

## THE SPIRIT OF CATHOLIC ACTION

EVEN in His manhood Christ Our Lord, being endowed with the fulness of grace and truth, enjoys a divine intimacy of love and vision which is incomparable. Since He is at the very apex of perfection made a "little less than the angels" but to Whom all things have been subjected, He "is able to save for ever them that come to God by Him." Anointed with the glory of the Godhead the grace that is His is not only an endowment of His own sacred humanity but a fount of supernatural life which is meant to pervade all who are redeemed. The first among creatures to receive within herself the author of divine life was Mary the Mother of God, by whom God gives Himself to the world. "The Blessed Virgin," says St. Thomas, "received such a fulness of grace that she was nearest of all to the Author of grace; so that she received within her Him Who is full of all grace; and by bringing Him forth, she, in a manner, dispensed grace to all."<sup>1</sup> And again he writes: "Indeed it is a great thing in any saint that he should have such an abundance of grace that it is enough for the salvation of many: but when it is so abundant as to be available for all it is in the highest degree, as is the case with Christ and the Blessed Virgin."<sup>2</sup>

By the man-becoming of God, the God-man is consecrated priest and anointed as king. As Mediator He has the power of interior influence to unite souls to God, whilst as Sovereign He is appointed to bring all under His sway by the outward government of their lives. Now is the reign of the Prince of Peace Who by the law of liberty gives to His purchased people a freedom to serve their royal master in an attitude of humble adoration. For if man is to be raised up from his ruined state he must be prepared to accept the whole of God's redemptive plan whereby he is to be lifted up by grace to the level of God. The Incarnation is God's love-unfolding of His own image and likeness, to be trans-

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa*, III, 27, V ad 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Exposition on the Hail Mary*.

ferred in His manifold reflections to all those who in humility gaze on Him with the eye of Faith.

Our Lord Himself is the centre of the divine life of grace which is to radiate throughout the world of souls through the agency of the Church, His Mystical Body. His priestly prerogative has indeed enabled Him to reconcile "all things unto himself making peace through the blood of his cross," for each member of His Body has been purchased at a price that is divine. The offering of sacrifice He needed not for Himself but for those whom by sacrifice He willed to purchase. Whilst the Priest and Victim are one there is yet a supreme need that those who are assembled to His sacrifice, should be identified with Him in making His very gestures of self-oblation. The Christian people have been designated by St. Peter as a "kingly priesthood" since they are brought within the precincts of the sanctuary wherein stands the altar of sacrifice, by a close partnership with Christ's own sovereignty and priestly dignity.

The destiny of the Christian soul implies not only that it be lifted up to the level of God but moreover that it appropriate Christlike gestures expressive of self-effacement in God's presence, and of the liturgy of life the centre of which is the worship which sacrifice offers. Herein lies the reality Our Lord's own priestly power entering into the life of each. The sacred engraving of the Christ-like priestly character which sacraments give brings with it a new power for the sacred action of self-sacrifice in union with Him Who offers, and by which human life is dedicated to the worship of God. The priestly characters which the three great sacraments confer demand in the offerers of sacrifice a spiritual transformation into the life-like image of Christ the Priest. By this character Christ Himself is mirrored in the soul made like to Him whose Priesthood it shares. That perfect resemblance can only be achieved when the priestly power sacramentally received has set the whole soul in motion, and shaped every activity, every thought and aspiration to the image of Christ. The whole person is to be caught up into a sacrificial activity derived from Christ the Priest, by being made capable as His instrument-to-hand of His very ges-

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tures. The soul which animates this dynamic outlook is Christian Charity, which is of the very essence of that perfection which is the first and foremost object of Catholic Action.

The Sovereign Pontiff has declared that Catholic Action cannot be separated from the Christian life. Indeed to be a Christian is an apostolic work. But that power of radiating influence being largely under the control of free will may become well-nigh lifeless and enfeebled, unless it is realised that the work of human effort combined with grace is to re-cast nature's shattered image and to re-mould it on the model of Christ.

The Redemptive Sacrifice by divine design has a world-wide influence, at once visible and invisible. But those who are prepared to sacrifice themselves by giving up their wills to the Divine Priest, are brought into the stream of sacrificial influence and in so living may impress those whom they meet with something of their own Christ-like features. A vigorous Christian life is indeed charged with a divine efficacy for the re-shaping of shattered members of Christ's Body.

