

The Call To Catholic Action

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All Catholics are divided into...

No. For once it is not the easy and bromidic division of "all Gaul." All Catholics are divided into so many classifications that one faces with a sinking heart their differences and discordant views (on all save essentials), their varying degrees of enthusiasm for their faith and of blank apathy toward it, their frequent suspicious distrust of one another.

However, just to simplify our discussion, all Catholics may be divided (roughly and on the most general lines of their attitude toward their faith) into:

Bad Catholics.

"Dumb" Catholics.

Good, ordinary Catholics.

And

Safely we can keep that last and splendid group until a little further along in our discussion, as a sort of happy climax and inspiring record and hopeful prophecy.

Written in Water.

The one fluid in the world with which one cannot write (though I suppose my scientifically-minded readers will name a dozen or a score) is water.

Dip your pen into ink, and as you scratch along you leave behind you the fair record of your thoughts, emotions, adventures. Wine has been used as a fairly satisfactory substitute for ink. A pen dipped into strong coffee leaves a faint trace across the paper. But a pen writing with water leaves not a trace to record even the briefest love of "callow sixteen". The records written with water are fleeting as the records written in water.

Yet Indelible.

Yet water is the one fluid in the world that writes so indelibly that no passing of time nor enduring of eternity will ever blot out or dim its record. When the priest in baptism pours water across the forehead of the infant, that water writes upon the infant's soul the ineradicable mark of God's adoption.

Indeed, the fact seems to be that the inescapable word "Catholic" is at that very moment written across the newly-baptized face. For one who watches human beings with a thoughtful and observant eye gets to feel that he recognises on the streets, in the subways, on trains, in business offices, and on ballroom floors a baptized face.

Certainly, we are often sure that we are looking at a face that the waters of baptism have never touched.

So unmistakable is this handwriting of baptism's flowing water that the one fact a man can never live down seems to be his Catholicity. The record that baptism has written on the soul (and seemingly on the body) marks one for all time and eternity, in the eyes of God and the angels and very frequently in the eyes of men, as a Catholic.

Promptly Known.

If the person baptized remains true to his faith, everyone promptly recognises him as a Catholic. He or she may give up the Faith and pass into that slightly shadowy, often dubious, sphere known as "former Catholic," to be regretted by his former co-religionists, suspected by the group he has later joined; but he still remains a used-to-be Catholic. Whether a practising Catholic or a used-to-be-Catholic, Catholic forever he remains,

We have seen this verified in the case of those in public life and of those of commonplace experience. The new clerk entering the office, the new teacher slipping unobtrusively into a school system, the new executive taking over the local branch, the new neighbour moving into the house down the block in Suburbia, the maid applying for a job, or the sales manager taking charge of a territory is promptly known by his co-religionists, and even more promptly by those not of his faith, as a Catholic.

The joyous party swings into high. Drinks are loose, and conduct loosens to match them. Into the crowd comes a new arrival. In the midst of staggers and hiccoughs and slips, physical, lingual and moral, she keeps her calm, steady, assured poise. "Oh," runs the whispered comment, "she is a Catholic."

Or, sadly enough, she staggers with the rest, hiccoughs as maudlinly as they, and trips to lapses, to slips, to falls. Up go the eyebrows. "Astonishing," runs the comment of those who pause in identical conduct to scrutinise her. "Astonishing! Because, you know, she is a Catholic."

Following Up and Down.

The fact of his present or relinquished Catholicity, follows a man as he mounts from obscurity on the slippery and often soiled ladder of politics. It is remembered of him or her long after the bright lights of Hollywood's glory have obscured the light of faith. Even big business and sports usually uninterested in anything except results remember a man's Catholicity and rehearse the fact with strange explicitness and insistence.

The white light that beats upon the throne beats upon the religion of a Catholic, and only that of a Catholic. The world is singularly uninterested in the faiths of other men. Not a thousand Americans paid any slight attention to the religion of Calvin Coolidge, president from 1923 - 1929. The religion of Alfred E. Smith (a Catholic) dogged him from councilman to candidate for President in 1928. I doubt that many people paid any heed to Andrew Mellon's religion, (he was U.S. Secretary of the Treasury during the Depression – and an Episcopalian) or that many know the religion of Charles Schwab (the great steel magnate of the early 20th century). Perhaps a corporal's guard could tell you the religion of the famous actors Douglas Fairbanks, jun., or Robert Montgomery. Few would fail to tell you what Ramon Novarro's faith is, or what was once the religion of Mary Pickford or John Barrymore. (All three are Catholics.) I have never heard boxer Max Schmeling's faith discussed. Like the rest of America, I have heard much of that of Gene Tunney (a Catholic).

Whatever, then, the division into which I am to fall as a Catholic, a Catholic I shall remain in the eyes of mankind and of the angels through-out all time. And so will you.

It does seem that if one will always be recognised as a Catholic, good or bad, or remembered as a Catholic, present or ex., one would rather be a satisfactory Catholic than an unsatisfactory one. One might even aspire to reach the highest division of Catholics, for few people willingly do badly the thing they must do before the eyes of a wide and critical audience.

Bad Catholics.

