

**THE CAUSES AND  
CURES OF  
UNBELIEF**

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The causes and cures of unbelief by N. J. Laforet & James Gibbons & P. J. Ryan

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**N. J. LAFORET & JAMES GIBBONS & P. J. RYAN**

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## PREFACE.

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**I**T is useless to deny the fact that in Christian communities many men are to be found who no longer believe in Christianity. Many even, not content with rejecting the religion of Jesus Christ, go on to deny God; or if they do not deny him in express terms, their idea of him is radically false, and they seek to place upon the altar of the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth, a philosophical idol, ten thousand times more vain than the idols of wood and stone to which pagan nations offered incense. Whence comes this infidelity? According to those who pride themselves on being philosophers or critics, the denial of Christianity, or even of a personal and living God, is dictated by science and reason; it is, they say, the natural and legitimate fruit of intellectual progress; rationalists, spiritualists, materialists, atheists, pantheists, sceptics of every kind, all alike appeal to science and reason to justify their belief or their doubts in the eyes of the public, and even apparently to their own conscience. I willingly bear this testi-

mony to learned unbelievers of every shade, that they can shelter their infidelity under the finest and noblest pretexts. I have no intention here to examine or discuss those scientific and philosophical pretexts which they call decisive and unanswerable reasons. This has been done elsewhere,\* and Catholic writers continue to do so daily with the authority which belongs to true learning. I am now going to attempt another method.

I have often reflected, sometimes with wonder, always with sadness, on the phenomenon of infidelity in the midst of the light of Christianity. I have frequently asked myself, in the sincerity of my heart, why so many men—many of whom are noble-minded, serious, learned—reject the teaching of the Catholic Church—the organ and representative of our Lord Jesus Christ upon earth—why certain minds, rather than submit to the authority of the Church, will descend to a total denial of the moral and religious order, and even to universal doubt. In this fact there is certainly matter for psychological and moral study of high importance and melancholy interest. I know very well that in the eyes of infidels this fact appears the simplest and most natural thing in the world; I know that they affect to place their infidelity under

\* See "Our Christian Heritage," also "The Faith of Our Fathers," by Cardinal Gibbons.

the direct and exclusive patronage of science and philosophy; but I am convinced that science and philosophy are in no way interested in the hostile or indifferent attitude which they assume toward the Christian faith. Christians have always possessed, and still, thank God, possess, as large a measure of science and philosophy as infidels. Infidelity depends on other causes. What these causes are I propose now to make the object of my inquiry. I cannot hope to bring to light all the real causes of infidelity; there are some which necessarily escape the eye of the observer, however attentive he may be; there are mysteries in the depths of the human soul which the eye of God alone can penetrate. But it is easy for any one who has had an opportunity of closely observing believers and unbelievers, and of studying their history, to recognize the principal and ordinary causes of infidelity.

This work will be divided into two parts, one historical, the other critical. In the first part, after a few words on the preaching of Jesus Christ, and the opposite effects produced by it, we shall mark, by a few examples, the principal phases of the twofold history of the Christian faith, and of unbelief in the bosom of Christianity; this history will afford us valuable lessons; it will show us how men become, how they

remain, and how they cease to be Christians. We shall see, by the experience of eighteen centuries of the human mind, whether the source of infidelity can possibly be the development of reason and the progress of intelligence. In the second part, relying on the lessons of history and on psychological and moral observation, we shall seek to unfold the real causes of religious unbelief. We shall begin by defining the nature of faith and the nature of infidelity; we shall then analyze the principal forms of contemporary infidelity, and we shall seek to distinguish the diverse and often complex conditions of the soul, to which they attach themselves, or by which they are produced.

We trust that God will make use of these pages, humble though they be, to confirm some souls in the happy possession of the Faith, and to rescue others from the corroding bitterness of doubt, or from the gloomy, icy void of unbelief, leading them back to the bright and sweet repose which Christian faith alone can give.



## NOTICE—SECOND EDITION.

**T**HIS book has already produced consoling fruits; God has used it as his instrument to bring back many wandering souls to Christian Faith and practice.

The Sovereign Pontiff had foretold this result in a letter addressed to the author a few weeks after the publication of this work. We give a translation of this letter.

### LETTER OF THE SOVEREIGN PONTIFF.

ILLUSTRIOUS AND REVEREND SIR:

To the more considerable works which you have already published you have added one which, though small in size, will, as its title promises, prove of the greatest utility. For, as in the art of healing the body its diseases are treated with the greatest ease and security when their true cause is known, so may the maladies of the soul be best and most effectually resisted and cured when their origin has been

ascertained. As the plague of infidelity, which is the principal evil of our day, proceeds either from corruption of heart, or from the languor of religious feeling, or from the madness of pride, to discover such causes and to bring them to light, by tearing from them the veil under which they disguise their shameful deformity, will assuredly be a powerful aid to the minds of men to reject these errors, and to give them also a free access to the truth. Therefore our most Holy Father especially approves its design, and has charged me to return to you his thanks, and to assure you from him that he foresees most abundant fruit from the labor which you have undertaken, and, as a pledge of that success, to convey to you his Apostolic Benediction, which he gives you with the tenderest affection.

Having had the pleasure of fulfilling this agreeable task, I offer you also the expression of my particular respect and esteem, and pray God to bestow all his favors upon you.

Your most humble and devoted servant,  
FRANCISCU MERCURELLI,  
*Secretary to His Holiness.*

## FOREWORD.

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**W**E who possess the light of Divine faith should not censure too severely those who are deprived of that sublime gift. We should rather assist them by prayer and by trying to lead them to a better way of thinking. They are not the only ones to blame. The three great enemies of man's salvation, the world, the flesh, and the devil, have much to do with unbelief: "All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world". (I. John 2:16). This evil of unbelief is deeply seated; it is largely traceable to the corruption of human nature: "The earth was corrupted before God, and was filled with iniquity". (Gen. 6:11). We are a fallen race. Mankind fell from the favor of God by the disobedience of our first parents in transgressing the commandment of their Maker: (Gen. 3:17). Since that day the natural tendency of human nature is towards evil: "The imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth". (Gen.