Man made to the likeness of God carries within his nature an aptitude to be drawn into the Inner Life of the Three Divine Persons, whenever God may deign to pour forth the new life into his soul. Although it is historically true that it was never within God's intention to endow man with merely natural life, yet such is the aftermath of sin that even the pursuit of natural goodness involves a conflict of unsatisfied desires. "Adam's sin was the most harm that ever was done, or even shall be, to the world's end."<sup>3</sup>

The only remedy for the ills of a sin-stricken world lies in the first place in the Redemptive Sacrifice of God's only Son. That "amends-making is more pleasing to God and more worshipful, without comparison, than ever was the sin of Adam harmful."<sup>4</sup> But there yet remains to each individual not so much the super-imposing of grace but

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<sup>3</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, Ch. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, ch. 29; *cfv.* St. Thomas *Summa* III, 48, II, where the same idea is expressed.

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rather the re-gaining of self-mastery through the conquest by grace of fallen nature. In spite of sin the image of God once engraven cannot be effaced but only veiled. The supernaturalizing of life implies an unveiling and a still further deepening of the divine impress which even fallen nature holds. The true and perfect pattern upon which the features of God may be remodelled is the God-man Who Himself is the image of God. "And like as we were like-made to the Trinity in our first making, our Maker would that we should be like Jesus Christ, our Saviour, in heaven without end, by the virtue of our again-making."<sup>5</sup>

By the reception of Baptism and Confirmation, and in a further degree through the Priesthood, a priestly seal at once life-like and efficacious is implanted, whereby the Holy Spirit may fashion the soul so that it may become configured to the image of the Son.

A person is not completely upright and true unless he holds before him the divine ideal as shown forth by the Word Incarnate. "True," says St. Thomas, "as applied to life is used inasmuch as a man fulfils in his life that to which he is ordained by the Divine Intellect."<sup>6</sup> We are bidden already by St. Paul "to put on the mind of Christ" to form in our minds a lifelike image of Him with His virtues and perfections which are to be made our own, by that self-same image being in consequence imprinted on the will and the emotions. The key to this Christo-centric attitude is the learning to think in a Catholic way about revealed truth in its application to everyday life. But all human endeavour if it is to be made holy must be intermingled with prayer. Indeed prayer directed heavenwards is the messenger of the heart drawing the desires after it. As such it is the fiery breath of a soul supernaturally alive and energized by a vitality within itself. The inward glances towards God in the midst of occupation minister to the fire of charity and make it to be the life-giving soul of all other virtues, directing them Godwards with loving purpose. Virtues so

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<sup>5</sup> Julian of Norwich, *ibid.* ch. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Summa* I, 16, III, ad 3.

animated become the very springs of inward vitality and the channels of an outward Catholic Action.

Right understanding of Christian teaching far from being a mere luxury is integral to the soul's life. It was part of St. Dominic's genius in founding his Order to have the realisation that true holiness in harmony with Christ as exemplar must of necessity be rooted and founded on knowledge. He was moreover fully aware of the need of being in touch with contemporary thought, and perhaps still more with the society in which he lived. He could have scarcely been unconscious of his own daring in making the world his cloister. Yet he was prepared to run the risk of criticism and condemnation, since to win souls to Christ necessitates the interplay of mind with minds, so that they may be galvanized into Christian thinking. For the achievement of this noble end and to fire others by appealing to the heart through the mind, study or even erudition will not suffice. St. Dominic knew because he was already likened to his Master, that with learning must be fused a willingness to give oneself and to be spent without counting the cost. In fact every type of active apostolate must be prompted by a tireless generosity set aflame by the spark of zeal behind. This is the ardent and unselfish spirit, inherited from Christ the Priest, and shared by those who bear His image which should animate all Catholic Action. In this way Catholic Action is nothing less than a spontaneous outcome of Christian living, whereby the minds and hearts of men and women are prepared for the coming of the Lord to reign over them.

