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A  
MESSAGE  
TO *Catholics*

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By Earl Browder

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# INTRODUCTION

**E**ARLY in 1936 the Communist Party of France sent forth a wholehearted appeal for a brotherly alliance and a mutually respectful collaboration between Communist and Catholic workers.

For over two years the important repercussions resulting from this affirmation of our good intentions have strengthened the French People's Front. The French democracy, menaced on the twin frontiers of Nazi Germany and its border that meets Franco's Spain, was happy over the inner harmony that resulted from this collaboration of the millions of Catholic democrats at home.

Then, in October, 1937, Maurice Thorez, leader of the Communist Party of France, made his famous statement of the "outstretched hand" in which he answered the hundreds of letters the French Communists had received from Catholic men and women, priests and scholars. His Eminence, Cardinal Verdier, in a Pastoral Letter issued an answer from Pope Pius XI to this appeal, which states:

"If this gesture of the 'outstretched hand' from your side expresses the wish to become better acquainted with your Catholic brothers, in order to give better respect to the religion which inspires them, to their convictions, their feelings, their works, then the Church will not refuse to carry out this work of enlightenment'. . . and you will speedily recognize that this can contribute greatly to the happiness of all."

This basis of Catholic-Communist cooperation further strengthened the harmony and mutual respect in the great trade union movement of France and within the mighty ranks of the People's Front.

In the United States the Catholic workingmen, from the beginnings of trade unionism, through the bitter struggles of the Molly Maguires in the mines, through the railroad, steel and textile strikes have been among the staunchest fighters for the economic and civil rights of our people. From the poor homes of Catholic immigrants came the Fosters, Mooneys and the MacNamaras.

Today in the ranks of the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. march millions of Catholics side by side with their brothers of all political shades and religious creeds. Today the Most Reverend Robert E. Lucey, Bishop of Amarillo, Texas, can rightly say:

"It is the duty of working people to join a bona fide labor union for mutual protection and progress. They must organize for their own sake and for the welfare of their families, their community, and their nation."  
(*Pittsburgh Catholic* of October 21, 1937.)

With these progressive Catholic sentiments the Communist Party heartily agrees. We, as Communists, commend Father John P. Monaghan when he points out:

"When they [the employers] raise the cry of alien agitators against the union organizers, remember: all Americans are either emigrants or the sons and daughters of emigrants."

Sister Vincent Ferrer of Rosary College expresses our point of view when she declares:

“Since women have become a permanent part of the working forces of modern industry, higher wage standards and shorter hours should be established by legislation as well as by trade unions.”

To the millions of American Catholics who share such noble and humane ideas, and whose families and homes are threatened by those reactionary forces which have no religion or compassion, we extend our hands in simple friendship.

We know that Catholics understand us and our aims when we can read in a simple parish organ such as *The Corpus Christi Chronicle* of New York so sympathetic an appreciation of our position. We quote:

“. . . Instead of sneering at attempts to reform Capitalism, they [the Communists] have become so thoroughly convinced that Socialism is the only system under which the working people can permanently better their lot, that they regard every benefit gained within the framework of the Capitalist system as a step towards Socialism—and simply and solely because it is a benefit and makes the world a better place to live in.

“With this in mind, the Communists now approach all honest, forward-looking men and women. They point out the urgent need for extending our political democracy into an economic democracy and the fact that even what democracy we have is seriously threatened by fascist-minded reactionaries.”

Earl Browder, General Secretary of the Communist Party, U.S.A., in his report to the Tenth National Convention of our Party, has clearly explained the need for such Catholic and Communist brotherly cooperation as a vital part of the developing democratic front in the United States to ward off the menace of fascism and war and to secure to the American people the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In the pages which follow we reprint this section of Mr. Browder's report.

As this brotherly cooperation is being demonstrated today in France, China and Republican Spain, so too, we feel, will it attain its historical fruition in this great democracy. For as the Rev. Dr. John P. Boland, Chairman of the New York State Labor Relations Board, pointed out:

"When Browder said the majority of the members of the Catholic Church are in the camp of democracy, he paid us the greatest compliment Catholics have had in America." (*Buffalo Times*, June 5.)

This democratic front for jobs, security, democracy and peace will be achieved, we believe with all our hearts, by such unselfish cooperation despite the cynicism and open attacks of those agents of fascism, even among the clergy, whom Cardinal Mundelein justly castigates when he warns:

"Don't let others use the danger of Communism as a cloak to cover corrupt practices, when they cry out against Communism and themselves practice social injustice."

NATIONAL COMMITTEE, COMMUNIST PARTY, U.S.A.

# A MESSAGE to CATHOLICS

By EARL BROWDER

**W**ITHIN the camp of democracy are included the great majority of the members of the Catholic Church. We Communists extend the hand of brotherly cooperation to them, and express our pleasure to find ourselves fighting shoulder to shoulder with them for the same economic and social aims.

The Catholic community, comprising about one-sixth of the American population, shares fully all the hardships and aspirations for a better life of our whole people. This community, because of its exceptional social organization, raises certain special questions for the democratic front, and therefore for the Communists also. Let us briefly consider the most important of them.

