

EDITORIAL

SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A NEW book by Dr. Newman Smyth is entitled *Passing Protestantism and Coming Catholicism*. The title is not a happy one. Its contents suggest as a far more appropriate title: "Splitting the Difference."

The gist of Dr. Newman Smyth's book is that the present Catholic Church is reactionary and out-of-date; on the other hand, that Protestantism has lost control of the forces of life. To these two premises the Dr. adds a third, to wit, that the Modernist Movement within the Catholic Church, and against which the Pope has issued his anathema, is stepping forward as the New Religion.

Granting, for the sake of argument, that Dr. Newman's premises regarding the present Catholic and Protestant churches is correct, his reasoning looks very much like this:

Joe Doe holds that $2+2$ equal 10;

Richard Roe holds that $2+2$ equal 20;

Both are wrong;

The right is found by splitting the difference;

The difference between 10 and 20 is 15;

Consequently, $2+2$ equal 15.

Dr. Newton Smyth's position is utterly unscientific—his Dr.'s title to the contrary notwithstanding, in which respect he stands in a large company. The trouble with him lies in that he can not keep distinct two distinct ideas—the sentimental, or purely religious, and the practical or political part of religion, so-called. The two are inextricably tangled up in his mind.

With the sentimental, or purely religious part of religion, the Social Question and social evolution have no concern. The moral code of religion has not changed for thousands of years. What has changed is the outer garb, and that is purely political.

The outer garb, or social form, of religion is the shadow, or reflex, of the material conditions. The latter are in a state of constant transformation—in constant transformation also must the former be. From Moses down to Brigham Young the “founders of religions” have been State builders, and the States they built must necessarily vary with the changing materials used. A “splitting of differences” has no place in the process.

If Dr. Newman Smyth is right that the present Catholic Church is out of date, then that would mean that mankind has outgrown the outward garb of that Church.

If Dr. Newman Smyth is right that Protestantism has lost its hold upon the lives of the people, then that would mean that the outward garb of Protestantism has likewise become out of date with up-to-date mankind.

By the same token, a splitting of the difference between the out-of-date garbs could not be “in season.”

Assuming Dr. Newman Smyth’s premises to be correct it would follow that the material for the now needed outer garb of the human conscience has to be looked for, not in the splitting of the difference between frayed-out materials, but in material, new—and fresh and strong because new—that progressing social evolution is weaving.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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