

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE MISSIONS

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WHEN Jesus said: "Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be condemned."<sup>1</sup> In these impressive words the Son of God touched off the tiny spark of Catholic missionary zeal that was to set the whole world on fire with the joyous news of the Redemption. Here, too, He proclaimed for the first time the most fundamental requisite for eternal salvation, the necessity of membership in His Mystical Body, the Church, through Baptism. This divine command was carried out by the apostles and disciples who preached the redeeming death of Christ upon the cross to all men without exception. Down through twenty centuries this same emphatic order to the Church militant has been issued again and again by Popes and Councils, by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church; and always it has been faithfully and generously obeyed by countless missionaries who have sacrificed all things, even life itself in loving devotion to the cause of the Saviour of the World.

### GOD'S WILL—THE SALVATION OF ALL MEN

Because of the simple fact, that no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church, the faithful have frequently been accused of intolerance by heretics and schismatics. At all times the missionary efforts of the Church, inspired as they are by an unselfish love and a consuming thirst for souls, have been scoffed at as ridiculous by the godless. Indeed, the bold statement of this dogma—"Outside the Church no Salvation!"—does seem to stand in striking contradiction to the infinite mercy of God; for it is a fact that millions of people have never heard and never will hear of the Catholic Church, and other millions have been blinded to its truth by the very environment in which they live. Are such as these to be condemned without pity for all eternity? If not, then why is Mother Church so anxious to gather them within Her maternal arms? If not, why do Catholic missionaries swelter in tropical jungles and chill to Arctic blasts?

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 16, 15-16.

Catholicism must have something special to offer: and indeed it has. It offers the only sure means to eternal happiness, the most important thing in the life of each individual man, "For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?"<sup>2</sup> The Catholic missionary is an apostle of love, one who will go to the ends of the earth to establish the Kingdom of God, to give to all men their sure means of salvation.

St. Thomas Aquinas, whose doctrines on this matter have never ceased to inspire missionaries since the thirteenth century, writes succinctly that Christ is the Saviour of all men, and especially of the faithful.<sup>3</sup> The Angelic Doctor explains that God gives to each man at least the possibility of belonging to the Church and consequently of saving his soul. In His infinite wisdom, however, He offers more aid to some than to others. To show this fact more clearly a comparison between Catholicism and Protestantism on the one hand, and Catholicism and paganism on the other will be extremely useful.

#### CATHOLICISM OF GOD: PROTESTANTISM OF MAN

In the final analysis no one who has the stain of original sin on his soul can belong to the Church. Its absence is the first requisite for the follower of Christ. Therefore anyone who has had this sin removed by Baptism is eligible to be a member of the Church, provided he erects no obstacle of deliberate heresy or schism. Protestants, then, who are validly baptized and who live according to the graces given them, never voluntarily closing their minds to Catholic truth, are members of the Church, even though it be in an indirect and invisible manner. They are in the state of grace and by this very fact their souls are temples of the Holy Ghost, Who is in turn the very Soul of the Church. If they are saved by persevering in this state of charity till death, it is not through the merits of their own particular sect or lack of sect, but only through those of the Roman Catholic Church with which they are really, though unconsciously, associated. Such people have a good start on the road to salvation. That road, however, is beset with innumerable difficulties and temptations. Except for Baptism (and even this is many times invalidly administered by modern Protestants) they are, indeed, ill-equipped to travel it; for Protestantism is a man-made religion, divorced from Jesus Christ, the Source of all grace. It is a religion based on the changing feelings of man, and not on the solid foundation of divine truth.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 16, 26.

<sup>3</sup> III, Q. 8, A. 3.

Catholics on the other hand who profess the faith of the Church without reserve have every opportunity and means of saving their souls. Pope Pius XII in his encyclical letter on the Mystical Body eloquently describes the good fortune of these faithful members of Christ: "The Saviour of mankind, out of His infinite goodness has provided in a marvelous way for His Mystical Body, endowing it with the Sacraments; so that by so many consecutive, graduated graces, as it were, its members should be supported from the cradle to life's last breath, and that the social needs of the Church might also be generously provided for."<sup>4</sup> These Sacraments are the ordinary means by which the merits of Christ's Passion and Death are shared by the human race. They are outward signs visible to all men. They are the causes or channels of grace from their very institution by the Son of God. All of them have been entrusted by God to the Catholic Church and no other religious institution has any valid claim to them.