In the divine economy for bringing the world back to God Our Blessed Lady the Mother of God occupies a most exalted position as the most glorious member of her Son's Mystical Body. Not only does she show herself a close companion of Our Saviour both in time and in eternity, but her presence is set before us that we may be shaped to the likeness of her who of all creatures is the most perfect mirror wherein may be seen reflected the beauty of the divine countenance. "Jésus-Christ crucifié se reflétait dans le coeur de sa Mère; mais il ne se reflétait pas seulement avec tous ses douleurs:

il se reflétait en elle avec tous ses gloires et tous ses titres.”<sup>7</sup> The close likeness which nature yielded between the Son and His Mother only shines more brilliantly under the influence of nature and of grace by their constant living in the company of each other.

Although it be true that “the interior influence of grace can come from Christ alone, whose humanity united to the Divinity has the power of justifying”<sup>8</sup> yet “she is to be most highly revered because of her affinity to God.”<sup>9</sup> Further, “because the Blessed Virgin brought forth the Redeemer of mankind, she is also in a manner the most tender Mother of us all, whom Christ Our Lord deigned to have as His Brothers.”<sup>10</sup> She is both Mother of God and Mother of men.<sup>11</sup> “Our Lady is our Mother in whom we are all enclosed and of her born in Christ.”<sup>12</sup> The Incarnation was in very truth the consummation of a mystic union with the entire human race,<sup>13</sup> but even this spiritual wedlock was subordinated to the free consent of His Mother, who by her “fiat” gave her answer as representative of all humanity.<sup>14</sup> Again the present reigning Pontiff has recently drawn special attention to the Mother of God and her Rosary, which he describes as “wonderfully taught by St. Dominic not without the inspiration of the Virgin Mother of God.” And as in times past the Rosary was instituted against anti-social heresies, so in the midst of present evils this garland of prayer may be taken up as a weapon. Therein may be contemplated the Son in His Mother’s company both in joy and in sorrow, that pondering on their mysteries we may learn to imitate what they contain, by allowing them to be reflected in ourselves. “May the virginity and life of Mary be depicted for you as though in an image, after the manner of a crystal in which shall be reflected the comeliness of chastity

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<sup>7</sup> Unpublished MS. of Mère Marie Deluil-Martiny quoted in *La Sainte Messe* by Dom Eugène Vandeur, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> *Summa* III, 8, VI.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* IIa IIae, 103, IV, ad 2; and I, 25, VI, ad 3.

<sup>10</sup> Leo XIII, Encyclical *Octobri mense*.

<sup>11</sup> Pius X, Encyclical *Ad diem illum*.

<sup>12</sup> Julian of Norwich, ch. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Leo XIII, *loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Summa*, III, 30, I.

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and the model of virtue.”<sup>15</sup>

It must be only too clear to all that a mere veneer of religion is not vigorous Christianity, nor is it able to withstand the organised forces of a paganism which is at work around us, and threatening the very structure of society. The Holy Father does not hesitate to warn his children that “hostile forces, impelled by the spirit of evil, do not content themselves with mere clamour, but unite all their strength in order to carry out at the first opportunity their nefarious designs.”<sup>16</sup>

There is danger of self-complacency in the possessors of the God-sent gift of Faith, and of a forgetfulness that belief is the acceptance of a Person. Moreover the work of Christian apostolate involves much more than the spread of a body of truths so that they may be lodged on the surface of other minds. As Newman profoundly remarked, “every part of the Truth is novel to its opponent; and seen detached from the whole, becomes an objection.”<sup>17</sup> Here even the mastery of truth when blended with zeal may fall short of the mark. In addition there is need of a Catholic culture which is mellowed by experience, lending to large-heartedness a depth of vision and a Christlike sympathy for all those into whose lives Christ is to be brought.

Still further we may remark with Newman that the unfolding of Truth when divorced from personal virtue possesses little or no responsibility and small power to convince unwilling minds. It is personal influence gathered from close membership in Christ's Mystical Body which will make men subject to the kingly sway of Our Lord, for they will become aware of His presence before them, “while they themselves would be changing into that glorious Image which they gazed upon, and be in training to succeed him in its propagation.”<sup>18</sup> Though such human instruments of the divine purpose may be few they are enough to bring to perfection God's “noiseless work.”

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

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<sup>15</sup> St. Ambrose *De Virginibus*, Lib. I, cap. ii.

<sup>16</sup> *Caritate Christi Compulsi*, May 3rd, 1932.

<sup>17</sup> Sermon, *The Means of Propagating the Truth*, 19.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* 34.