The first group of Catholics we can dispose of with a glance and a quick dismissal. In fact, they have a way of rapidly eliminating themselves from each period of the Church. With mingled regret and relief the motherly eyes of the Church watch them go. She has tears for their delinquency; they are losing grace and Peace and the friendship of Christ and in the end their eternal happiness. Wisely, however, she knows that they do her far less harm as open enemies than as false and disobedient children.

Simply and flatly, they are bad Catholics. Their evil lives are in direct contradiction to Catholic faith and morality. Yet the observant world is not observant enough to see that the evil they practise is done despite the warnings of the Church and in direct refusal of her precepts, commandments, and practices. They do the Catholic Church the greatest harm she ever suffers.

Open enemies can be met and fought on even terms. Foes who pretend friendship, traitors within the fold, are the real enemies. A gangster with a Catholic name (Irish, let's say, or Italian) is picked up from a roadside at the end of his one-way ride. He may not have been near a church since his baptism; the non-Catholic world persists in seeing in him a Catholic, lumps him with the rest of the Catholic world, says with cynical judgment, "If this is the type of men who are Catholic, I will never join them," and thousands are lost to the possibility of conversion.

Scandals.

A politician, known to be Catholic, practises a dishonesty which the Church's moral law must absolutely condemn and becomes involved in a graft scandal. His attendance to his religious duties may have been limited to an official appearance put in at occasional Communion breakfasts (he was present at the breakfast; he was notably absent from the Communion that preceded it); his Catholic connection is none the less remembered by the world that condemns his dishonesty, and again the Church suffers terribly from those who judge it, not by her best, but by her worst, children.

Bad Catholics, in high places and low, are those who do the Church the gravest and most irreparable harm. Their scandalous lives are taken by the world as samples of Catholicity. Saints are inexperienced and reluctant publicists. Sinners are notoriously in the headlines. And Catholic sinners, blazoned before the eyes of the nation or the limited vision of a narrow neighbourhood, do most to keep back the work of Christ.

Plain Dumb.

"Dumb" is still, we must admit, slang. But it somehow best describes that mass of Catholics who, whatever their degree of education, are vacuously ignorant of what the Church teaches and holds. The second class of Catholics, then, is made up of "dumb" Catholics, and their name is legion.

Regrettably enough, they have, in many cases, had a Catholic education – an education which on the important matters of faith, they have allowed to slip from their minds. Many more of them have

had no Catholic education and go through life quite ignorant of why they do the things they do or what the simplest practices of their Faith really mean.

And when they are asked to represent the Catholic Church in public movements, again and again they stand before the world as misrepresentative Catholics. They are floored by the simplest question about their faith. Their non-Catholic friends find them dodging religious discussion as if it were not quite decent to engage in it. When they are faced by an inquirer who will not be denied, they refer him to a priest for their answer, knowing all the time that he will not go, or give an answer so incorrect and misleading that the non-Catholic is turned forever from any further investigation of Catholic doctrine.

They are not in the main bad, these dumb Catholics. But God and the recording angel alone know the harm they do to the Church by their dodging of religious discussion, their incorrect answers, their misstatements of Catholic dogma and opinion, their representations of the Catholic Church which even the non-Catholic world knows must be awry.

Just Ordinary.

The great majority of the Catholic world falls into the class of just good, ordinary Catholics. They are fairly well instructed; they are fairly devoted to their religion. They practise that by no means to be despised devotion of the fifty-two Sundays a year. They receive Holy Communion in routine fashion, realising that it is a duty (or worse, just a habit), but not realising that it is life's most golden opportunity. They are good, but ordinary.

Now, to insult a man to the top of your bent, tell him he is just ordinary. That one word sinks him into a slough of nothingness. It levels him to the commonness of the mob and brands him with the mediocre herd. An ordinary man is one so devoid of any distinction that his contemporaries fail to recognise and posterity stands no chance of remembering him.

A "just ordinary" doctor is not good enough for the wife or the child one really loves. An ordinary lawyer is not entrusted with an important case. An ordinary singer wins no plaudits from excited audiences and no press notices for his scrapbook.

"Ordinary" is a completely contemptuous word. We are furious when it is used ("just an ordinary-looking person with ordinary manners and an ordinary mind") in our connection.

To be superlatively fine in anything is glorious. To rise above the merely commonplace is the ambition of every real man or woman. We remember only those who stand out, because they are not ordinary or common or mediocre.

Extraordinary — Good or Bad.

History has its place even for those who are extraordinarily bad. Not, heaven knows, that one would regard that as an honourable distinction; but the fact is that a great tyrant, an outstanding despot, a notorious traitor, a distinguished robber baron or a famous racketeer (in any age; and every age has had them) not only steals from the men of his day, but steals a place in world history. Ordinary sinners, like the rest of the ordinary herd, carry their nonentity with them into the future.

Yet, there are too many Catholics who seem to realise nothing of the contemptuous meaning found in the phrase, "a good ordinary Catholic." They are content with their dullness, their commonplaceness, their mediocrity at a time when the world is clamouring for extraordinary men and women in every line.

A Mediocre World.

Certainly, as the Holy Father looked over the world, he must have felt, with sinking heart, that the Church was filled with ordinary Catholics. They were not bad, these ordinary Catholics, but they were listless. They were not “dumb,” but they were discouragingly dull. It had not seemed to enter their consciousness that the faith they possessed was not merely a gift but a high responsibility; not merely something to be hugged to their own selfish hearts, but something to be given generously to the world.