Apply the words of the Pope to the life of the average Catholic. A few days after his birth he is incorporated into the very Body of Christ when the purifying water of Baptism flows upon his brow. At that exact moment, when his life has scarcely begun, he becomes a Christian and an heir of heaven. If he should die before reaching the age of reason, he would immediately become a saint of God for all eternity. When this same child has reached an age where the sting of temptation begins to be felt more keenly, he is strengthened by the Holy Ghost in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Upon coming of reason he may receive, even daily, the most adorable Body of life his Saviour in the most Holy Eucharist. Likewise every day of his he may be present at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. If, in spite of these powerful spiritual aids, he succumbs to the assault of sin, he is absolved from the eternal punishment in the sacred tribunal of Penance and from the temporal punishment by the indulgences stored in the vast spiritual treasury of the Church. Finally, when death is hovering near, the priest is ready with the Sacrament of Extreme Unction to restore this Catholic soul to its baptismal beauty so that it may enter upon eternity as an innocent child of God. In addition there are the two social Sacraments. In order that the means of grace may easily be available to all the faithful, certain chosen souls are, in the words of St. Paul, "taken from amongst men and ordained for men in the things that appertain to God."<sup>5</sup> Lastly, the union of

<sup>4</sup> *Encycl. on Missions*—Pius XI, p. 11. America Press Trans.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. 5, 1.

the Catholic man and woman for the procreation of children and for mutual solace and love is solemnly blessed by the Church in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The fulness of Catholic spirituality is evident. It stands in striking contrast to the spiritual emptiness of Protestantism which provides so few aids for the salvation of its adherents. The Catholic, though in the very lowest state of poverty, is rich in the things of the spirit; the Protestant, though he may have all that this world can give, is deprived of those things that count for most in the salvation of his immortal soul.

#### PAGANS, THE POOREST OF THE POOR

There is, however, another comparison infinitely more pathetic, the comparison between the Catholic and the pagan. Here are truly the most needy of men, well over a billion of them, who know nothing of the true God and their Redemption from sin. Here are those who can so easily run the broad road to damnation. Consequently they make the greatest demand on Catholic charity. In their behalf Pope Pius XI voices a touching plea in his encyclical letter on the Foreign Missions: "Since no one is to be considered so poor and so naked, none so infirm or so thirsty as those who are deprived of the knowledge and grace of God, there is no one who does not see that mercy and a divine reward shall not be wanting to him who has shown mercy to the most needy of his fellows."<sup>6</sup>

If every Catholic, surrounded as he is by spiritual wealth, and too often unmindful of it, could realize fully the urgency of this plea! These wretched people labor under a handicap that few can overcome. To lead a naturally good life, seriously wounded by the presence of original sin and exposed to temptation on all sides, is almost an impossibility. The Catholic with all his aids to salvation falls many times and is restored and strengthened by the Sacraments and other means of grace. The pagan falls and inevitably he sinks deeper and deeper into the mire of sin that will eventually drag him down to hell.

It has been pointed out that the Catholic child shortly after birth is incorporated into the Body of Christ by Baptism. Thus he becomes capable of attaining the very destination of life itself, the sight of God face to face for all eternity. With the pagan child it is a very different situation. If he dies before reaching the age of reason, he will be relegated to Limbo, a place of permanent but only natural happiness. Here in this state he will never see God to face.

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<sup>6</sup> America Press Translation, p. 8.

