

'Yes, I Tithe...

It's Graceful Giving!



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FOR some time we had been involved in discussions with parishioners on tithing. Our initiation to tithing was given by a convert to the Church who said: "We Catholics are making a mistake. We should tithe. The only time I ever had trouble balancing my budget was the year I joined the Catholic Church and quit tithing. I went back to tithing." She added that God has promised to shower blessings, material and spiritual, on those who give one-tenth of their earnings to God. He even said, "Try Me and see." She was referring to the book of Malachias (iii, 8-10) in which God says "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be meat in our house and *try Me in this*, saith the Lord, if I open not to you the floodgates of Heaven and pour you out a blessing even to abundance."

We discussed this subject with a

Protestant minister. Some Catholics might resent our quoting him, but if those Catholics have a superiority complex they might do well to remember that the Baptists, Mormons, and many other Protestant groups do tithe. These people do not have access to the channels of grace that Catholics do, yet they are more generous in their giving than we are. With these groups the first tenth of a person's income goes to the Lord.

Every parish, sometime in its history, has known the experience called a "drive for funds." Countless weeks are spent in organizing parishioners to do what they should have done voluntarily, namely giving of their sustenance for God's work.

Our parish had a fund drive. The firm conducting our campaign stresses and copyrights the term "Fair Share." That term recalled something we had been mulling over in our mind for almost a year and we wanted to give our campaign a spiritual motif, so we told our people that no matter what amount

was suggested on their pledge card, it was not their "Fair Share." Almost 6,000 years ago God Himself had "Fair-Shared" everyone of His children. In fact, in the Old and New Testaments, God mentions our "Fair Share" some forty-six times, which brought us to the subject of tithing.

Ought to Be Done

The basic objection we have run into in private conversation to tithing is that it isn't mentioned in the New Testament. But it is. St. Paul in his letter to the Hebrews mentions it four times in seven verses. Our Divine Lord Himself points it out as a duty in both St. Matthew and St. Luke when He says: "Woe to you Pharisees because you pay tithes on mint, rue and every herb and disregard justice and the love of God; but these things you *ought to have done*, while not leaving the others undone." He further tells us "unless our justice exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees we shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Pope Gregory the Great condemned those who refused to pay the tithe and said they were guilty of sacrilege and in danger of eternal damnation.

The Council of Trent, the greatest Council in the history of the Church, and composed of Bishops, Generals of all the Orders, Abbots, and the leading learned theologians of the day, definitely enjoined payment of tithes and excommunicated those who withheld them.

As late as 1868, the Council of Quebec decreed that the payment of the tithe is binding in conscience of the faithful. All these references to tithing indicate it must have been practiced by the early Christians. The Church Fathers, Origen, Augustine, and Ambrose, not only favored tithing as a Christian obligation and prerequisite for Christian perfection, but also implied more than the tithe was expected of the Christians under the new law of Grace.

The tithe is set down in the Old Testament as obligatory, and we as Catholics have not thrown out the Old

Testament. Christ tells us specifically that He came "not to destroy but to fulfill." Our present Holy Father, Pius XII, has said repeatedly that we are all "spiritual Semites." At any rate, anyone who maintains that the tithes are no longer to be in effect will have to show us where and when they were rescinded or abrogated. Inasmuch as they were of Divine Law they can never be totally abrogated.

Whether or not they are a matter of obligation is beside the point! There is an old adage: "He who never does any more than he gets paid for, never gets paid for any more than he does." To my mind one of the interesting facets of the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is the so-called prayer of the Pharisee, in which he thanked God that he fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all he possessed. This was much like a Catholic's entering church and saying: "Thank God, I am not like the rest of men. I go to Mass every Sunday and I make my Easter duty and I don't eat meat on Fridays."