Certainly the Holy Father must have seen with deep disappointment how little impression was being made upon the world by Catholics, simply because the vast majority of the Catholic faithful were good, ordinary people. Catholic thought is not dominating the world of ideas to-day. Catholic thinkers have too often been ordinary or inarticulate. Catholic leaders do not direct the world of politics. Catholic leaders cannot arise from the ranks of the merely ordinary; and the merely ordinary are too numerous. Catholic leadership in sociology and economics was the leadership of the Pope himself, speaking his magnificent truths about capital and labour and social justice and government and finding only the faintest response among his own children.

The Added Extra.

So the Holy Father, seeing this great group of ordinary Catholics, hoped he could change them from nonentities into influences, from followers into leaders, by the addition of just that prefix “extra.” For it is that little extra something in life that always makes the difference.

Thousands of young men have knocked a ball about a golf course. One of them had the extra drive and precision and stamina that made him Bobby Jones. Thousands of young women have gone out on a court, tennis racket in hand. One of them had the extra speed and accuracy that made Helen Wills.

Of all the men and women who have practised at a piano until the neighbours threatened violence, a few had that extra technique and emotional depth that made them a Paderewski, a Samaroff, or a Vincent Lopez. From the mass of ordinary lawyers an occasional one rises to eminence by the extra knowledge of law and extra grasp of legal principles that make him a world figure.

Prophecy and Call.

So, in the hope that the ordinary Catholic, good at heart but ordinary in achievement, might be made extraordinary, the Holy Father issued a challenge and call. He named it Catholic Action. Surely he felt that in action was to be found that extra something that would turn a dull Catholic into an alert one, a somewhat indifferent Catholic into an interested one, an apathetic Catholic into an apostle. [The Holy Father issuing this call to Catholic Action is none other than the great Pope Pius XI.]

There are times when the Pope seems to have a sort of prophetic vision. He not only sees the need of his own times; he foresees the need of a coming generation. And again and again he provides for that before the need itself actually arises.

Youth is Saved.

Thirty years or more ago, the Holy Father [it was Pope Saint Pius X] realised that the need of the young generation then facing the world was frequent Communion. He could hardly have known by purely natural means that that young group was to undergo a battering of faith and an assault against morality such as no other generation had ever known up till then.

Yet, even before the fury of that assault began, the Pope had given them the sure defence and the source of that strength which was to carry them through the struggle.

The battering began. Faith was assaulted with a violence unique in history. Morals were attacked, undermined, sneered at, ridiculed, represented as handicaps to mankind's forward march. The young generation of thirty years ago walked into a barrage against their souls that would have destroyed them if they had not had intimate contact with the personality of Jesus Christ in frequent Communion. But daily they received Him, and He was their strength. Their faith might be assaulted, but they had touched in intimate communion the Giver and Founder of that faith. Their morals might be attacked with cruel and treacherous violence; but they had been in the Eucharistic companionship of the Virgin Christ. Frequent Communion saved that generation for God, the Church, and decency.

Opposition.

Interestingly enough, there were those of good-will and sincere convictions who opposed frequent Communion even after the Holy Father had spoken. There were even good priests who regarded his commands with distrust and apathy. Frequent Communion, though it brought with it the hope of a whole generation, was not welcomed everywhere. It was opposed actively and passively. Time alone has swept away opposition and proved that the Pope knew just what were the needs of that age and generation.

Again a Prophet.

From his watchtower in the Vatican, where he sees the world as no other mortal sees it, the Holy Father, again with prophetic vision, foresaw the needs of this generation. And he forestalled those needs with Catholic Action. Inevitably, once frequent Communion had become common, Catholic Action was bound to follow; for one cannot associate with Christ in the intimacy of the Eucharist without wanting to bring Him to the world He loves and came to save. Catholic Action is the corollary of frequent Communion.

Beyond that, however, the Pope knew that Catholic Action was suited, not merely to the needs, but to the particular characteristics of this generation. An age so restlessly in motion, so eager to do remarkable things, could not be content with an inactive faith and a religion without achievement. A generation made up of young men and women of initiative, resourcefulness, and relentless activity must be given a participation in their religion that would fire their imagination and stimulate their desire for achievement.

Just What was Needed.

The forward-moving activity of God's enemies, crystallising in the new paganism, in Communism, in anti-Christian morality, and an atheism that makes war upon a God it denies, demanded a counter activity on the part of Catholics. The particular genius of this age meant that Catholic laymen must be given a fuller share of responsibility for the destiny of the Church. Yesterday was opened to them an almost priestly participation in the Eucharist. Today is offered to them an almost priestly participation in the apostolate of the Church.

If sincere and honest men, if apathetic priests and conservative laymen opposed frequent Communion, it is not surprising that something of the same opposition has in certain circles arisen against Catholic Action. But those who know history, know that the Popes are wise with the wisdom

of the Holy Ghost. The programme of Catholic Action given to the Church today brings to our generation the salvation that was found in frequent Communion by the last generation,

Not Vague.

Perhaps some of the opposition or apathy comes from the fact that, despite the documents of the Holy Father, Catholic Action itself is still a bit vague in certain minds. Once clear, it is not merely important; it is inevitable. It is not merely something that can be engaged in with profit to the Church, but it is something that must be engaged in if Catholics are to supply the world with that leadership and guidance which would bring it through the pressing perils that surround it.

