

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

THE FIRST ENEMY of fraternal charity is ourselves. How often are we not tempted to lay our own responsibilities on the shoulders of others? "If he were more likable!" we say in order to justify ourselves. This is a poor excuse which deceives nobody. It is *I* who am really the guilty person. Though he may be the occasion of my fault, my neighbor is never the immediate cause. Let us seek the cause, not outside, but within us. We shall find it. It is egoism, the destroyer of both love of God and love of our neighbor.

We know very well that egoism and divine charity are two incompatible loves, in violent and irreconcilable opposition to each other. Everything given to the one is so much taken from the other and only adds to the second what is cut off from the first. "The life of self-love is the death of pure love. The life of pure love is the death of self-love. One cannot co-exist with the other. One must lose all other love in order to have pure love" (Huby, *Ecrits spir.*, p. 134).

But, are we equally convinced that this egoism reveals itself as the implacable adversary of fraternal charity, that between them there exists the same absolute and radical opposition? Nobody can love his brother unless he hates himself. Since love of God and love of our neighbor derive from one and the same virtue, egoism contaminates them both simultaneously. In an egotistic heart, there is little love of Christ, and little devotion, also, to His living members.

"Who does not love God, loves only himself. To love one's neighbor as oneself, one must first go forth from oneself and must love God more than self. Love, once united to this source, is equally diffused on one's neighbor" (Bossuet).

An analysis of charity and of egoism brings out on one and the other side elements, traits, and tendencies which are diametrically opposed. Charity, born in God, *is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us* (Rom. 5:5), is a participation in the Holy Ghost, a mysterious flowing into our souls of the substantial, eternal, infinite love of the Father for His Son, and of the Son for His Father, and of their common predilection for the generality of mankind.

As Christians, we have a godlike heart for our brother, the same heart

which Christ had. *Love ye one another as I have loved you* (John 13:34).

Egoism, which is the offspring of nature, wounded by original sin, degrades and putrefies the heart. It is a false love of self, and consequently of our neighbor, which corrupts even our most noble and lawful affections. It is a leprosy. It is no longer the divinization of love; it is its downfall.

Charity is a delicate feeling of benevolence which goes out toward our fellow beings in order to console, help and lavish gifts on them. It passes on our lips and in our hands like the smile and liberality of Providence. By nature expansive, it forgets self, spreads itself, gives itself.

Egoism, on the contrary, ignores its neighbor and is only benevolent toward its own person. It only thinks about itself, is always busy with self. It has an exclusive cult of the "I." It is not interested in its neighbor. Egoism, which is a power of acquisition and of concentration on self, resembles an octopus, whose tentacles are stretched out merely to seize its prey and absorb it. Everything for self, nothing for others.

Charity is synonymous with disinterestedness. It must lend without interest, and give without thinking of return or refund. It must demand nothing, hope for nothing, not even for a "Thank you." . . . *Let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing* (Matt. 6:3). This is not all: Charity must even go as far as considering itself the debtor of its clients. *It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than to receive* (Acts 20:35).

One severe winter, a charitable Christian woman turned beggar, went from door to door, knocking and asking for assistance to help a needy Carmelite Friar and some poor families. When handing over her collection, she added a kind word or two to thank those she assisted for having given her the opportunity of practicing charity.

There are those who will never understand the beauty and grandeur of such an action. For them, well doing easily assumes the guise of a commercial business, in which they are interested in proportion to its turnover. Pose or gain is not foreign to their liberality. Did not the Pharisee boast to God that he had given a portion of his goods in charity? While thinking of others, one is careful not to forget oneself!

Need we add that these venal and calculating souls will never know the meaning of devotion? Love our neighbor? Certainly—on one condition, however. That it will cost nothing. The egoist never knows how to put himself out, to deprive himself, or to expose himself. His "peace and security" are his prime considerations. But, honestly, is that loving one's brethren? His sacrifice ceased to be the most valid criterion of love?

Those creatures who have no heart for others, whom St. Paul calls "lovers of themselves," *seipsos amantes* (2 Tim. 3:2) whom he declares to be rich in vices, constitute the most unpleasant, the most repugnant, the most hateful race in the world. If we wish to excel in goodness, let us begin by exorcising egoism.

"No, man will never be able to love his neighbor as himself and in the spirit of fellowship, until he has triumphed over self-love, and loves God more than himself" (Bossuet).

This brief selection is from the recently published book LOVE ONE, ANOTHER by Louis Colin, C.S.S.R., translated from the French by Fergus Murphy. It is printed with the kind permission of the publishers—copyright 1960 by the Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland.