

## COMMENT

## (I) LET US CONSIDER!

*We print the subjoined short article by a Jewish reader of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT both for its intrinsic interest to Catholics and because we welcome all points of contact in prayer and the spiritual life between ourselves and those who love and serve God but do not share the fullness of our faith. Dr Arthur D. Heller, M.D., its author, is Deputy Medical Superintendent of Prudhoe and Monkton Hospital Prudhoe-on-Tyne, Northumberland, and also Editor of P and M, the monthly news sheet of the hospital, which contains regular editorials and other notes written by him.*

IT does not happen often that a Jew writes a contribution for a Roman Catholic review. But here I am. It is difficult to say how it came about this morning that I suddenly sat down to my typewriter and started typing an article intended to be published in THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT. My own notion is that this must be an act to which God gave me the will and the strength.

When I was a boy of six, living with my almost orthodox Jewish parents in Prague, then the provincial capital of Bohemia in the old Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, I began my school-life at a monastery, the Collegium Clericorum Piarum, for short the Piarists' School. I was not the only Jewish boy there; my brother, three years my senior, was at that time already an established pupil of the Reverend Father Caietan Masch. In fact, the school was the best school in Prague and thus about fifty per cent of the pupils were non-Catholics. My teacher was the late Reverend Father Antonius Aemilianus Heske, the most excellent teacher I ever met. He was kind and firm, strict and gentle, and always just. I loved him so much that when I left school after five years and became a pupil of a secondary school, I paid him a visit twice yearly. When I became a Doctor of Medicine in 1916, Pater Heske was one of the few guests of honour who were present at the ceremony at Prague University, and needless to mention that when I gave publicly a vote of thanks to my parents I did not fail to describe in vivid and thankful words what the old priest had given me during five years of my life.

Every morning, school started with 'Our Father', but on the very first day Pater Antonius said to the boys that those who were not Catholics should stand in silence and say their own prayers inaudibly. I always did, but I could not help remembering the sound and the meaning of the words 'Pater Noster', which I soon knew by heart in at least three languages, Latin, Czech, and German.

It was shortly before the first world war that I went to the monastery to ask my old teacher for advice. My elder brother was not as Jewish as I was, nor was he as believing either. He was ill, had a very weak heart and often suffered from rheumatic fever to which, in the end, he succumbed at the age of only twenty-nine years. He was studying law and was a very excellent scholar. For no apparent reason he wanted to become a Roman Catholic but, of course, that was impossible since my father was a near-orthodox Jew. Egon—this was my brother's first name—asked me to go to my old teacher and ask that he should come and baptize him. Halfheartedly I went. Pater Antonius Aemilianus Heske—may he rest in peace—spoke to me long and earnestly. He emphasized that it was the duty of a priest to rescue the soul of anybody who wished to become a son of the Church. And yet he refused to baptize my brother because he did not believe that the real reason of my brother's wish was a deeply religious one. In the end, my old teacher said: 'Your brother was born a Jew and a Jew he should remain throughout his life.'

This message to my brother did not make a great impression and not very long afterwards he was baptized, though not by my teacher. My father did not become aware of that fact until after my brother's death. It might have been one of the causes which influenced him very soon after, for he became less orthodox and did not keep the holy feasts so strictly as before.

Whatever the deeper causes of the aforementioned facts may be, I think that they had a bearing on my development. They did not make me a more pious Jew; I did not keep rites and traditions more precisely than before . . . but my utter belief in God grew stronger and stronger and has not weakened now when I have reached more than three score and five years. My belief in prayer grew stronger, too.

It was my late father who taught us both the Hebrew night prayer and we soon knew it by heart although it is about ten

times as long as the Pater Noster. There has hardly been any day, since I was three years of age, on which I have forgotten to say the Hebrew night prayer. In some respects, I changed two passages. One passage expresses the Blessing and in the original it is said on behalf of one male person. I repeat it three times, as it should be repeated, but I say the first for my wife, the second for our son, his wife and their children, who are living in Israel, and the third for all those who have the responsible task of leading the spiritual, cultural, and political lives of mankind at present.

A similar change I made in the passage, 'Thy help, O Lord, is my hope, on my right the Angel Michael, on my left the Angel Gabriel, before me the Angel Uriel, behind me the Angel Raphael, and above me the Glory of God.' This I repeat four times; three times as in the aforementioned Blessing and the fourth time for myself, for, indeed, I am much in need of his help.

For some years I have started every day with a short prayer in English; I am not sure where I have read it or if it is my own intuition. It runs thus:

'O Lord, I thank you that you have restored new life for my dear wife, for our dear children, for myself, and for all those to whom you have assigned continuation of earthly life. Amen.'

If one reads what I have written so far, one would not find anything remarkable in itself. However, if one considers that I am a medical man, educated in the modern scientific way; that I am living, as we all are, in a time full of tribulations and under such chaotic conditions which make many a man doubtful; moreover, if one knows that nearly forty of my wife's and my own relatives have died in concentration camps or the death-chambers of Auschwitz; finally, that our time, as no other time before, shows strong trends towards agnosticism and even atheism, and that cultural, scientific, and even political tendencies are moving against creeds and religious convictions, one may find my slender contribution, if by no means remarkable, yet at least unusual.

It was in 1936 that a publisher took the risk of publishing my book, *Glauben und Wissen* (Belief and Science); there I pleaded for the Belief in God and tried to put Science in its proper place. I have not stopped doing so in addresses and in articles.

An article, even the most modest, should convey a message to the reader. This is my message: May we all, whatever our

specific creed and denomination may be, always be aware of the unshakable Truth that in each of us is a Divine spark which can emanate the rays of love and peace if we let it freely develop.

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## (II) NON-CATHOLIC BAPTISM

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

**B**APTISM may be doubtful in fact or in law. Even in the case of Catholics doubt may arise about the fact of baptism or of its validity. Not seldom such cases come into the matrimonial courts, either with a view to obtaining a declaration of the nullity of a marriage, or to obtain a dissolution. Similarly a juridical enquiry may have to be made concerning the validity of priesthood or of religious profession, on the alleged grounds of defective baptism. Obviously this is a matter of no little moment for the welfare of souls and for the Church at large. The Church cannot adjust her policy on so grave a matter to placate the injured feelings of those outside her.

In the case of converts awaiting to be received into the Church, experience shows that in the majority of cases it is impossible to ascertain with certitude that their baptism was validly conferred. Due investigations however should be and are made in individual cases. Particular cases cannot be resolved by taking refuge in general abstract theories concerning the sufficiency of non-Catholic baptisms. However, the general discipline of the Church commands that, when there is prudent doubt whether baptism has been conferred at all, or whether it was validly administered, it must be conditionally repeated. (Canon 732.) In this country this enactment is reinforced by a decree of the First Council of Westminster 1852 on the reception of converts. (Decretum XVI, n.7.) There it is laid down that all converts from protestantism must be conditionally baptized, unless there are proofs beyond all question that make it quite certain that their baptism was properly administered. In the Form for the Reception of a Convert reference is made to this decree, and the manner in which conditional baptism is to be given is reiterated.

These are principles upon which we must act, and to say that