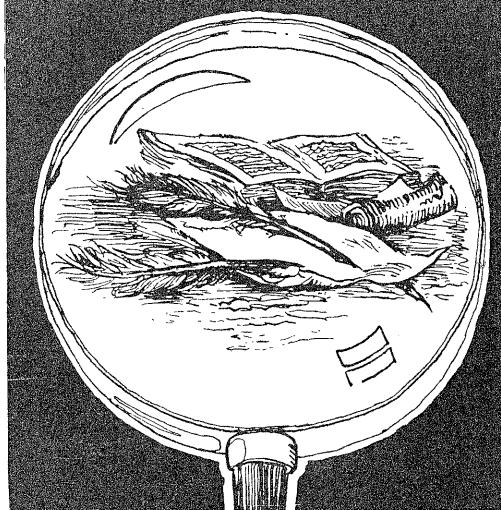


**READING:  
Learning  
To Choose**



**JAMES B. STENSON**

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### **The Author**

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*WE LIVE in an era of communications, ever more abundant and even overwhelming. Newspapers, magazines, books and booklets provide in printed form a constant stimulus to thought and action (or their opposites) only matched by the sights and sounds of TV, radio and the movies. Increasingly, education (and maturity) is measured by the ability to select and evaluate media critically. For a person of faith, there is no doubt that Christian values should influence media choices (See Vatican II, Decree on the Means of Social Communication, no. 9). These reflections on the subject, particularly relating to the print media, come from a professional educator.*

### **Reading: a program for personal excellence**

SOME YEARS AGO, an eminent American scholar was asked to define education, the object of his long life's work. Without hesitation, he replied, "The essence of education is this: to choose your company carefully, and then listen."

To choose one's company carefully—this is a challenging goal for any young person who wants to take his education seriously. The years between 18 and 25 are a time for building life-long powers of mind and will, for shaping

values which enrich experience and give vigorous direction to the course of one's life. The fruits of a sound education, therefore, are not merely technical skills and useful information. They are, rather, what Aristotle called "the full use of one's powers along lines of excellence."

These lines of excellence can best be found in a program of discriminating reading. The best books in our cultural heritage introduce a young person to a wealth of experience with life, and this experience gives depth and maturity to personal judgment. Sound judgment is, in one sense, the object of any real education. It develops the power to make, throughout life, those essential distinctions upon which so much depends: good from evil, truth from falsehood, the sound from the silly.

There is no better company for a young and inquiring mind, therefore, than the best of good books. Reading deeply in philosophy and theology throws light on the meaning of human affairs. History and biography are, as Thucydides said, "philosophy learned from examples." Literature, like history, gives deep and often poignant insight into human character, for a great writer's vision of life is often brilliantly illuminating: great truth expressed in the noblest language. To spend time in the company of great books is thus to grow in powers of wisdom and discernment.

Throughout the centuries, discriminating reading has had this influence on the lives of many young people. To name just a few from different ages and cultures:

—At the age of 32, St. Augustine was converted to Catholicism by reading the works of Plato and the Epistles of St. Paul. He later said that Plato introduced him to God, and St. Paul intro-

duced him to Christ. His restless, truth-searching mind found its rest in the wisdom of the Church.

—St. Ignatius Loyola changed the course of his life by reading a single volume of the *Lives of the Saints*. Trapped at home in the boredom of convalescence from battle wounds, he had nothing else to read, least of all the escapist books of chivalrous romance which he preferred (and which Cervantes satirized a generation later in *Don Quixote*). The active heroism of the saints gave direction to his life, and thereby changed the course of history.

—Cardinal Newman, G. K. Chesterton, and other prominent English converts to Catholicism were attracted to the Church through their serious study of history and philosophy. They found Catholic doctrine reasonable at first and then intellectually compelling.

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel-prize winning novelist, was converted to Christianity while reading the great works of Russian literature. Like many other thinkers in the Soviet Union, he was captivated by the spiritual force of Christianity in Russian culture.

