

EXTRACTS

THE LAYMAN'S OBLIGATION TO PERFECTION is the title of an article by Fr R. W. Gleason, S.J., in the *American Ecclesiastical Review* (October, 1951) which begins rather lamely, quoting from a text-book one of the great principles of St Thomas, *viz.* perfection consists in the love of God. But the author recovers himself and later goes to the text of St Thomas to explain how everyone is bound to perfect charity:

We must always strive towards perfect charity as towards our end, but we have not failed to obey the precept if our charity is not perfect. . . . The substance of the commandment is observed if nothing is loved more than God, if the lowest necessary degree of charity is kept, if charity itself is kept through the avoidance of mortal sin. He who avoids mortal sin has kept the essence of the precept of charity and possesses essential perfection.

But this of itself is an impossibly grey approach to perfection, and the man who aims at this sort of 'essential perfection' will hardly arrive at any perfection at all. He must go further and strive to observe the spirit of detachment implied by the evangelical counsels. Fr Gleason concludes by referring to the work of the late Père de Montcheuil, who distinguished the Christian who regards himself as under 'contract' with God to do his will and so to reach reward (for whom the above description of perfection will be of use), and the Christian who strives to give himself completely by love to God and so to subsume 'obligation' in the wider embrace of love. In the latter case works of 'supererogation' cease to have meaning, for he finds himself constrained always to give the most perfect gift; love has no limit, obligation to the will of God suggests strict limitations. The weakness of this distinction is that it seems to suggest that a Christian may choose 'obligation' or 'love' and that the latter is of a rather individualistic character. Surely, though many Christians in fact find themselves through feebleness in the first category, they can never remain content therein?

THE SAME QUERY proposes itself constantly when the Christian considers his life in relation to peace and war. He constantly finds himself caught up in an atmosphere of war and hatred and is tempted himself to become a belligerent, and yet the voice of our Lord calling him to be a peacemaker comes to him whatever type of man he may be. It is a part of the perfection of love to be at peace. For this reason the Christian is always drawn towards making peace, which is an aim of love. A group of Catholics has recently sent a letter to the hierarchy in England begging for guidance as regards the Christian's use of modern warfare. In France, not only have the French hierarchy condemned the

use of atomic weapons but there have been peace meetings at which outstanding Catholic priests such as Père Chenu, O.P. have spoken despite the danger of a warped interpretation by the Communists. And Père Paul Coulet, S.J., preached a series of conferences at Bordeaux in 1950 on this subject, the conferences being now published by Editions Spes under the title *L'Eglise et la Paix* (300 francs). The author shows how the Church is always trying to apply the true message of Christ by preaching peace in modern social relationships. He goes at length into the difficult problems it involves in the state and among nations; but first he shows the peace of the Christian himself—peace as the tranquillity of the soul, the tranquillity of order, the respect of justice and the fruit of charity. Our Lord reconciles the sinner with God and so with mankind whom God creates, and thus the foundation of peace is laid:

In recalling all men and all conditions and classes of men to their common origin and their common destiny; in recalling them to the fact that they are all alike, equally creatures of the same God, equally called in the same way to be children of the same Father and truly sons of God, in showing them how Christ embraces them all with the same love and calls them to share his joy in the eternal life of heaven, Christianity gives them the most potent reason for loving each other, of helping each other fraternally and of living in peace one with another.

The question is indeed one which the seekers after perfection should consider most urgently and most deeply today.

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