First, let us look at the relations between Communists and Catholics. It must be admitted that they are many and we are few, that as compared with over twenty million Catholics there are less than 10 per cent of that number of Communists and their sympathizers. Thus, if there were any social conflict of interest between the two groups as a whole, Catholics would outnumber us ten to one, and we would be in a very unfavorable position. And the point is, that certain persons are work-

ing very hard to create a conflict between Catholics and Communists, a conflict which is not of our choosing at all, and which, insofar as it exists, is founded on misunderstanding or misrepresentation. We want to clear away all misunderstanding, and refute all misrepresentation, in the interests of brotherly social relationships.

Questions of religious belief have nothing to do with this problem. True, most Communists are not Catholics, although a growing number of the latter are joining our Party. But this is true of five-sixths of Americans, who are also non-Catholic. True, also, that most Communists profess no religion at all, and subscribe to a philosophy which finds no room for the supernatural element in solving social and economic problems, although in this matter there is no dogmatic obligation in Party membership and we have a growing number who retain their church affiliations. But this also is no cause for conflict between us, for Communists scrupulously respect all religious beliefs and avoid all offense against them, firmly upholding complete religious freedom and toleration. If our views contain error, according to the standards of Catholic doctrine, such error can differ only in degree from that of five-sixths of all Americans, who are also in error according to those doctrinal standards.

Questions of ethical standards are no foundation for any practical differences between Catholics and Communists. True, Catholics as a whole turn to the doctrines and dogmas of their Church for formulation and justification of ethical and moral standards, while Communists base their standards wholly on the needs of society, but in practical life, among the masses, it

all comes to the same thing, justice, truth and fair dealing between man and man.

Questions of family and social morality furnish no practical division between Catholics and Communists, except in the same degree that they may divide Catholics and all non-Catholics, as in the question of the social permissibility of divorce, and so on. Contrary to much slander distributed by reactionary politicians in Catholic circles, the Communists are staunch upholders of the family. We consider sexual immorality, looseness and aberrations as the harmful product of bad social organization, and their increase in America today as largely products of the crisis of the capitalist system, of the demoralization among the upper classes which affects the masses by contagion, and we combat them as we combat all other harmful social manifestations.

Putting aside, then, matters of religious belief, ethics, and family morality, which have been the subject of the broadest misunderstandings, as matters on which there can be no more differences between us than exist between Catholics and all non-Catholics, at least insofar as concerns the establishment of normal brotherly relations that should exist between all members of social groups, there remains the whole field of *political questions*, of political relationships, and programs.

According to our understanding of Catholic doctrine—Catholic authorities may correct us if we are wrong—the Church as a religious community cannot be committed to any specific political party, political program, nor even any specific economic and social system. Whatever may have been the case

in the past, or in other countries, at least in modern times and in America, as we understand it, the Church as such, as a religious body, leaves the political affiliations of its members to their free choice as citizens. We know, of course, that in the past this was not the case; that the Church hierarchy fought as a body, with honorable exceptions, against the rise of the bourgeois-democratic system under capitalism, and condemned as mortal sin any democratic political affiliations; we know that in certain undeveloped countries this has extended even into modern times, as in Spain; but in the advanced countries, as in France and the United States, for example, we understand that the free political choice of Catholics among all parties and programs is not hampered by the imposing of any religious doctrinal restrictions. We understand that no Catholic can be refused the consolations of his Church on account of affiliation with the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, the Farmer-Labor Party, the Progressive Party, the American Labor Party, or the Socialist Party. We understand that this applies also to the Communist Party.

If this understanding is correct, it would be a public service for Catholics to make it clear to everyone. We have drawn these conclusions from our study of the issues as they arose in the United States during the 1928 election campaign, when Al Smith, a prominent lay Catholic, was candidate for President, and was subject to much unfair and un-American attack on account of his religious affiliation. If we have misinterpreted the relations of the Catholic Church to American politics, we ask our Catholic neighbors, in the most friendly spirit, to offer

us precise and detailed correction in the spirit of brotherhood.

Quite another matter is the question of how Catholics, as individuals or as members of social organizations, align themselves on political questions. We understand that most wealthy Catholics side with the reactionary camp in politics; we see that they exercise a disproportionate political influence among the clergy; and we have witnessed in the 1936 elections quite a serious conflict of loyalties among the Catholic masses as between Roosevelt and most of their lay and clerical national leaders. But when we witnessed the overwhelming majority of Catholics follow their loyalty to the President, we were confirmed in our belief that at least in the United States the Catholic Church is not operating as a political unit, that Catholics retain their political freedom of choice. And when we saw how Catholic workers were quite free to disregard the pressure of many priests who tried to keep them from joining the trade unions of the Committee for Industrial Organization, we were further confirmed in our opinion.

Some Catholic spokesmen attack the Communist Party because it supports the government of republican Spain against the fascist uprising which operates chiefly with Moorish troops and Italian and German armies of invasion. They say the Spanish Republic is anti-Catholic, and that by supporting it we are attacking the Catholic Church and religion everywhere. But the Spanish Republic is not anti-Catholic—that is even more of a lie than the story that it is a Communist government, for there are a few Communists in the government of the Republic, but there is no anti-Catholicism. The Spanish Catho-

lics divided in that struggle; the rich and with them most of the higher clergy went over to the fascists, and betrayed their country, while the poor went with the Republic.