—Flannery O'Connor, the distinguished American novelist, said that her intellectual values were formed by her extensive reading of St. Thomas Aquinas, Paul Claudel, Cardinal Newman, and other Catholic thinkers. Her profound commitment to Catholic doctrine gave depth to her artistic vision, and it gave her the courage to reject and even satirize the agnostic existentialism of her literary contemporaries. Since her death in 1964, her artistic reputation has continued to grow.

In the lives of these people, and so many others like them, one interesting fact is found in

common. Each had read these influential books because other people, whose judgment they respected, had recommended them. The company of important books was mingled with the company of discriminating friends.

The benefits of personal recommendation come as no surprise to anyone experienced in reading. Although browsing is an enjoyable part of youthful experimentation, sooner or later every serious student makes an important discovery: Time is too short for directionless dabbling, and good advice in reading (as in practically everything else) has significant value. Seeking out and following sound advice is, in fact, an important part of the virtue of prudence. And prudence, like the other virtues, is essential to intellectual maturity.

**Prudence:  
Sound judgment in choices**

It is interesting to observe how the classical virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) have come to be called by other names in our common speech—and conversely how their names have come to signify a caricature of the original meanings.

Temperance, for instance, typically denotes abstention from alcohol, with associations of puritan prudishness. But what it really means, and originally meant, is what today we call “self-control” or “self-discipline,” especially for the sake of some higher good. A person who eats and drinks and exercises moderately, for improving his physical and spiritual health, is living the virtue of temperance.

Prudence, too, has seen a similar distortion. It has wrongly come to be associated with fearfulness and unreasonable caution. But what it really means is simply what today we call sound, discriminating judgment: the power of making sensible decisions. This power is built

by experience, either one’s personal trial and error or (better still) the experience of others whose intelligence and values we trust. If we look around us, we see that society is a network of interdependent services derived from experience. Physicians, lawyers, scholars, consultants, spiritual directors—all give useful advice to help people make intelligent personal choices.

Consequently, “to choose one’s company carefully” in reading requires an exercise of prudence, of sensible choice. To choose *anything* carefully involves a considered discrimination into categories: the worthwhile, the mediocre and the relatively useless. As Aristotle pointed out, and as common experience with life shows, people of mature and discriminating judgment are almost always open to sound advice. In fact, they actively seek it out. The mature have enough self-knowledge and self-confidence to acknowledge their limitations, including their lack of experience in a given area. (Another name for this honest self-awareness is humility, another misunderstood virtue.) Seeking intelligent and informed advice is how people strengthen their powers of judgment and good taste throughout their lives.

So a young reader who wants to use his valuable time well can do no better than to set out on a program of well-chosen reading. And this he can do most effectively by seeking advice on which books are most worthwhile. In doing so, he is already practicing maturity of judgment. He is also leaving behind that common mindset of adolescent insecurity: the obstinate insistence on trying everything for oneself. Pride often keeps company with naivete.

But whose advice should a student follow? How should the judgment of the Church on doctrinal and moral matters affect his choices in reading? What experience does the Church

bring to bear in advising people toward, or away from, certain moral or doctrinal positions? Is the Church's position a limitation on intellectual freedom?

These are important questions. Before we address them, it would be worth our while to consider some background issues. The Church's role as advice-giver should be seen in the broader context of how ideas are communicated in society, and what this process means to a thoughtful, discriminating reader.

**Communication:  
An exercise in choices**

Everyone who reads, whether he reflects on it or not, is constantly subject to other people's powers of selection. Editors, publishers, critics, university professors—all have a profound influence on which ideas young people assimilate. The flow of information (together with implicit philosophical and moral premises) is channeled and shaped by people who exercise choices for reasons of their own. Their values and criteria come into constant play.

Take a large metropolitan newspaper, for example. Every day, a large newspaper receives up to 5,000,000 words from its many sources of information: staff reporters, wire services, press releases, correspondents, and the like. The editors face a daily task of discriminating among this torrent of stories and selecting what will be presented and in what order of priority. Typically less than 10% of the material will finally see its way into print.

