

# Life of the Spirit

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## 'NEW SPIRITUALITY' FOR THE LAY APOSTLE

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WHILE the basic and traditional lines of the spiritual life are unalterable, being the fruit of the thought of theologians and the experience of souls, there is room for development in method and indeed, granted changing circumstances, the possibility of completely new methods. Of course the dictum *Nil innovetur nisi traditum est* is as true here as elsewhere, and new methods can never mean more than a new approach or a new combination of traditional methods. This present age is one in which circumstances would seem to demand such a new approach. It is an age which has seen the growth and development of a deeper appreciation of the place of the laity in the missionary activity of the Church. Thus it is now better understood that a deep spiritual life need not mean withdrawal from the world, on the contrary the 'mixed' life can be and is the vocation of many souls. In this 'mixed' life the active element may mean being plunged into a multitude of affairs, civic, political, social, economic and professional. The deeper one is involved in these material cares and considerations, the stronger and more intense must be the interior life of grace. This is a platitude of the spiritual life, but it must be repeated lest the apostle mistake activity, superficially successful perhaps, for action.

The need for a new approach is shown, in part, by the lack of suitable literature addressed to such people, or written expressly for those whose primary vocation is to live an active apostolic life either in the world of work, or of the family. One does not write this in any reproachful sense, because the situation and the need are of recent growth and the realisation of this need for a 'new spirituality' for the laity is as recent. Nevertheless, one has heard from many such apostolic laymen and laywomen the complaint that they search in vain for books that take account of their

situation. The majority of books available are written by priests and religious who, one might almost say by chronological necessity, are ignorant of the needs of the apostolic layman, if only because the idea of the institutional apostolate is so recent. It is with some diffidence that the present writer sets forth some lines of development for this 'new spirituality' and would only claim in justification a certain amount of experience with the laity engaged in the institutional apostolate, among workers, university students and family groups.

The system is built on three theological facts. First, the indwelling of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity in the soul of the just which accompanies sanctifying grace. Second, membership of the Mystical Body of Christ with the consequent obligation of working to build the Total Christ. Third, the practice of the infused virtues, moral and theological, in a social as well as in an individual sense, with the assistance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. None of these is new, nor is it in any way revolutionary to use them as the basis of the spiritual life, indeed the first of them may be found in the first pages of the *Interior Castle*. All that is new is the emphasis and the reasons for the emphasis.

The religious leaves the world and seeks the cloister in order the better to be with God, alone with God. The apostle in the world has the same pressing need to be with God, even in the midst of material cares. Hence the necessity for him to grasp the reality of God's presence in his soul. It is already clear from the words of our Lord and Saint Paul in the New Testament (Jn. 24, 23; I Jn. 4, 16; I Cor. 3, 16, I Cor. 6, 19-20), and the first Christians were deeply conscious of this truth. Thus St Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred at the beginning of the second century, was called *Theophore*, the God-bearer. Leonidas, the father of Origen, kissed with respect the breast of his baby and said that he was adoring God, dwelling in the heart of his newly-baptised child. To these early Christians, as one can see from the acts of so many martyrs, this was a source of strength and joy in a world that was pagan and hostile. This same real presence can be a similar support to the apostle of the twentieth century in a neo-pagan, and perhaps more subtly hostile, world. It must be the central point of his spiritual life, because through it he can understand how he can remain always united with God. In a word, this belief is for the layman his cloister and his refuge. Through it he can live by God and for God, *vivat Deo de Deo*.

There are certain practices which are necessary to strengthen faith in this presence, and to bind the soul ever more closely to

God. The first of these is the regular period of non-vocal prayer for which time must be found, no matter how packed the day may be with activities. Progress in prayer is progress in union with God, and so the lay apostle will need a spiritual director. (In parenthesis, one may note here that the practice of spiritual direction has hitherto seemed to be only for the few, but as the number of those engaged in the apostolate increases it should become more and more widespread, for the saints of tomorrow will be the laymen and laywomen who today have taken Christ into the market-place.) Obviously, no rigid lines can be laid down for this. On the other hand most of the modern movements of the lay apostolate devote part of their weekly meeting to a discussion of some passage in the Gospels. Each member prepares it during the preceding week by careful meditation of the prescribed passages. This prayerful reading of and meditation on some point in our Lord's life may very well lead without much difficulty to formal meditation.