I know that Franco's apologists claim that the poor people in his territory support him, but I also know that if this were true he would not find it necessary to sell his country to Hitler and Mussolini in return for armies—the poor are always ready to fight their own battles, and the poor exist in immense numbers throughout Spain. No, the Communists are not against the Catholics in Spain; we support the Catholics in Spain, the great majority who are the poor people, against their disloyal shepherds and their exploiters and oppressors.

Some attack the Communists because, they say, in the Soviet Union the Communists destroyed Catholic freedom of worship. But the Roman Catholic Church never had any freedom or equality in the old Russia; under the Czar there ruled the Greek Orthodox Church, a part of the Czarist state, a thoroughly corrupt and reactionary institution and a political machine throughout its organization. I am sure there must exist a great deal of Roman Catholic literature, of pre-1917 origin, explaining in detail what a monstrous corruption of mankind the Greek Orthodox Czarist Church was. Only as a result of the rise of Soviet power were Roman Catholics given equality and freedom of worship in Moscow. Surely, there is little for Catholics to complain of against the Russian Communists.

Speaking in Baltimore a few weeks ago, I took the occasion, while discussing some of these questions, to criticize a certain book, *Facts About Communism*, written by Rev. Edward

Lodge Curran, president of the Catholic Truth Society. I pointed out that this book was not only permeated with falsehoods, but was also dangerous to the sexual morality of the younger generation, by its printing of lascivious writings, falsely attributed to the Communists. I have been reading Socialist and Communist literature systematically and assiduously for thirty-two years; I think I can claim to be something of an authority on the subject; but never in my years of reading have I ever found anything in that literature remotely resembling the indecent document which Father Curran reproduced most shamelessly in his book as characteristic of Communist views on sexual morals. The only thing approaching it I have seen in print were the apocryphal tales about "nationalization of women," printed in the Hearst and similar papers in the early days of the Russian revolution, and thoroughly discredited among all honest people. The publication of such documents, backed up by the assurance that millions of people believe and practice such indecencies, will surely do more harm to youthful morals than Father Curran can remedy by his implied disapproval of the things he printed. I seriously question the propriety of discussing Communism in such fashion, especially if it is done by a priest. It is not in the interests either of truth or of Christianity.

Father Curran sent me a telegram of protest against the published notices of my speech, which telegram he released to the newspapers. But in it he did not mention my criticisms of his book, either to defend it or to correct himself. If Father Curran wishes to pursue this matter further, I will be glad

to submit his book and my criticism of it to an impartial jury, composed of churchmen, half to be named by himself and half by me, for a verdict as to which of us is correct from the point of view of public and Christian morals. If the verdict is against me I will publicly apologize to Father Curran, while if it is in my favor I will expect a similar public apology from him. If he refuses this offer, I will consider he has decided discretion is the better part of valor, and that he lets my criticism stand by default.

In pursuing this question, I am interested only in eliminating falsehood and bitterness from all discussions between Catholics and Communists, and placing such discussions on the plane of that Christian brotherhood and charity which we of no religion appreciate as social virtues.

Many Catholics have joined their voices to the anti-Communist campaign charge that we are un-American because of our affiliation with the Communists of other lands. That sort of argument will not carry much weight among Catholics, who are quite accustomed to thinking of themselves as members of a community that transcends all national boundaries, and who at the same time consider themselves just as good Americans as any one. But it is unfortunate that some of the Catholic clergy try to wield this double-edged sword against the Communists, oblivious of its danger to the Catholic community in America, as well as to the health of our public life generally.

Surely, we in America have had enough of the A.P.A., of know-nothingism, of the Ku Klux Klan, of all those obscurantist ideologies which set Protestant against Catholic, Chris-

tian against Jew, white against Negro, nationality against nationality, and race against race. We of the Communist Party fight against every manifestation of such reactionary and anti-social ideologies, from which Catholics have been among the chief sufferers in America, and we offer our cooperation to the Catholics to scotch them wherever they show themselves.

Fascist reaction is the only camp that gains from the spread of these obscurantist ideologies. Catholics, whose hearts are bleeding for their fellows in Nazi Germany and Austria, should remember that Hitler rose to power on the wave of that same "crusade against Communism" to which they so lightly give their support or toleration in America.

Fascism threatens not only the labor movement and the Communists. It threatens everything progressive and decent in human life. It threatens to destroy freedom of religion and the church, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. Surely in the face of this terrible menace, which hovers over America as well as Europe, we should all rise above differences to join hands for our common salvation, just as we would to meet some terrible natural calamity.

Every word that I address to the Catholics applies more or less to the other religious communities in America. We speak these words with deadly seriousness, with a full sense of our responsibilities in the hour of deepest crisis the world has ever passed through. We extend the hand of brotherly cooperation to the great mass of democratic Catholics.

A Pamphlet Every American Should Read

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By EARL BROWDER

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