Similarly, magazine editors and publishers of books receive thousands of manuscripts each year, most of them unsolicited. The vast majority of these are discarded, many even unread. The publishers and editors select what will appear, and they rigorously edit these items to suit their business' purposes (which is usually to make a profit).

Book critics also routinely practice discrimination. They have to. In the United States alone, more than 30,000 new titles appear each year, and no book critic can possibly read more than a small fraction of the large number published in his field of interest. Most books are ignored (naturally, to the intense disappointment of their authors). Those which are selected and read must fall under the critic's categories: the good, the mediocre, and the waste of time. So, what finally appears in a critic's column is the end result of many selective steps involving judgmental choices.

Finally, a university instructor wields substantial powers of selection. From the scores of books in his field, he selects only a few for compulsory reading. Among the hundreds of topics he could discuss, he chooses a handful for his lectures.

What criteria may a professor apply here? Virtually any. Unlike people in the publishing business, he is not responsible to stockholders or to market forces. If he is tenured, he may use whatever criteria he pleases: personal convictions, current interests, professional judgment, or even (as every student knows) whims, quirks, and narrow prejudices. In any event, he can choose in many ways, both subtle and direct, to steer the reading and thinking of his students.

All of these selective activities are legitimate, of course. When practiced responsibly, they form a valuable professional service. Everyone involved with communicating ideas is obliged to be discriminating. At every step of the publishing and teaching processes, people consciously weigh choices and then reject what is unsuitable, either for their organization's mission or for the welfare (as they perceive it) of the people they serve.

What are the implications of these matters? There are two concepts for a young reader to

reflect upon.

First, to evaluate his reading critically, he should bear in mind how much he constantly depends on other people's judgments—which means, in practical terms, on other people's values and criteria. When a reader deals with a piece of published material, he is holding in his hands what other people have decided he should read, or even what he *must* read. Their collective intent is that he should be persuaded to share their opinions, or their principles, or their vision of life. Only an unreflecting reader would believe, naively, that he is free from these real influences. A reader's freedom is really exercised in what he chooses to *do* about them.

Secondly, and related to this, a critical reader should keep these editorial influences in mind when he considers the Church's position on reading. A committed Catholic has, by definition, a set of principles by which he tries to live. When he is faced with choices in reading, therefore, he should consider some critical questions: How much do I know about, and trust, the principles of the people behind this book? Are their standards and values consistent with my own? Do they have something worthwhile to teach me? . . . Or should we part company now?

#### **The Church's position: Faithfulness**

Any discussion of the Church's position on reading ought to begin with a clear understanding: The Catholic Church has always lived, from its very foundation, an unswerving commitment to a set of principles. It could not do otherwise. When Jesus Christ established his Church, he entrusted it with a mission: "teach all nations . . . to observe all that I have commanded you." Consequently the Church's obligation before God and its own members is to preserve, pro-

tect, and defend the fundamental rights of the faithful. The most critical of these rights are (1) to know the truths of the faith, whatever God has revealed; and (2) to live in the state of grace, the friendship with God, won for us by Christ himself.

For the Church, this commitment to the integrity of faith and morals is a matter, literally, of life or death. Those members of the faithful with a special responsibility for the welfare of souls—the Popes, bishops, and spiritual directors—have defended the Church's principles down through the centuries *as a matter of conscience*, often at the cost of their lives.

A study of Church history shows how constant this struggle has been. Christ himself warned his disciples to "beware the leaven of the Pharisees." And the Pharisees of the gospel were the forerunners of those forces poised against the Church throughout history: self-serving groups of the "establishment," pursuing power at the expense of truth and of people's fundamental rights.

St. Paul's epistles ring with warnings, over and over again in different terms, for the faithful to shun the dangers leveled against doctrine and the life of grace. From Apostolic times forward, the Church has defended its people's rights against kings and princes, cultists and demagogues, and dictatorships of every description. In 2,000 years, the Church has never had its teachings on faith and morals unchallenged by the prevailing "establishment."

