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## **Crisis in German Catholicism: Capitulation**

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# Book Reviews

## CRISIS IN GERMAN CATHOLICISM

**CAPITULATION.** The Lesson of German Catholicism, by Carl Amery.  
New York: Herder and Herder, 1967. xxiii, 231 pp.

Carl Amery's *Capitulation*, is a polemic rather than a desirable dispassionate history of the decadence of the Catholic Church in Germany. This is unfortunate insofar as much documentation is absent or delegated to footnotes referring the reader to hard-to-find sources. Originally written in German and haltingly translated by Edward Quinn, much of this book's original bitter irony comes through blunt and obscure due to an almost too literal translation. It is a book written for the Western German reader who is acquainted with all of the local personalities of the Church in labor, economics, publishing, and politics. There are fleeting explanations about some of them in the frequent and at times baffling footnotes.

One gathers that the new omnipresent crisis in Church authority was already acutely felt among thinking and sensitive German Catholics back in the early 1930's. The problem faced by the ordinary layman with the advent of Hitler, along with the famous Concordat and Fulda Declaration of 1933 (neither of which appear in part or summary in the text nor in an appendix), stirred few heroic souls to start thinking for themselves. The hierarchy and clergy both secular and regular swallowed the documents unquestioningly. The whole of German Catholicism was mired down in a passionate desire to maintain the *status quo*: the comfortable bourgeois life of conformity and rigid attachment to the secondary virtues. These virtues of honesty, diligence, cleanliness, punctuality, reliability in service, so characteristic of Germans in caricature, passed for integrated Christianity and by them the Church fell an easy prey to Nazi machinations. By the time that the capitulation became obvious to even the most earthly-minded Catholic, it was too late and the war was pursued with frightening totality. Convincing arguments were manufactured by the clergy to

shore up loyalty to the Fatherland rather than to the then existing regime. Resistance was undreamed of and the rare *Jägerstatters* were hounded and executed as depraved lunatics.

With the return of normalcy after 1945, neither clergy nor laity showed signs of having learned a lesson. The reaction of the Bavarian peasants in their brutal and unchristian handling of the refugee problem illustrates what the mentality of the Church was all over the country.

Carl Amery claims that his book was written to defend a thesis and is intended to bring about a fundamental change to the present tragic condition. The thesis runs: German Catholicism today is almost exclusively dependent on the ideas of value and virtue which prevail in the milieu of the majority—a selfish, closed society with a veneer of religion to give it a semblance of respectability and stability. This majority's course is defined by its ideas and aims, not by the demands of the Gospel. With an effort to overturn this hypocrisy Mr. Amery would uncover the wounds with the bitter prophetic aggressiveness of a Jeremiah. His remedy for each conscientious Catholic is to exhibit a simple honesty and courage to face up to the truth; to discover his true place in reshaping society; and to steel himself to face losses in material possession, in reputation, in prestige, and even to face persecution from the Church itself. This recommendation is plausible, but hardly any more far-reaching than what many others have said. Hypocrisy is a deadly, perennial, incurable human weakness. One wonders wearily if there is any remedy....

In the light of recent *trahison des clercs*, the ordinary Catholic layman in any country finds himself armed, it seems, with conscience alone to guide him in the soul-searing problems of nuclear war, civil rights, population explosion, and with the massive identification of institutional religious health with gross material achievements. Carl Amery's book gives some valuable insights. It is regrettable that the book is not more comprehensive, more coolly composed, and better translated.

VERNON POORE, F.S.C.

## NEW TRENDS IN ADOLESCENT CATECHESIS

METHODS, by Pierre Babin. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967. 187 pp.

THE CATECHETICAL EXPERIENCE, by John F. Murphy. New York: Herder and Herder, 1968. 126 pp.

Most religion teachers and catechists today are in search of methods and techniques that would enable them to overcome their students' seeming apathy and boredom. They want to know the way