Catholic Action, says the Holy Father in exact substance, is the participation of the laity in the apostolic mission of the Hierarchy.

Few sentences have ever been so packed with meaning and hope and prophetic promise.

Weary Spectators.

Participation at once suggests an activity that has been all too lacking on the part of laymen and laywomen. Whether we like to admit it or not, the Catholic world has been filled with what we may rightly call "religious spectators." They have sat passively by and watched the priests and the religious do the work. They have been interested, but only as a slightly inert audience watching others play a game or enact a play.

They have a slogan, these religious spectators, though they themselves are unaware of it. I never had thought of it myself until a certain evening when I took dinner with a former student, his new bride, and his mother. It was at his mother's home, and when dinner was announced we went in together. I with that characteristic priestly wonder: Would anyone remember to ask me to say grace?

Quite according to custom, my hostess forgot, and was just about to sit down to dinner, when my young friend, a splendid Catholic, be it admitted, but a distinctly irreverent youth, lifted his hand in quick command and said:

"Just a minute, mother." Then he turned to me, and, with his famous grin, said: "Well, reverend, strut your stuff."

So I said grace.

A Bad Slogan.

Then and often later I have felt that was the slogan of the great mass of Catholics, who have sat passively by watching the intense activities of the Church: "Reverend, strut your stuff."

They go to Mass on Sunday, these inert Catholics, and there in the pews they watch the priest say Mass. That they could be offering together with the priest the Christ Who is victim both of priest and people never seems to occur to them. Mass is beautiful, restful, dignified, reassuring. But their part in the Mass is all too often less intensely personal than the response of an audience to a gripping play. "Reverend, strut your stuff."

They watch the missionaries going off to the conversion of the pagan world, and watch them with approving pride. How splendid it is that we have such unselfishly apostolic priests, Brothers, and Sisters! With real appreciation, they applaud their efforts. But the realisation that the conversion of the pagan is their own task, too, and not only the task of missionary priest or religious never seems

to dawn on them. They would not allow their sons to march off to war unless they planned for that work behind the lines, upon which depends the success of advancing armies; but they allow their priests and religious to go to make war upon entrenched paganism and forget that behind the lines work must go on unceasingly, "Reverend, strut your stuff."

They hear the impressive words of Christ: "Go, teach all nations." But easily they shift the burden of responsibility from their own shoulders to the shoulders of the priest or the teaching Brother or Sister. That to them were addressed Christ's words of apostolic command never enters their consciousness. The priests are doing their part, aren't they? And surely the charity work of our Sisters must impress the world. "Reverend, strut your stuff," they say, and lapse back into their inertia.

Shoulder to Shoulder.

Then suddenly comes this challenge of the Holy Father. They learn, these religious spectators, that they are to be spectators no longer. They are to participate with the priests in their work for the world. Shoulder to shoulder with the clergy and religious of the Church, they are to move forward to a world conquest. Not alone or unguided are they supposed to take up their work, but in the sure companionship and under the certain guidance of those who are God's special messengers to the world.

The wisdom of the Holy Father in suddenly calling the Catholic laity from apathy to activity is beyond all doubting. Human nature is so constituted that it cannot stay interested in anything of which it is a mere spectator. No one ever grew enthusiastic about golf or tennis by forming part of a gallery.

None Exempt.

Hence, quite aside from all other considerations, Catholic Action has the instant appeal of interest. It transfers a man from a passive religious state into an active one. It vitalises his whole attitude towards religion. He becomes a companion with the priest in the work that Christ entrusted to His Church. Catholic Action, beyond anything ever given to the laity, will mean the awakening of religious enthusiasm.

"Laity" is the broad and inclusive word the Holy Father uses. This is an enterprise extended to the whole laity, men and women. None is exempted from the call. None can be excluded from the opportunities. The whole Catholic world is called to this new crusade, this new awakening of zeal for souls.

The Work of Bishop and Priest.

Just what is the apostolic mission of the Hierarchy? Why is a Bishop consecrated and a priest ordained? What is the work that is given to them to do? Once the answers to these questions are known, it becomes obvious what laymen and laywomen will be expected to share. For if they participate in the mission of the Bishops and priests, it is essential that they know in what that mission consists.

Those who regard religion as a gigantic system of 'don'ts' and 'mustn'ts' often seem to regard the Catholic priesthood as a sort of glorified spiritual police force. God gave the world His Ten Commandments. Then, in order to have these put into effective operation, He created His

priesthood. The work of the priests, in this entirely mistaken concept, is the enforcement of the Ten Commandments. How utterly without inspiration would be a mission like that!

Slightly more dignified and impressive is another concept of the priest as a spiritual traffic officer. The road from earth to heaven is at best a difficult one. It lies over perilous stretches and detours, and God graciously designed His priesthood to direct the traffic safely along this crowded highway. Again, this is a gross understatement of the facts. Eager as the priesthood is to see mankind safely directed to heaven, this is still far from being its great apostolic mission.

Glorious Trust.

The apostolic mission of the Hierarchy is the most glorious work that could be entrusted to a human being. It is the envy of the angels. It was the glowing inspiration of the martyrs.