In the past century, it seems, these challenges have grown more pointed and pervasive. The development of the mass media, a new social force in history, has given rise to a new "establishment" contending with the Church's principles. As early as 1831, the great social thinker Alexis de Tocqueville foresaw what he called "the tyranny of the majority," the subtle but powerful manipulation of public opinion. He

predicted how publications would have a profound influence in shaping people's perception of truth and morality. But the Church had known about this dynamic for centuries.

For centuries, people in Western cultures have had experience with reading; and for centuries the Church has had experience with people's souls. Because of its commitments and its experience, the Church has maintained a set policy with regard to readings. It is this: Catholics may not knowingly and willingly read any publication opposed to the teachings of the Catholic faith or to Catholic morality. Any Catholic who does so (without proportionately serious reason) is endangering the integrity of his faith and the life of grace in his soul. By consciously putting himself in this "occasion of sin," he offends God seriously. (Our Lord himself coined this phrase: "If your eye is an occasion of sin for you, pluck it out. . . .")

Those specifically entrusted with the care of souls (bishops, priests, spiritual directors) have a serious obligation in conscience to warn the faithful in these matters. In the fulfillment of this duty, they are following the example of their predecessors, going back to St. Paul, St. Peter, and Our Lord himself—the source of all the Church's responsibility and authority.

There is one common misunderstanding which should be mentioned here. In the 16th century, the Church drew up a list of specific publications which were particularly offensive to Catholic faith, and this was called the Index. Any Catholic who read any of these books, knowing of their offensiveness, committed a serious offense to God *and* was automatically excommunicated, that is, cut off from membership in the Church. In 1966, this legal penalty of excommunication was rescinded and the list of specific titles was done away with. Catholics were, however, urged to exercise their *personal responsibility* (in keeping with the

theme of the Second Vatican Council) to dissociate themselves from books of this type. The *moral* effects of reading such publications remained the same as always: whoever needlessly endangers the integrity of his faith or morals commits a serious sin.

This position was reaffirmed as recently as 1983 with the publication of the new Code of Canon Law. In Canons 822 to 832, the Church emphasizes the "duty and right to ensure that in writings. . . there should be no ill effect on the faith and morals of Christ's faithful." It also speaks of its "duty and right to condemn writings which harm true faith or good morals."

#### **The Church's position: Reasonable prudence**

What does all of this mean to a Catholic reader, to someone committed to intellectual excellence *and* to the principles of his faith? In general terms, it means that he must maturely and vigorously exercise the virtue of prudence. That is, he should make sound and informed judgments about his reading in the light of a well-formed conscience. He will reject not only the tasteless and the useless, but also the immoral, the unprincipled, and the false, regardless of its standing in "public opinion." He will, in short, exercise his powers of discriminating choice in keeping with his ideals and his convictions. This is, as we have seen, what prudence means. And it means a lot.

In squaring his principles with those of the Church, he can expect to meet criticism. Our Lord himself had his critics, and his faithful could hardly expect less. As we have seen, these critics have come from the ranks of the powerful, the makers of public policy and public opinion. These have never lacked avid followers. In past decades, and increasingly in our own time, the most influential critics of the Church's position have been people in the established

centers of communication: writers, editors, publishers, university figures, columnists—whoever seeks to shape people's thoughts and attitudes.

The chorus of criticism now, as always in Church history, decries the Church's supposed "suppression" of intellectual freedom. The critics allege, wrongfully and untruthfully, that the Church is "afraid of ideas" and relentlessly hostile to "progress." These accusations can be found in practically every forum of public discussion: books, periodicals, television, and university lecture halls. They form, as it were, a constant challenge to the free choice of a Catholic to live by his principles.

The issues here are so important that it is worth our while to look at them in some detail. Granted that appeals to "progressive ideas" are always emotionally attractive, what real *assumptions* lie under the charges? How fair-minded and reasonable are the critics' accusations? A look at the underlying premises of the arguments will reveal (as one humorist put it) that "there is less here than meets the eye."