One of the Pharisee's principal faults was that he was gloating over something that he should have done automatically as a good Jew. If we are going to do only what strictly is a matter of obligation we would do well to note the Church commands us to go to confession and receive Communion only once a year, yet how many persons fulfill just that obligation? The Church has no law whatsoever about daily Mass, yet look at the thousands who attend daily Mass. Good Catholics do things in proportion to their love for Almighty God and certainly tithing is the true test of love for Almighty God. This is particularly the case in the age in which we live — permeated as it is with materialism and craving for luxuries as well as necessities. Since true love pours itself out in sacrifice, what better way to show God our love for Him than by sacrificing these desires to give to Him His due? As Christ said, "Where thy treasure is, there thy heart also is." (Matt. vi, 21)

In the book of Deuteronomy (xxvi,

12-19) tithing is indicated as the necessary preamble to prayer or converse with God. It says: "In those days, Moses spoke to the people, saying, 'When thou hast made an end to tithing all thy fruits, thou shalt speak thus in the sight of the Lord thy God: I have taken that which was sanctified out of my house, and I have given it to the Levite, and to the stranger and to the fatherless, and to the widow as Thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed Thy commandments nor forgotten Thy precepts. I have obeyed the voice of the Lord my God, and have done all things as Thou hast commanded me.'"

Nothing Is Ours

Everything we have belongs to God and to Him we owe our very existence. The Psalmist tells us: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. In the beginning God created Heaven and earth and all things." (Ps. xxiii, 1) Whatever puny talents we have we got them from God. We speak of born musicians, born lawyers, born salesmen, born

teachers, etc., and those expressions are most accurate. We were born with those talents. We may have developed them, but we got them from Almighty God. Perhaps a few anecdotes will show you what we are trying to say.

In an article in Newsweek on "Income Tax Collection," it was stated that if a person made \$8,000 a year and put down as a donation \$800 to the church he was immediately suspected. The magazine was deluged with letters (from Protestants) saying that such a remark was an insult — that they very definitely give one-tenth of their income to God.

Alvin Dark, the New York Giant short-stop received \$12,500 in the 1954 World Series. He immediately sent \$1,250 to the Baptist Church in Louisiana saying that he had tithed ever since he first began making money, as a newsboy.

John D. Rockefeller tithed from the day he first made a dollar and a half, saying that if he hadn't tithed on that

amount he would never have been able to tithe on a million dollars later on.

Some other prominent people who tithe are William Colgate, H. J. Heinz of the 57 Varieties; Henry P. Crowell of Quaker Oats; A. A. Hyde, manufacturer of Mentholatum; James L. Kraft of Kraft Cheese; John S. Huyler, the candy king; Matthias W. Baldwin of the Baldwin Locomotive Works; Hershey, manufacturer of chocolate. All of them got rich on the scheme of one tenth for God. They helped Him, so He helped them.

A Catholic Chaplain relates an incident about a Colonel overseas who made \$950 a month. The officer immediately took out \$95 for God, stating that he didn't feel that it even belonged to him. He said; "I live off the rest and never in my life have I lacked for money."

A boy in our own parish came in and gave \$32, unsolicited. He said he was tithing his summer salary.

The movie actor, Jimmy Stewart, a friend of mine, one day introduced me to his agent. I mentioned later that with

the success he was enjoying, the agent seemed superfluous. Mr. Stewart said: "the 10 per cent I pay my agent is the best money I ever spend." Likewise, the ten per cent we give to God is the best money we shall ever spend.

At a recent Serra Club convention, a priest concluded a talk on Charity by stating nonchalantly: "All we priests tithe."

A recent article in a Catholic newspaper said: "Tithing is impractical." We should like to have the privilege of introducing that priest-author to some families in our parish. He might well write another article.

It is a strange mentality we Catholics have today. We are afraid to tip just a mere ten per cent, yet we are horrified at the thought of giving God, who gave us *everything*, the 10 per cent that is due Him. Many people say they cannot afford to tithe, but I assure you that one dollar a week, four dollars a month represents about one-fiftieth of the average man's income in any parish.

Considered in terms of tithing, it is a shameful offering to the Lord.

Some parents, furthermore, are setting an example of miserliness with God, for their children. The average teen-age Catholic, I dare say, spends several dollars a week on himself and contributes nothing or next to nothing to the church. His parents have never interested him in supporting the church. The way to view this entire matter is to picture ourselves on our death bed and see then how we would have liked to have supported God through the years. Again, in the words of the Psalmist: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

The Lenten season, which the Church stresses so thoroughly, is actually a tithe of the year. God, who said in Aggeus (ii. 9): "The silver is mine, the gold is mine;" and "all the beasts are mine, the cattle on the hills (Psalm xxxix, 10), expects one-tenth of these gifts to us as His due.