The apostolic mission of the Hierarchy is to bring Jesus Christ into human lives.

One pauses reverently before this highest of human callings. Then one realises with deep gratitude that the Holy Father has communicated this calling to the whole Catholic world. What the priest and the Bishop do in virtue of their priesthood, the laity do through a participation in that royal priesthood. It is the work of every Catholic who walks through the world to bring Jesus Christ into the lives of those with whom he associates.

Christ Comes to Men.

We all know the way in which, first of all, the priest brings Christ into the world. In the cold of the dawn he goes up to the altar, that is so much like Bethlehem, and in the presence of a handful of worshippers, bends over the bread and wine upon the altar. "This is My Body. This is My Blood," he says. And as Bruce Marshall puts it, "to the unheard fluttering of unseen wings," Christ comes from heaven to earth to take up His place among His people. The priest has brought Christ physically into the world.

This is so important a work that for it priests have gladly died. Mass, through which Christ is brought among His people, the priest has known to be his highest privilege and supreme duty. And though the saying of Mass might mean deaths, as it did in the penal days in Ireland or the days of Tudor persecution in England, priests continued bravely to bring Christ down into the lives of those for whom He died and for whom He instituted the Mass.

Atheist to Martyr.

Few men of modern times have the romantic appeal of the Abbé Charles de Foucauld. For years this man had been a God-hating artillery captain in northern Africa. His attitude towards God had in it all the venom one finds in French atheists, and he moved with his regiments and batteries through Mohammedan Africa with neither faith nor hope nor charity.

Suddenly, through one of God's miracles of grace, he became a convert and a Catholic. No convert ever hated his former folly more bitterly than did de Foucauld. He resigned from his battery, entered a Trappist monastery in France, and in a spirit of penance gave himself over to reparation for his former sins and blasphemies.

Yet all the while the memory of Mohammedan Africa lingered with him. As Mass was offered up in La Trappe, he thought of that huge black desert in which Christ had never come among his people.

He grew heartsick as he recalled the vast spaces dotted with little villages and wandering tribes into which Christ had never come in the Eucharist.

Glad Death.

He became a priest. He begged for and obtained a dispensation to go to Africa. He there disguised himself as an Arab. He moved unsuspected into darkest Mohammedan Africa and found himself a little hut in the midst of a pagan village. [He ministered on the borders of Morocco at first, but afterwards shifted to southern Algeria and the Tuareg tribesmen.] Had anyone suspected that he was a Christian, death would have been inevitable. What would have been his fate if they knew him for a priest, he did not stop to consider.

In the hush of the dawn he said Mass in his little hut. There he reserved the Blessed Sacrament. There he lived, happy that he had brought Jesus Christ physically into a part of the world that He had never entered and among people who had closed their doors in His face.

And when they [some marauding tribesmen belonging to the anti-Western Senussi sect of Islam in 1916] found him and the rifles rang out, de Foucauld fell a martyr of the Eucharist at the foot of his little altar, glad to give his life in so noble a cause. He had brought Jesus Christ into the lives and villages of Mohammedan Africa. Heroically he had done what each priest does when he brings the Eucharist Christ physically into the lives of humanity. [He was beatified as a martyr in 2005.]

Christ to His Own.

The moment of Communion comes. The priest turns from the altar and carries Christ to His rich and His poor, His happy and His sorrowing, His saints, His sorely tempted, His sinners, His young people surrounded by the perils of life, and His old people slipping quietly into the shadow of death.

The bride walks up the long aisle and at the altar she finds, not merely the young lover who is to be her husband, but the Christ of the Marriage Feast, brought down by the priest in the glory of the Nuptial Mass.

To the dying man facing with terror the unknown passage through death into eternity, the priest comes, bringing the Master of life and death to soothe the worries, strengthen the soul, reassure the troubled heart of the dying and guide him safely through the black gate into the eternal life that lies beyond.

Nothing else that the priest does is so significant as this bringing of Christ into the lives of His people.

Your Sacrifice and Mine.

And now the Holy Father assures the faithful that, in measure, this is their work, too. They must help bring Christ physically into the world. They are to attend Mass, not as inert spectators, but as active participants in the glory of the liturgy. They are to realise that the priest does not offer the Mass in private. He is forbidden to do so except by special dispensation. Priest and people together offer the Mass, which is "your sacrifice and mine." The missal of the priest is the laity's prayer-book. The actions of the priest can be joined by their actions. Together priest and people bring Jesus Christ into the world and together they offer Him for the honour of His Father and for the salvation of the world.

Immediately that this idea is appreciated, Mass ceases to be a half-understood spectacle or an indolently-watched drama and becomes the vital action of a united priest and people, which action flows through all their actions of the day, until every act of the people and the priest throughout their lives is joined in merit to the sacrificial actions of Christ in the Mass. We may almost say that devotion to the Mass and appreciation of Catholic liturgy are at the very basis of Catholic Action.

Welcomed.

The Catholic well knows that the priest can give Communion to him only who willingly receives it. If it is the happy office of the priest to bring Christ into the lives of the faithful, it is the happy privilege of the people to welcome Christ into their lives. Only they can unlock the ivory door through which Christ enters their lives.