● **First assumption: That negative guidelines deprive people of their rightful freedom.**

Even a hasty study of the way things work in society shows that this assumption is ill-founded. Negative guidelines lie all around us and for good reason. In countless ways, we find such advice useful and even necessary.

To take a few examples: Grammar and style books consist almost entirely of negative admonitions explaining how not to write incorrectly. Service-station gasoline pumps display conspicuous signs warning us not to smoke nearby. Newspaper columns constantly advise us about the dangers of cholesterol. No one reasonably thinks of these, and countless other examples in society, as deprivations of personal freedom. The form of these warnings is nega-

tive, the intent behind them is positive and so too are the effects. The examples noted here can promote good writing and good health.

In fact, any professional newspaper editor (even one who decries the Church's "negative prohibitions") insists that his staff adhere to the rules of his organization, which are phrased mostly in negative terms. He prohibits, and rightly so, fabricated news stories, sloppy quotations, misspelled names, and libelous falsehoods. One American editor said that his newspaper had a universal rule encompassing all the rest: "Thou shalt not put thy editor on the spot."

Similarly, university professors routinely insist on adherence to a set of negative guidelines. They set limits with respect to attendance, deadlines, correct form for papers, and options for reading. When they submit papers to professional journals, they in turn must adhere to clear-cut standards of acceptability. None of these guidelines, negative though they be, are taken as tyranny—not, at least, for the fact of their being negative.

To look at the matter another way, in fact, negative guidelines leave more room for personal freedom than positive ones do. The Church does not positively command what must be read; it leaves this up to the good judgment of each Catholic. In a similar way, grammar books do not tell us what to write, and the gasoline and cholesterol warnings do not order us to give up smoking or become vegetarians. It would seem that negative guidelines *presume* personal freedom and even show *respect* for it.

Parenthetically, we may note that editors and university professors, by their selection and rejection of reading matter, *do* exercise positive control. They narrow people's options considerably. If an editor were an anti-smoking

activist or a militant vegetarian, the pages of his paper would reflect these views, and probably nothing to the contrary. If a literature professor thought science fiction to be contemptible, he would hardly include such works on his reading list, and he would hardly entertain substitutions. But these people would react indignantly to accusations of "mind control."

● **Second assumption: That all ideas are worthy of the widest possible dissemination—nothing should inhibit free expression of thought.**

If we may fairly judge beliefs by actions, we can form one firm conclusion: However often writers may voice this attractive dictum, almost no one who works in publishing really believes it.

As we have seen, every editor and publisher has an active responsibility and a daily practice of rejecting unsuitable "expressions of thought." An editor who accuses the Church of discrimination will himself refuse to publish crackpot letters, libelous defamations, racist articles, or excerpts from *Mein Kampf*. Writings of this sort are what wastebaskets and rejection slips are for. It is arguable, in fact, that an average book critic "suppresses" more books in a year than any ten Catholic bishops. A book publisher annually condemns more manuscripts to oblivion than the entire Index ever did.

Much the same could be said for the practice of tenured professors. Not all "expressions of thought" are equally acceptable to teachers, as countless final examinations can demonstrate. Some student opinions are praiseworthy, others will result in "F." Some readings are

required, others are avoided. A student sometimes learns the narrowness of his options the hard way.

In short, everyone discriminates. Everyone would probably agree with the Harvard professor who used to tell his students every year, "By all means, have an open mind, . . . but not so open that your brains fall out."

Is there anything wrong with these discriminating practices? Certainly not. But they do cause thoughtful Catholics to wonder why critics of the Church are prone to such selective indignation.

Virtually everyone who works with ideas has a duty to exercise critical judgment, to differentiate between the good and the worthless. This is what writers and editors and teachers are paid for. These professionals act according to their convictions and to what they see as the welfare of their readers or students. But the spiritual leaders of the Church have similar, and vastly more important, responsibilities of their own—to God and to the benefit of the Church's members. If the critics insist on their professional right to discriminate among ideas, how can they justly fault the Church for doing the same thing?