Objections to Tithing

"I am in debt. It would be wrong

for a man to give away his money while he owes others." This objection misses the point spiritually. It denotes a lack of proper understanding of our relationship to God. Most of us are in debt. The Bible, however, does not say: "all of you who are not in debt bring the tithe into the storehouse," but it does say: "bring you all the tithes into the storehouse." To whom is one more indebted, the real estate agent from whom one buys a house or God who has freely given you all things (Romans viii, 32)! From whom comes every good gift and every perfect gift (James i, 17)?

Our debt to God is a thousand times greater than that to any man. If giving be apportioned on the basis of how much we owe God our first and largest portion of income should be given to Him. Our debt to God comes first, not last.

Another objection to tithing is: "I cannot afford to tithe. I earn so little and it takes all I make to live. It would be impossible to give one-tenth." This objection usually comes from people

who have never tried tithing. There is not a case on record of any one who has been poorer for tithing. So many blessings have come from giving God His tenth that the truth of the matter is: "I cannot afford not to tithe."

"Tithing is not mentioned in the Bible." This can be answered by stating that it is mentioned from Genesis to the Apocalypse, forty-six times.

Another objection is: "Salvation is free. We are not under the law but under grace." That is correct. We cannot earn nor help to earn our salvation. But if our gratitude to God, under grace, is less than that of the Jews, something is wrong with us. One who seeks to justify a selfish course by quoting the above passage of Scripture has a mistaken idea of grace, for one of the manifestations of grace is liberality.

It Will Work

Jesus, in making the transition from law to grace, raised the old standard in every instance. Read the Sermon on the Mount. If the tithe is not now expected

of Christians, Jesus lowered this one standard. If it is lawful for a Christian to spend more than nine-tenths of his income on himself, then he has a right to be more selfish than the Jew, and Christ has lowered a moral standard. Did He do that in this one case only? Grace has not repealed the Ten Commandments, but it has given us more strength to keep them, and provided more compelling motives for doing so. Nowhere in the Bible, when giving is mentioned, is any portion less than the tithe indicated. The Christian under grace has a larger obligation and privilege than the Jew under law.

Would a true Christian think of robbing God? Yet in denying God His just due, he is doing just that. Malachias (iii, 8) says: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? *In tithes and offerings.*"

Incidentally, tithing will work. Children can be trained to give 10 per cent of their allowance to God. The converts are already fully versed in this

from their Protestant days and with encouragement will do it automatically.

What a boon it would prove to the Church? We could eliminate things like bazaars, bingos, chance tickets, etc. Catholics really should be above this sort of thing. With the increased collections, much needed schools and churches would be built. With the money worries eliminated for the priest, not only would we eliminate "talks on money" but we would not be bothering our Protestant neighbors with chance tickets. Instead we would be able to sell them our religion. As one lady put it: "When a Protestant or a Mormon comes to the door, he is not selling tickets." The tithe he gave earlier precludes this.

Even a tuition free parochial school would become a reality. We have already seen some phenomenal blessings, material as well as spiritual, resulting to families who decided to "Try Me and see."

The only objections we have heard are from families who do not tithe, not from those who do. "Ask the family that

tithes," is the answer to every argument.

To sum up, for those who must be told that they ought to tithe we again cite the Council of Trent and the words of Christ. For those who wish to prove how much they love God we need only say this: Abraham commenced it, Jacob continued it, Moses confirmed it, Malachias commanded it, and Jesus commended it. In the words of Almighty God, "Try Me and see."

“Give glory to God with a good heart and diminish not the first fruits of thy hands. In every gift show a cheerful countenance and sanctify thy tithes with joy. Give to the Most High according to what He has given to thee and with a good eye to do according to the ability of thy hands for the Lord maketh recompense and will give thee seven times as much.”

Ecclesiasticus xxxv, 10-13.