Beyond that, the more the individual Christian promotes Eucharistic devotion among others, the more general is he making this entry of Jesus Christ into human lives. The mother who makes Holy Communion a beautiful and personal thing to her children, the nurse who brings back her patient to the Sacraments, the business man who wins his partner to fidelity to his religious duties, the man or the woman who advances the Eucharistic reign of Christ — all are actively bringing Christ into the lives of men.

Into Men's Minds.

The priest goes into the pulpit only after a long preparation, which has been uniquely devoted to the task of bringing Christ into his own mind and heart. Through his training for the priesthood he has been taught to pray. Through prayer he conversed with Christ and received from Christ those internal graces that made Him very real and very near and personal.

His classroom study centred about the doctrines and life of the Saviour. Christianity in its most dogmatic form is only a fuller explanation of the precious truths which Christ revealed to the world. Moral theology is only the application of Christ's principles of living to the problems of ordinary and extraordinary conduct.

So, when the priest studies his dogmatic theology, he is learning precisely what Christ meant by the truth He revealed. When he studies his moral theology, he is investigating just what Christ wanted men and women to do in order to serve His Father and their fellow-men. When he studies the Scriptures, he is seeing Christ in prophecy and type, and then following Him through the fascinating history of His dealings with men as He walked the earth, its visible God, its Saviour, its Teacher, and its King.

The whole priestly training is an effort to bring into the mind and heart of the priest a thorough understanding of the personality, message, teachings and moral doctrines of Christ Our Lord. And this training the zealous priest supplements with his constant reading and study, and with his application of the principles of Christ to the problems of modern society.

The Teacher of Christ.

So, when he goes into the pulpit, he goes hoping to bring Jesus Christ into the mental lives of the people; He teaches them to know and love and understand the Saviour. He explains the principles and doctrines He gave to the world, so that they may apply these easily and readily to their own lives. He gives them the living Truth which is Christ, to combat the lethal errors which are anti-Christian. He feels himself not nearly so much the preacher as the teacher who must make his

hearers vividly aware of the Saviour and all that the Saviour meant to His own times and means to ours. He leaves the pulpit hoping for one thing, that he has brought Jesus Christ into their minds.

Because of this he regards the teaching of little children as a privilege. His catechism class is the avenue down which he leads the little ones into the presence of the Lover of little children. He goes into the classroom of the older students knowing that from him they must come to a fuller appreciation of the fact that if Christ is in their minds, few problems will baulk them and few moral difficulties will be too strong for their conquest.

Back to Literature.

Inspired by the example of those splendid priests who have given the world great books, he writes, he edits a magazine or a newspaper, he becomes a pamphleteer. Never for a moment is he impressed with his own cleverness or the charm of his style. His one ambition is through his writing to enlarge on the explanation of Christ's truth. Christ is the hero of even these Catholic books in which He seems to appear but slightly. His solutions are the answers given by Catholic problem novels. He dominates the thought of the most brilliant priestly essayist. He inspires the poetry of the greatest Catholic poet. His message is carried to the world in the pages of every ably-edited Catholic magazine and newspaper.

Teachers All.

Christ has been, to a terrifying degree, excluded from the mind of the modern world. Paganism and Christ are at desperate odds. Christ, par excellence, the world's greatest Teacher, is not welcomed in modern school systems. Christ, fountain of truth, finds little cordiality in the authorities on world problems. Christ and His morality are not notably in best sellers, current magazines, the great secular press.

So, with all their strength, zealous priests strive to keep Christ in the minds of the faithful, dominating their intellectual and moral life. They bring Jesus Christ to the intellectual world, Catholic and non-Catholic, through their teaching, preaching, writing, and editing.

This, too, is a function that the Holy Father shares with the laity. They must assist the priest in bringing Jesus Christ into the intellectual life of modern times. They, too, must carry the Teacher of Teachers with His world-saving truth into the minds and hearts of our age.

First for Self.

For this, as for the work of the priest, there must be careful preparation. Prayer in the Catholic Action programme is not a mere begging for favours. It is not just a pious running to the saints. It is direct and intelligent conversation with God. It is the thoughtful consideration of His life, His truths, the application of His life to our lives and of His doctrines and principles to our problems. This is mental prayer. Prayer becomes the closest possible approach of the soul to Christ, so that, with eyes fastened upon Him, a heart in tune with His, the Catholic, conversing easily with Christ, comes to know Him thoroughly, love Him deeply, and consult Him with faith and confidence.

An ill-trained teacher is an ineffective teacher. If the Catholic layman and laywoman are to carry Christ's truth to the world, a real effort must be made to master that truth. A Catholic education becomes at once a necessity. From kindergarten to post-graduate school the leader in Catholic Action must be trained under Catholic guidance.

Learning More of Christ.

The student in the Catholic school, realising that he will be called on some day to present Christ's truth to mankind, sees in his religion and philosophy classes courses of paramount importance. He dares not leave his Catholic school with a skimmed and smattering knowledge of his Faith. He must master it. He must see its reasonableness and its validity. He must learn to apply it to life and life's manifold problems.

And, school over, the supplementary forces of correct and stimulating reading and membership in Catholic study groups are inevitable. The priest must never relax his study. The teacher in any line must keep abreast of his subject and move forward to new achievements. The specialist must read widely, study deeply, be alert to the developments in his particular field. And the man who understands the implications of Catholic Action will realise that his religious education and self-development must advance with the years. He is the priest's associate in a difficult work, a lay teacher of the word, a specialist in religion as every Catholic is expected to be a specialist.