Where have these two assumptions led us so far? As we have seen, opponents of the Church's position cannot fairly fault the *form* of the Church's guidelines, for negative advice is commonplace and almost universally useful, even in the critics' own fields. And they cannot, in all justice, deplore the *act* of critical evaluation because this, too, is commonly found in intellectual work and even constitutes its essence. So the turning point of the controversy must lie with the *content*, with differing values about

the doctrines themselves. This brings us to the third and crucial assumption.

- **Third assumption: That the Church is needlessly "afraid" of ideas—that all philosophical and moral positions are essentially harmless.**

This is the point of departure, the nub of the argument. The Church does indeed believe that some philosophical and moral positions pose serious dangers to the earthly and eternal happiness of individuals. To the Church, a person's loss of grace, along with the faith that might lead him back to it, is an unimaginably tragic disaster. No physical calamity, no merely temporal suffering can compare with this loss.

The critics of the Church simply do not share this vision.

The Church does not fear falsity or immorality as such; it has faced these things down the centuries. What the Church fears is their *effects* on the faithful. The leaders of the Church fear *for* their people. Since the Church is responsible before God for their welfare, it is obligated to warn the faithful away from whatever poses a danger. People who do not understand this commitment in conscience cannot understand the Church's firmness on this point.

In other words, the central issue is not "ideas." It is the happiness of *people*, both here on earth and in the afterlife.

To use an analogy by way of illustration, we might consider the state of medicine toward the end of the 19th century. Medical practitioners a hundred years ago were rather evenly divided between two schools of thought: those who believed in Pasteur's "germ theory" of disease and those who did not. Strange as it may seem today, many physicians in Pasteur's day refused

to believe in the dangers of micro-organisms. To them, the elaborate precautions of the "germ theorists"—the hand-washing, the sterilization of instruments, the preoccupation with cleanliness—seemed unnecessary hindrances to the free practice of medicine. Doctors unwittingly would spread infection by examining patients, one after another, without stopping to wash their hands. Hospitals were thus dangerous and deadly places. Of course, with time and experience, Pasteur and his followers were proved right.

Time and experience—the Church has had much of both. Even the Church's harshest opponents have had to acknowledge its unique position as the longest-lived institution in history. The Church's experience with human nature, with individuals and whole societies of every conceivable type, is immense and unmatched.

Chesterton conceived his famous detective, Father Brown, as an exemplar of this experience. In story after story, the diminutive priest solved baffling crimes through his remarkably astute perception of human nature. This was Chesterton's point: a Catholic priest, through the sacrament of penance and his spiritual direction of souls, knows people through and through.

The Church has seen, time and again in history, that ideas can have profound and far-reaching consequences. It has witnessed how doctrines contrary to Christian belief have led to people's personal misery and even to social catastrophe. There is nothing new—certainly nothing "progressive"—in these doctrines. They have been around, in various forms, for centuries. To name just a few:

—the denial of God's existence

—the belief, aggressively promoted, that life ends with death

—the contention that morality is solely a matter of social convention; that physical pain is the only real evil

—the dogmatically held “truth” that truth is unattainable

—the justification of violence as a political force

—the materialistic doctrine that people are mere “things” and therefore exploitable or even disposable

—the belief that human rights derive from political authority and are removable at will (as with unborn children).

Over the course of time, the Church has seen these doctrines promoted in varying shapes and often enticing guises. Sometimes they have appeared as explicit philosophies. More often, they have formed implied *assumptions* in an otherwise flawless logic. (The evils of Marxism and Nazism lay in their *assumptions*, not their logic. The death camps and terror squads follow, with chilling logic, from a materialist view of man.) Finally, and most subtly, they have formed an ethic in literary narratives, even works of high stylistic achievement.