Further, the lay apostle must gradually acquire the habit of turning to God within him, if only for fleeting seconds during the day. Thus he can build up a constant sense of the presence of God. In the nature of things it cannot always be at the level of consciousness, but it can be permanently present in the unconscious in such a way as to be evoked at will, and particularly in times of stress or temptation. Only in this way can he become a *Theophore* in a real and active sense. Moreover, this practice should prevent him from becoming so immersed or entrapped in means as to forget the end. This is perhaps the greatest danger and biggest temptation that awaits the eager and enthusiastic apostle: the heresy of good works, of activism. A regular turning to God in moments of love and adoration will preserve the one thing necessary from which all activities should flow and to which they should all lead.

This indwelling of God in the soul means the presence of all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, and it means also a special relationship with each Divine Person. While the point must not be overstressed, one may perhaps say that in prayer we speak to God the Father *per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum*, while in engaging in the direct work of the apostolate we are bringing Christ, the second Person, to others. He is the Redeemer, and the whole world stands in need of this redemption. Thus the Christian is a Christopher, bringing Christ to those who need him. At any rate that is how the lay apostle envisages his apostolate. An important motive which should inspire him in striving for perfection and in applying himself to his apostolic work is the uniqueness of his position. In God's providence he may be the *only* means of salva-

tion to those around him, in the sense that it is through him they are to learn of Christ, to know Christ, and ultimately to love him. Herein lies the weight of the responsibility for the Christian. Christ is not given to him for his personal joy and devotion alone, but so that he can show him to others. His place of work, his house, his street, his companions—these make precise his responsibility.

From this should come two facts. The first is the necessity to know Christ better as a person, as God made man in the sense of the words used in the Preface for Christmas: *ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilia amorem rapiamur*. This one does primarily from the Gospels, but also from the Liturgy. Catholic Action has been called not inaptly the Third Order of the Church, and so its prayer should be the prayer of the Church in which the mysteries of Christ are relived. It is no accident that Pope Pius X, who was so concerned with restoring the Liturgy to the people was also the first Pope to speak about Catholic Action. The revival of the one and the growth of the other are interwoven. The Liturgy is the Mystical Body of Christ at prayer while Catholic Action is that same Body in action. Unfortunately the Liturgical revival has not progressed so far that it is an integral part of parochial life. Still, until that happy position is reached, the lay apostle should find at least in his own organisation facilities for living the Liturgical cycle. Retreats, days of recollection and the rest are necessary in their own right, but they should also provide occasions for deepening the liturgical life of those taking part. This point cannot be developed further here, but it is one of the most important elements in the spirituality of the lay apostle and calls for a great deal of experiment so that satisfactory methods may be found.

The second practice that should follow from the lay apostle's position as a Christopher is the importance of frequent Holy Communion. It may not always be possible, either because of the long distance he has to travel to work or because of the difficult hours of Masses. But one has found that more and more young people are willing to make great sacrifices in order that they may have this intimate union with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Moreover their Communion ceases to be an exclusively individual affair but now has a social meaning too as the Sacrament of union with all the other members of the Mystical Body.

The central act of the Christian's life is the Mass, and for the lay apostle the Mass has a particular and personal significance. There is no need for him to look for means of mortification, of sacrifice and renunciation. If he is living an apostolic life as a

member of a Catholic Action organisation such demands will be made on his time, goods, energy, attention and good will that his whole day will be made up of a series of renunciations. Set-backs, rebuffs, failures and even deliberate malice he is bound to suffer in the course of his work. Hence he learns of mortification not as something which is theoretically necessary in spiritual progress but as something which in practice is inevitable. As in many other things the process is from reality to theory, from hard fact to reasons and purposes. The purpose gradually becomes clear: that the way of redemption is through suffering. Meetings, discussions, arguments, all have their place, as they did in the life of our Lord, but it is his suffering and death that save. There is an asceticism of a daily life that is lived as part of a missionary apostolate, and it operates on many levels. The worker who from a sense of apostolic duty goes to a trade union branch meeting regularly may find the proceedings boring. The intellectual who has to suffer in answering the same old objections to the Faith again and again may find it intolerably tedious. But, as someone has said, if the early Christians could give their bodies to be martyred for Christ's sake, surely we can give our minds to be bored. In and through the sacrifice of Calvary re-offered on the altar at Mass all these actions are made significant and redemptive. At the offertory they are all lifted up, as in the daily prayer of the Young Christian Workers—'I offer thee this day all my work, my hopes and struggles, my joys and sorrows'. After that, during the day, the altar may be a workbench, a kitchen sink or an office desk—whatever it is, the *sacrificium laudis* will go up from it before the sight of the Most High.

