the capital of Portugal, towards the end of the twelfth or the begin-