Tongue-Tied.

Catholics have been, regrettably enough, a strangely inarticulate race. Being so generally persecuted, they have often thought silence the safest course. Living surrounded by non-Catholics and often overwhelmed by their superior wealth and social prestige, reticence has been natural. Because of this reticence Catholic thought has not made on the modern mind an impress in any proportion to our actual numbers.

While all the world today is talking religion, usually false and stupid religion, Catholics shy away from the subject in exasperating fashion. Catholic solutions, which are Christ's solutions, are not brought to bear on economic, moral, social and political ills, simply because Catholics are timidly silent.

If the world has not Christ in its mind, the fault is not altogether the world's. The Catholics, who have Christ, have not offered Him to the minds about them.

Talking the Truth.

The Catholic Action programme, then, demands that the Catholic layman and laywoman regard themselves as associated with the priest in bringing Christ and His truth to the minds of men.

This means a new articulateness on the part of Catholics. They must talk religion to one another in private conversations, in small club and society meetings, in study groups, in public gatherings. Words and phrases now infrequently heard must become easy and fluent on their tongues. Religion, the most absorbing subject in the world, can easily become the favourite subject of discussion. The Catholic who has learned to talk religion with fellow-Catholics soon finds it relatively simple to talk religion with non-Catholics. And he will find in both Catholic and non-Catholic associates a surprisingly respectful interest in Christ and what He means to the tossed and troubled modern era.

The Voices Rise.

Under the inspiration of Catholic Action the Catholic Evidence Movement is inevitable in its growth. From pitches in Hyde Park, in talks before non-Catholic forums, in radio broadcasts, men and women are carrying the faith to wide and receptive audiences. [Other groups to emerge include the 'Catholic Answers' groups: see their apologetics Pages: <http://www.catholic.com/>

An Australian Based Catholic Apologetics Group: 'Lumen Verum'. See their pages at http://www.theworkofgod.org/library/Apologtc/L_Verum/Lumen_V.htm

The Catholic Evidence Guild of New York has a web page at: <http://www.catholicevidence.org/>

Check them all out!]

The priest finds himself supplemented by willing groups of catechists eager to teach the truths of Christ to little children who, because of poverty, remoteness from church or parental neglect, would otherwise never know them. Vacation schools under lay leadership or guidance of staff spring up to capture the errant fancies of the youngster turned loose by the summer holidays into the slums of big cities. Catholic young men and women visit rural districts where there are no Catholic schools, to bring Christ into the minds of the boys and girls who know Him but slightly.

A New Note Struck.

Catholic Action has suddenly made the Catholic lawyer realise that he must bring to his lawyers' associations Catholic solutions of legal and ethical problems. Christ was a lawyer with much to say to the modern man of law.

Catholic physicians have brought to their medical associations the viewpoints of Christ the Physician towards the poor, the needy, the insane, little children and women. He was very clear about the relative importance of body and soul. They have gallantly placed themselves between the helpless sick or the misguided well and pagan principles destructive of society.

Catholic business men have come to realise that Christ would not think that "all is fair in love, war, and business." They have brought to groups of business men principles of justice and fair dealing and honesty singularly Christ-like.

Too little of this, however, has been done. The possibilities opened by Catholic Action are unlimited. Christ's doctrines and Christian philosophy must still be taught to the professional, political, and business world. What a magnificent opportunity to the lay leader who gallantly carries the principles of Christ into the heart of the modern world!

Rebirth.

Throughout the civilised world has spread a great Catholic literary renaissance. Men have realised, with almost a shout, that inside the Church is to be found the truth that makes great literature and the beauty that makes great art. England, Ireland, France, parts of Italy and Austria are to-day pulsing with this reawakening of the world of art and letters to the inexhaustible sources of literary material revealed to the world by Christ. Christ has triumphantly re-entered the pages of world literature.

Inevitably Catholic Action inspires every man and woman who has an itch for the pen to take up that pen in the cause of Christ's own truth. All too long the boundless store of Catholic certainties and Catholic verities has lain neglected. The beautiful romance of Catholic dogma, whether expressed in the wide sweep of the Communion of Saints or in the gemlike life of an individual saint, has been unrecognised even by Catholic writers. Today, however, the powerful pens of Catholics everywhere, the delicate artistry of Catholic poets, are being employed brilliantly to bring the truth of Christ and the beauty of Christ to the reading world.

As the course of Catholic Action moves forward, more and more young writers will realise that in the storehouses of Catholic doctrine and liturgy and ritual and history is the raw material of the greatest literature, literature that will help recreate a civilisation which has been dynamited by the pagan sceptics and the anti-moralists of the past thirty years.

Needed Everywhere.

If the world is to be saved, the spirit of Christ must enter it from every direction. Because his work is so varied and so diversified, demanding full energies and all his resources, the Catholic priest is forbidden by canon law to divide his interest with any strictly secular work. His day must belong twenty-four hours to God.