The second great truth of the Faith which should be the basis of the lay apostle's spirituality is the Mystical Body of Christ, and the fact that it must incarnate itself in each successive age of mankind, as Cardinal Suhard shows so forcibly and precisely in his great pastoral letter, *Rise or Decline of the Church*. In effect this is what gives meaning to the institutional apostolate whereby all institutions that man has created must be permeated by the spirit of Christ and brought under the rule of Christ the King. The primary effect of the acceptance of this truth as a reality is that one is a member of a community, and that there is such a thing as a social conscience in spiritual matters as much as in material ones. One is a living cell in the living Mystical Body with certain responsibilities. These responsibilities are in the spirit-matter order. Just as the Word was made flesh at a certain precise time in history and in a precise geographical location, so the

'incarnation-process' must continue at every period of history and in every place through the activity of those who have been made one with the Word in his Mystical Body. There is no room either for excessive individualism or for angelism here. All things are to be recapitulated in Christ through his members in their own mundane circumstances. Another way of expressing this process of incarnation is to speak of building the Kingdom. In their daily prayer the members of the Young Christian Workers pray 'Thy Kingdom come in all our factories, workshops, offices and in all our homes.' In doing this the lay apostle is never alone, for he is a member of the Body. Yet in any particular circumstance the precise individual (and even unique) responsibility is his. The second effect is the knowledge that each member of the Body lives by the life of the Body, that is the life of Christ, God. So the indwelling of God in the soul is more than presence, through our membership of Christ we are made partakers of the divine nature and in a certain fashion enter into and share the life of the Blessed Trinity. As a member of a Body that must grow and extend, as the repository of a Life that must be transmitted, the lay apostle will find all his reasons for action in considering the kind of being he is in the supernatural order.

The spiritual life is the practice of the virtues, and the infused virtues make us able to act in a supernatural way. The theological virtues of faith, hope and charity should be intimately woven into the life of the lay apostle. His faith should be concerned with those truths that are the foundation of his way of life: the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in his soul, the privilege and responsibility of his membership of the Mystical Body. His faith is at the root of all his life and work, and by it he is united directly to God. In his formal prayer and throughout the day he should gradually acquire the habit of eliciting such acts of faith, while in his apostolic activity he should regard all he does as being demonstrations of that faith.

The exercise of the virtues of hope is bound up in his apostolate, for in it he is working to build the kingdom, and the coming of the King in glory to take possession of his kingdom is an important object of our hope . . . *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi saeculi*. The theological virtue attracts and directs our will towards God as the supreme good and towards the fulfilment of his will, that the kingdom of Christ shall be built in joy, *spe gaudentes*.

A divine friendship between ourselves and God is the virtue of charity—as St Thomas says, *Cui debueras esse servus jubet ut sis*

*amicus*. This is the dynamic which must impel the modern apostle to love his neighbour, for as St John reminds us, the way in which we show our love of God whom we cannot see is by our practical love of our neighbour whom we can see. The love of God must be the great single passion of the lay apostle, and his activity should be as it were an overflow from this. Obviously whole books could be, and have been, written on each of these virtues, and their treatment here is summary not because of their lack of importance but only because my purpose is to show their particular significance in the life of the lay apostle.

Attention must be given to the moral virtues because these are involved more directly in the active life and relate only indirectly to God. Moreover they must be considered under the double aspect of individual and social acts. For prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance need not necessarily be concerned with an attitude to an individual but may be to a group. We are familiar by now, for example, with the use of the term 'social justice', but there is social prudence too. If there is any novelty in this suggested outline of a lay spirituality for the twentieth century apostle then it will be found here.

With the practice of the cardinal virtues as such there is no difficulty. So far as the individual is concerned, these infused virtues have for their principal purpose to purify the soul by removing obstacles which prevent it from attaining God. They liberate us in our different faculties, prudence in the intellect, justice in the will, fortitude and temperance in the appetites. The lay apostle can link them directly with building the Kingdom. At every end and turn the virtue of prudence is required because so little of the modern world can be taken for granted. Everything must be weighed and judged. It is not without interest in this connection that the Enquiry Method, with its formula of See, Judge, Act, as used by many Catholic Action groups for forming a decision for action, follows closely the traditional divisions of the virtue of prudence.

