

Family Council

Editor's Note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, a newspaper editor, a women's editor and two writers. Each article is a summary of an actual case history. The Council reports on problems that have been dealt with by responsible agencies and counselors.

Mrs. N.Z. - We can't get him inside a church any more.
Ralph Z. - It makes no sense to me. It's for fanatics.

Mrs. N.Z. - We have five children and we brought them all up as God-fearing and faithful members of our church. Ralph, our youngest, is now 18 and absolutely refuses to set foot in the church any more. We blame it on his friends, a bunch of those beatnik kids who don't believe in anything except beer and bongos.

Three of our children are married and we have several grandchildren. It's gotten so we try to keep the youngsters away from Uncle Ralph because he's so mocking and blasphemous.

We can't have him around at family parties any more. He starts arguments about religion, ridicules us, calls us idiots and morons.

What has happened to him? Will he ever come to his senses about the importance of God and the church in a man's life?

Ralph Z. - Church leaves me cold. It's an absolute waste of time. I get more out of sitting in the library and reading Shakespeare or Robert Frost.

Can't my family leave me alone? My mother says I argue. She didn't tell you that they start the quarrels. They are forever trying to "save" me and I tell them to save their breath. If they want to go to church, if they get something out of it, fine. I'm different. I think it's all primitive, quaint folklore. It has no meaning for me today.

And just because my friends are people who play instruments and enjoy jam sessions, they aren't beatniks. We all find our inspiration from music, whether it's jazz or Mozart.

My mother has nothing to fear. I'm seeking guidance. I'm looking for truth, but in my own way. I can't swallow that Biblical hocus-pocus.

The Council: Here is the eternal debate between the believer and the skeptic. Ralph is saying that what's good enough for his parents is not good enough for him.

There is nothing wrong with his refusal to accept his religion "on faith" and without question. What's wrong is his intolerance and belittlement of those who take an opposite stand. Some highly intelligent people still want to accept the faith of their fathers in a neatly tied package, and hope to pass it on to their descendants, unmodified and untampered with. To them it's a sacred trust.

In between the two extremes of unquestioning obedience and complete rejection, one finds still more people of brains and good will trying to adapt their ancestral creeds to their present day needs.

But to pooh-pooh all organized religion is a bit foolhardy for a young man who has not yet found anything to take its place. He admits he needs guidance. He prefers to go after it as a do-it-yourself project. He will find he also needs solace and comfort and strength. It's a tall order and Mozart may fail him at times. Generations of doubters before him found that the God of all religions is more reliable, more available on short notice, than a sonnet, a statue or an operatic aria. Even Ralph's idols, from Shakespeare down, might concede that.

Mrs. Z. should not press the issue. All teenagers need targets and Ralph has chosen one which can't shoot back on the spot. In addition, he's enjoying the "rise" he gets out of the family. There's a heady feeling of power, after perhaps years of being forced into church and religious conformity by his parents.

When his bitter feelings are spent, Ralph may find a more brave and constructive way of being "different" than by mocking his family's piety. He may well find that his quest for truth leads him back to where he started.

So often the long road is but a long loop leading back to the same old time-tested landmarks. The detours have proved dead end.

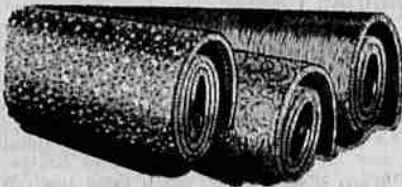
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LONG TUNNEL

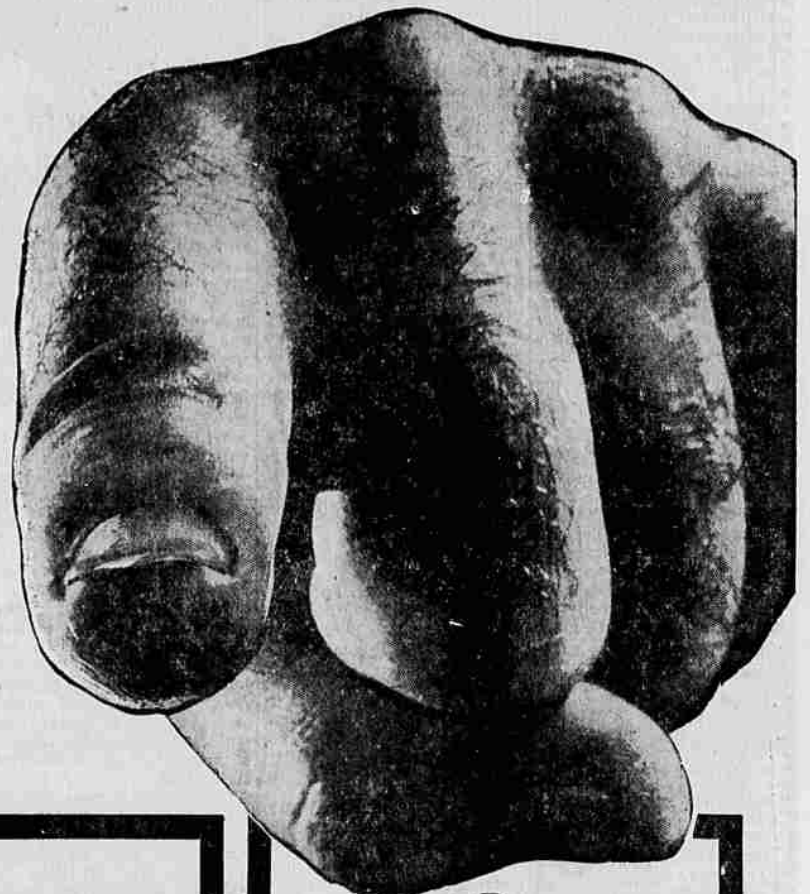
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