He will never know the joys of which St. Paul writes so expectantly: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard: neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."<sup>7</sup> If he does reach the age of reason, however, he must make a very vital decision. It will be his very first rational act. He must choose either God or created things. If he chooses God, i.e., if he finds within himself a strong desire to be a child of God, he receives at that moment what is known as Baptism of desire—a sufficient, though extraordinary, means of membership in the Church. Should he die at that moment in the state of sanctifying grace, he would go to heaven. If on the other hand he deliberately turns away from God and chooses created things (and this is by far the more probable choice of one in original sin), then he commits a mortal sin which can damn him eternally. Thus it is utterly impossible for a pagan to be in the state of grace until he grows to love the one true God about Whom he can have but the vaguest notion.

However severe this doctrine may sound, it is not contrary to the mercy of God Who, as has been shown, desires that all men be saved, but Who gives more grace to some than to others. Every pagan has a conscience which tells him when he has broken the natural law. Likewise every pagan is given enough grace to repent of his sins against this law. Thus, if he always lives according to his conscience he will never deliberately offend God. He can be counted as a member of the Mystical Body, for his state of mind presupposes that he would embrace the religion of Jesus Christ if it should become sufficiently known to him. If such a pagan through no fault of his own should be ignorant of even the most fundamental truths of the faith, God would use extraordinary means to save him by revealing to him at least those truths which are absolutely necessary for salvation. According to theologians this would mean a belief in the existence of God, His divine Providence, the Trinity and the Incarnation. This extraordinary intervention of God, however, demands a pagan who has never wilfully flouted God's grace, almost an impossibility since a soul in original sin lacks sanctifying grace and has an almost overwhelming inclination towards evil.

#### THE CHALLENGE

How many people lose their immortal souls? No one, of course, can say. The Church, itself, has never officially pronounced that any one is in hell. God in His boundless mercy may even have given such

<sup>7</sup> I Cor. 2, 9.

archtraitors as Judas Iscariot and Martin Luther the grace of final repentance, a last chance to rejoin themselves to the Mystical Body of His Divine Son; and they may have accepted it. On the other hand Christ Himself has said: "Many are called but few chosen."<sup>8</sup> The interpretation of this scriptural passage has always been a matter of dispute. A few interpret it literally. Most theologians today interpret it in a more consoling manner. Its precise meaning is known by God alone.

One thing, however, is certain; and that is that the Catholic is in the best position to be saved. Indeed, if he takes advantage of the means provided him by Christ, Founder of an infallible Church, he will infallibly be saved. The canonized saints took full advantage of these channels of grace. The Church has, therefore, declared beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are in heaven.

The whole purpose of the Catholic Mission Apostolate is to increase the number of the faithful who belong visibly to the Church. It has been pointed out that a few pagans and some Protestants belong to the Soul of the Church. This, without doubt, implies an indirect membership in the Body of the Church. Therefore, these people can be saved if they persevere in this state. Yet, even then, they are deprived of most of the means to salvation and will, on that account, have a much more difficult time saving their souls than do Catholics. It seems inevitable that many of their fellows, not belonging to the Church in any way, will be lost. Thus the missions present a challenge to every Catholic to share his superabundant spiritual wealth with the less fortunate members of the human race. Unlike earthly wealth, the more spiritual wealth is shared the more will divine dividends accrue to the sharer. This challenge of the missions will stand till all the people of the world are incorporated perfectly and visibly into the Mystical Body of Christ, the Roman Catholic Church. It is a task which cannot be left to the missionaries alone. All Catholics who appreciate their heavenly gifts ought to pray God without ceasing to show His mercy towards those "that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."<sup>9</sup>

Otherwise they are in danger of failing in charity towards the most needy of God's creatures. In this, as in all things, they would do well to imitate the Saviour Who begged the heavenly Father: "That all may be one, as thou Father in Me and I in Thee; that they may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent

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<sup>8</sup> Matt. 20, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 1, 79.

Me."<sup>10</sup> If they do this they will, according to Pope Pius XI, be sharing in a work that "surpasses any other works or testimonials of charity, as the mind surpasses the body; heaven, earth; eternity, time; and everyone that exercises this work of charity to the best of his ability shows that he esteems the gift of faith as much as it is meet and just that he should esteem it. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John 17, 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Enycl. on Missions*—America Press trans. p. 4.