The prayers and energies of the priest are directed, in consequence, to bringing the spirit of Christ into the whole of life. Christ must dominate with His justice government and politics. Christ must enter freely into homes, creating there something of the spirit of the house of Nazareth. Christ must be free to move through the business world, assuring fair treatment of employees and fair and honourable labour on the part of the employed. Christ belongs in the world of education, for His is the truth that will make men free.

Christ cannot be excluded even from recreation and entertainment, the theatre and the athletic field. His spirit must pervade the life of a man whether he be at work, at play, on the bench of the judge, or at the desk of the student. The ultimate office of the priest is to see that the spirit of Christ is brought to the whole of life.

Not for Sundays Only.

Perhaps the obstacle which has kept the Church back more than anything else, except, of course, the bad example of bad Catholics, is the failure of Catholics to realise that religion is something that goes with a man throughout the entire week, and that Christ belongs almost less to the hours of churchgoing than to the hours of business, pleasure, politics, education, sport, leisure.

Catholic Action might, in consequence, be called twenty-four-hour-a-day religion. It simply communicates to the Catholic the realisation that he must carry the spirit of Christ with him everywhere he goes. He must go from the Communion table to bring Christ with him to his home, his office, his workshop, his classroom, his athletic field, his gymnasium, his concert hall, his theatre. Christ must be invited to dominate all the activities of humanity. He may not be reserved for the brief period of a Sunday's devotions or the swift flight of morning and evening prayer. The Catholic must take Christ with him into every form of human activity and into every field of human endeavour.

Prefaces.

This is a tremendous order.

To prepare for it the Popes have been issuing those significant preludes to Catholic Action, their Encyclicals on capital and labour, on education, on the home and family and marriage, on Church and State, on Christian charity, on zeal for the conversion of the world.

Graphically, and with astonishing foresight, the Popes have portrayed Christ as dominating the relationship of employer and workman. They have shown us the predominant place of Christ in education. They have shown His fundamental importance in the home and in the institution of marriage. The State dares not disregard Him if it wishes to avoid tyranny or anarchy. The non-Catholic world must be given the chance to see Him, not only in the beautiful doctrines of the Faith, but in the splendid practice of the individuals who profess that Faith.

Do, Don't Talk.

Following those broad textbooks of principles, the Pope called the Catholic world to put these principles into immediate practice. And their practice is Catholic Action.

The employer who realises the dignity of labour and the rights of those who follow in the footsteps of Christ the Carpenter is a man of Catholic Action. So is the employee who gives an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, and who refuses the seductive beckoning of the red flag.

The Catholic statesman or politician who brings honour and integrity with him into government, who remembers that above the State there is the power of a just God, who is scrupulously honest with the money of the people and scrupulously just in his support of just law, who remembers that there is a Supreme Judge even above a Supreme Court Justice, and a Ruler Who will call all rulers before His tribunal, is practising Catholic Action. The terrible scandal of graft, even of that contradiction in terms, "honest graft," of corruption in office, tyranny in government, and the corresponding corruption of the voter, cannot exist once Christ has taken His rightful place in the world of statecraft.

Christ Goes Along.

Catholic Action points with insistent finger to the thousands who know not Christ. Laymen and laywomen eagerly stand behind the forward moving army of Christ's missionaries. Quite as eagerly they pray and work, by the convincing argument of example and by the clear light of Catholic viewpoint honestly and insistently expressed, for the conversion of the pagans nearer home.

Christ goes with the Catholic Senator to the capital; with the Catholic physician, not only to the hospital but to his learned societies; He is with the lawyer as he stands before the judge and jury or as he discusses legal ethics with his confreres; with the business man when he goes to the meeting of the board of directors, or that trying meeting when he must face disgruntled employees; with the educator as he enters his lecture hall or his laboratory.

Christ goes with the workman to his bench, and the stenographer to her typewriter; with the cook to her kitchen, and the mother to her nursery; with the Catholic labour leader to his union meeting; with the Catholic farmer to his fields or his co-operative society; with the aviator to his plane, the seaman to his ship, the operator to his radio station, the officer to his regiment.

With equal insistence and with a sense of its supreme importance, Christ is welcomed to the world of recreation, entertainment, and sport. Christ of the open road and the rowers' bench, Christ the welcome guest of dinner parties; Christ the man's man, will not be out of place in any form of amusement or in any type of sport that is decent, clean, really relaxing, and wholesomely entertaining. But if it is not decent or clean or really relaxing or wholesomely entertaining, not only is Christ out of place there, but so is every man and woman who cares for his own mental and spiritual health and the future of the human race.

Welcomed to Homes.

The place of Christ, Who gave us the perfect example of the Holy Family, in home life is clear enough.

Christ must have His place in modern marriage, since it was the Christ of the Marriage Feast of Cana Who elevated marriage to its present dignity. Love grows from lust into sacred affection through the presence of Christ in the relationship of man and woman. And children become precious through the remembrance of the Child of Nazareth.

Extra-ordinary Catholics

All Catholics may be divided (roughly and on the most general lines of their attitude toward their faith) into:

Bad Catholics.

“Dumb” Catholics.

Good, ordinary Catholics.

And

Extra-ordinary Catholics, Catholics who have heard the Pope’s call to Catholic Action and are now marching in the ranks of the great army bringing Christ into all walks of life. Won’t YOU hear the call? Let your answer be: ‘Here I am. Send me!’