No matter what their form, the Church has seen their consequences. It has seen people lose their faith in Christ’s word and then cut themselves adrift from his life of grace. Even in terms of earthly happiness, the results have been tragic: an aimlessness in life, a shapeless cynicism, marital problems, divorce, a pervasive sadness leading to despair. Any Catholic priest could cite personal examples.

And, even more sorrowful, the Church has seen what young people almost never consider

when they slide away from their faith: that they are cutting off *their children* from the faith and the sacraments.

Doctrines, in the abstract, do not cause these tragedies. Christ warned that evil comes from within, from the human heart. For generations, the Church has seen people embrace doctrinal aberrations to rationalize and justify their appetites, especially in sexual morality and the drive for power. St. Augustine originally lost his faith by reading pagan philosophers. (And, as we have seen, he later regained it through reading Christian authors.) Hitler’s readings in the works of 19th century agnostics led him to reject Christianity. Their materialistic doctrines later became his program of action, to the world’s sorrow.

Since men do not live as isolated units, whole societies have suffered the effects of doctrinal apostasy. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Popes persistently warned that disasters would follow from the doctrines then in vogue—atheism and agnosticism, worship of the state, moral relativism, the glorification of war and political violence, racism and class antagonisms, the rejection of belief in truth. The Church tried to teach what it had learned through centuries of experience: that when men deny truth, they relentlessly pursue power—that when leaders reject the Supreme Power, they seek to become one.

Then as now, the Church was deplored by the intellectual establishment for opposing “progressive ideas.” But our own time has seen the wisdom of the Church’s judgment. The landscape of our century has been stained with ashes and blood: global wars of unprecedented horror, concentration camps, institutionalized

violence, terrorism, genocide, and the growing threat of nuclear holocaust.

The rejection of God's truth and grace does indeed have consequences. It affects, singly and collectively, the lives of millions.



What do all these considerations mean, in practical terms, for someone who wants to form his life's values? What does he do about his reading in the light of a Catholic consciousness? A young person's intellectual freedom, that precious gift of God, is faced with a choice. Whose company will he keep?

Running through the pages of the gospels, there appears a constant thread of thought, a reminder which Our Lord repeated in different ways to his disciples: "Trust me."

Christ knew that the mind of man is always restless, always looking at things from different perspectives, always following the trails of concepts, wherever they may lead. For this reason, he left us a Church which teaches. He left us leaders who would represent himself, who would answer questions, as he did, about truth and rightness and justice. He never shrank from speaking the truth clearly, even when this cost him almost all his followers. But Peter and the others remained, simply because they trusted. They put their faith in the mind of the Savior, in the truth of his promises.

A similar choice of company faces every Catholic. What should he do? The common experience of the Church is this:

- He should begin by realizing that he, like everyone else in his position, needs sound advice in reading. He can best use his God-

given mind by associating only with the best and wisest of authors.

- He should actively seek out this advice from a learned adviser, from a person of scholarly and doctrinal learning, faithful to the teachings of the Church.

- Before he invests his time in any book dealing with doctrinal or moral matters (assigned as course reading, for example), he should ask his adviser for a critical assessment: Is this book's outlook consistent with our Catholic teachings? Does this author share our principles?

- He should determine to deepen his understanding of the faith through study. Every Catholic is called, by his baptism, to teach through word and example. The Church needs young people with initiative and discernment. It has suffered too much in recent years from people's passivity, an unreflective submission to intellectual fads.

- He should hold fast to his freedom, the freedom to trust in Christ's promises as a matter of principle. This means his faith in the Church will come *first*. It will come ahead of convenience, or convention, or caring what others might think. Misunderstanding and even ridicule have always been the price of commitment to truth.

- He should read deeply and wisely and well, pushing his intellectual powers as far as he can. He will see that a vigorous life of the mind gives delights and vitality, a youthful spirit, to an entire lifetime. One of the great saints of the Church said, "Nothing gives greater glory to God than a man who is fully alive."

A young person can choose no better com-

pany than the truth which will make him free. This he will find, as have so many others in history, by uniting his faith and his faithfulness with that of the Church.