The husband and wife in matters concerning their home, the professional man in his practice, the worker in the different aspects of his life, all need to make frequent prudential judgments. It has been said that prudence is the virtue above all others that is needed by the politician, i.e. 'the prince'. This underlines the social importance of the virtue, as the ruler in so far as he is the guardian of the common good must by his every action lead society along the right road. There is a virtue of social prudence that the apostle must practise too, because he is concerned with the reform of

institutions through individual action and through group action. One might perhaps say that in the former case the virtue is social in its object, in the latter social in its subject. At this point one might recall that one of the distinguishing marks of Catholic Action is that it is organised, i.e. it is not an individual apostolate but a group apostolate. So the lay apostle is called on continually to exercise the virtue of prudence, individual and social, aided by the gifts of the Holy Spirit that illumine his intellect. And these Christian judgments can be a continual source of perfection for him, connected as they are with his everyday responsibilities.

The same is true of the virtue of justice. Omitting the familiar divisions into distributive, legal and commutative as well as the 'parts' of the virtue, we may concern ourselves solely with social justice. It has been argued that the act of social justice is an act whereby one assists in the reform of social institutions in a Christian sense, whether they be labour unions, Chambers of Commerce, political parties or local government politics.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious how close is the relationship between social prudence and social justice. The Christian apostle is committed to the practice of these virtues in an organised and public fashion, in spite of the difficulties and obstacles that a materialist civilisation is bound to provide. Only in this way can the artificial barrier that has been erected between religion and life be broken down, and the lay apostle must be conscious of the fact that his actions, though seemingly *merely* social or political, are religious acts bringing himself and society nearer to God.

There are many things in which the individual is powerless to see that individual justice is done because he is enveloped and constricted by the 'system'. It is for precisely this reason that a re-ordering of the 'system' itself is called for in accordance with the dictates of the Gospels. This is, as Dr Ferree proves, the object of social justice: the *organisation* of operations and things. Thus in a letter to M. Duthoit for the *Semaine Sociale* of Nice (1934) Cardinal Pacelli wrote of the organising function of social justice. It is then the virtue that organises normally (i.e. according to the social necessities of human nature itself) all external human acts.

A similar social content may be found in the other two moral virtues, in fortitude and temperance. In particular, perhaps, patience and perseverance which are two of the 'parts' of the virtue of fortitude are important in the work of the lay apostolate.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. W. Ferree, S.M., *The Act of Social Justice*. Catholic University Press, Washington, D.C.



both in social and in family life. We have already pointed out that the task of the apostle is never easy and that there can be no room for mediocrity. The virtue of fortitude has an essential place in his life. The importance of the virtue of temperance is that the lay apostle has to build up a proper attitude to material things. One reaction to the pressing materialism of our time might be one of flight into non-materialism, but this would not be the correct attitude. The world is to be saved and all that God has created has to find its place in a world redeemed. In working out and living a sane Christian attitude to sex, to material wealth, to all that God has given man for his delight and enjoyment the balance and restraint that can only come from the exercise of the virtue of temperance should be clear.

All of this gives in very summary form the outline of what should be the basis of the spirituality of the lay apostle in the world of today. As was said at the outset there is very little that is new in the system. Nevertheless it has as yet no obvious exemplars to whom one may call attention as proof. In a word, it is theory. But one may hope that in the next few years there may be many apostolic layfolk who will find the way of perfection in the exercise of the right and privilege which is theirs as members of the Mystical Body and to which they have been repeatedly called by the Popes. With adequate assistance and direction they should go forward to exemplify and deepen the fact that the Catholic Church is apostolic and holy.



## FROM ST AUGUSTINE

'Et homo domat feram, non domat linguam:  
domat leonem, et non refrenat sermonem:  
domat ipse, et non domat se ipsum: domat  
quod timebat, non timet quod timere debebat.'

*Sermo LV—1.*

Man tames the lion, the tongue he cannot tame.

His words run wild and free:

He pens the brutes within an iron frame,

They own his mastery;

Creatures he fears he straitly curbs—yet he

Nor fears nor curbs the tongue, his greatest enemy.

JOHN SEARLE.