

THE CHARTER OF HAPPINESS

The quest for happiness is the dynamic force of human endeavor. It is a deceptive thing, this happiness. The word has been much abused. Like religion, patriotism, liberty, more crimes have been committed in its name than man can reckon.

Happiness and desire cannot go hand in hand; for when happiness has been found, there is nothing left to desire. It is a filling up of that deep, mysterious vessel, the human heart. It presupposed a perfect appreciation of human nature which only Christianity has. The way of true happiness was pointed out by Christ our Lord and Saviour. Christianity, therefore, may well be called the Charter of Human Happiness.

When the poor Carpenter of Galilee proclaimed the "glad tidings" at the other end of the Mediterranean, He brought light to a world that had been stumbling forty centuries in the dark. He solved the mystery of human destiny and the problem of human conduct; for the former He told of "a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens"; for the latter, the law of self-abasing love. His charter, signed on the Mount of Beatitudes and sealed on Mount Calvary, corresponds satisfactorily to every man, and to every capability in man. This double fitness, therefore, shall make up the burden of this article.

Coming to save and instruct all men, Christ made His system of teaching accessible to all. Every son of Adam is included; whatever be his station in life, every one can participate—poet and peasant, philosopher and fool. In depth and area like the ocean, this doctrine presents an unbounded expanse for the scientist to explore, whether by the light of divinely revealed truth, or merely by human reason. And yet the simplicity and directness of this doctrine appeal no less forcibly to the man in the mill, the woman in the home, the child at his play. So simple is it in the faith which knows no guile that, to the astonishment of the man of science with laboratory equipment, it can be explained by a child, catechism in hand, speaking intelligently upon the existence and perfection of Almighty God, the origin of the world, the cause of evil, the way of peace, man's first beginning and his last end. Truly all-embracing is this charter of happiness, and true to the commission, "Go ye into the whole world." . . . "Teach all nations."

Just as it is for all men, so does this doctrine correspond to the whole nature of man. Man possesses an intellect whose capacity exceeds all things of time, which no earthly knowledge can gratify. He possesses, too, a will whose aspirations no worldly goods or deeds of men can fill. And, thirdly, he has a sensitive nature which has to do with the practical and material things of life.

Man's noblest faculty, the intellect, seeks after truth. As it is the function of the eye to see the material things of creation, so it is the function of the intellect to comprehend truth. Only by submitting to truth can it attain the dignity and perfection to which it was destined. Truth is its food and drink, its bread and wine.

And the doctrine of Christ contains the full deposit of truth regarding man's origin, his end, and the means to attain it. It is the interpreter of man to himself. It offers the only solution to the problems of life. Man has an inherent craving to know what is his destiny. Christ's teaching meets this demand; it withholds no truth necessary for man to regulate his life on earth, and direct it to its eternal goal.

Knowledge of truth for its own sake, however, will not satisfy man. He craves for more; he has a will that desires to practice and apply knowledge; it yearns for action. We shall see how the code of Christianity adjusts itself to the workings of this faculty.

The will, as we have said, has to do with action. It is the motive power of the deeds of men. The will tends naturally towards good—not only to this or that particular good, but to all good in general. Remove the idea of an attainable good, and you destroy the idea of the human will. When it pursues a forbidden object, it is not because the object is bad, but because it appears good. It is just as much the nature of the will to pursue the highest good as it is for the intellect to seek the highest truth. A deep longing for the infinite good has been implanted in man by God by which it craves for union with Him who is the Highest Good,—to see God in His essence face to face, no longer darkly through a glass; to know Him as He is, when faith shall be no more; to live with Him in communion eternal, happy in His perfect bliss, in His glory glorified. The attainment of perfect happiness, or union with God, alone satiates the will. And this proper object of the will is gained only by right living. Out-

side the practice of virtue and holiness, nothing will establish us in the possession of God.

If we wish to know what is the standard of proper conduct, we find the answer in the Christian code of morality, sound and unmistakable. Unchangeable truth defines the essential relation between God and man; it regulates his life; it is to his moral activity what logic is to his mental activity—putting order into it. Piety to God, justice and charity to our fellow-men, temperance and chastity to ourselves, these it enjoins. When a Scribe, tempting Christ asked Him: "Which is the great commandment?" "Thou shalt love," came the answer,—and love is an act of the will—"the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like to this: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Behold the groundwork of all morality. To the aphorism, "God is love" every Christian precept can be reduced. Lay down love for God as a first principle, and love for neighbor and respect for self must follow. In this way it is that the Christian code conduces to happiness. Peace of conscience and a just hope of eternal life are the inevitable results. Perfect happiness consists in the possession of all truth and all good. When the intellect attains infinite truth, when the will possesses infinite good, and when these are assured to them forever, then man's happiness is supreme, and the restless soul can crave no more. But this in its fullness is reserved for eternity. Now we can have it only in part.

The completion of Christianity's fitness for the whole of human nature is found in its adaptability to man's sensitive nature. Although it teaches us to despise the passing things of this world and aspire to a permanent abode, yet it does not condemn and suppress worldly pursuits and interests. It would have us, however, regard them not as an end in themselves, but as a means to virtuous living. It fosters human endeavor; it is the spring of human energy; it sanctifies the deeds of men. Christianity has always kept pace with the progress and change of the world; it has always been in sympathy with the highest forms of culture and civilization; it has always prompted the arts and sciences—and all for the glory of God and the common good of mankind. It protects and cherishes commerce and industry. No other institution has so dignified labor and learning; no other legislation has so encouraged, and still continues to encourage,

all that is true, useful and honorable in the activity of the human family.

This religion, then, is God's generous response to the needs of mankind; it is a perfect robe to clothe and beautify every faculty in man's nature. Christianity has been sanctified by God to clarify man's reason and rectify his will. It reveals man to himself, pointing out the meaning of his earthly existence; it defines his duties, showing how they are to be performed; it directs him how to use the transitory things of this world for his temporal and spiritual welfare. Man's existence is a history of living, suffering and dying. And the Christian religion comes to his aid, teaching him how to live, how to suffer and how to die.

Two thousand years have rolled away since this divine charter was sealed. Those ages have been the story of endless struggles to promote the peace and joy of men. If we look for this document of genuine Christianity, which has been the message of "glad tidings of great joy," containing the solution of life's great problems, man's guide and consolation upon earth and his only hope for the life hereafter, where can we find it, but in the Ark of Peter, the Roman Catholic Church.

—Bro. Marcolinus Della Penta, O. P.

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