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mon people, at common things, divine sparks flashing at every human contact with men or with the world. There is a divine way to live with others: with God, with men, and with the world. God Himself has shown it clearly in the works of nature and supernature. It has been lived in detail and with divine perfection by the Son of God made man. For its utter human perfection, there is the quiet life of the Mother of God; lest we be abashed by such models, there is the quiet life of the obscure Joseph to make the lesson plain to the most hesitant. The divinization of our social life, this at-homeness in the family of God, is the Holy Spirit's gift of Piety; a gift not given to be idle; a gift proper to every one in the state of grace; and a gift that does its best work on every level of Christian life.

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The Heresy of Action

CHRISTIAN perfection is the fullness of the supernatural life which is communicated to man by grace and unites him to God by making him a participant in the divine nature and raises him to the noble dignity of a son of God and heir of all His goods. Whence it follows that Christian perfection is substantially the perfection of the interior life of grace whose principal act is charity, which unites us to God.

Not attending to this truth, many people go to extremes in their application of the doctrine on the necessity of external works in the spiritual life. To judge from their lives, one would think that sanctity consisted in the number of virtuous acts performed; yet it not infrequently happens that the very ones who are so busily engaged in the active life are in reality very weak in the true Christian life and at a low degree of perfection. Their works are mere routine and lack the vitalizing impulse of divine charity. That activity plays an important role in the spiritual life, no one would gainsay, but if that activity is not imbued with the true spirit of charity which springs from the interior life of grace, it will be saturated with self-love and vanity. The interior life of grace must be the nucleus of the spiritual life because it is grace and charity which make men holy, not good works. Spiritual writers as authoritative as St. John of the Cross, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Theresa of Avila have insisted on this time and time again.

There is another but smaller group who believe that sanctity consists essentially in the exercises of the contemplative life and they follow an ideal of their own making, passing long hours in prayer and silent recollection while neglecting the duties of their state in life. Generally these are the sentimentalists who spend time in pious exercises, not precisely because they love God or seek perfection, but because they experience tender feelings in such practices. If God were to send them

a bit of purgation or suffering, they would immediately hasten to find another exercise more to their liking. Such people despise the activity of others and condemn them for an excessively active life. But while the present Pope has broadly hinted at the "heresy of action" in some quarters, he has no less strongly insinuated that steps must be taken to avoid undue emphasis on the contemplative exercises of the spiritual life.

We intend here to examine the true role and function of external activity in the spiritual life in the light of man's obligation to strive after perfection. We shall discover that it is impossible to make a neat division of the spiritual life into contemplative and active or into ascetical and mystical. There has been too much division and separation; what is needed is a clear view of the unity and harmony of the spiritual life and a recognition of the fact that there is but one and the same road which leads to perfection through the various phases of the Christian life. Nor does this mean that we discard the traditional and time-honored distinctions; we accept them and use them, but we never allow them to militate against the unity and continuity of the spiritual life in its growth from the seed to the full flowering.

NATURE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

In order to discuss the soul's activity in relation to Christian perfection we must understand at the outset in what that perfection consists. And since the nature of a thing can be known from its goal or end, we need but turn to the words of Christ to discover the meaning of Christian perfection: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."¹ In other words, each Christian is called to a life which is substantially divine, a participation in the very life of God Himself. In calling us to the perfection of His Father, Christ placed no limits or divisions in that perfection, and the call was given not to a few select souls, but to all. It was re-echoed later from the cross when the sacred blood was shed, not for a few, but for all.

God never makes empty promises; He verifies and makes effective His every word. Therefore, although we were born as children of the

¹ Matt. 5:48.

sinful Adam and under Satan's dominion, we have been reborn and washed clean by the waters of the Holy Ghost. Though born into the natural order, we have been lifted up by grace, the vital principle of our spiritual life, to a new order which is essentially supernatural. And whereas by grace we were given a real and formal participation in the life of God, by the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost we have received a share in His divine activity so that we can know and love Him supernaturally and serve Him meritoriously. This array of supernatural faculties completes our spiritual organism and makes us apt for growth in perfection. But in addition to these interior functions, we have also the following external helps: the sacraments, which give or increase grace; the commandments and evangelical counsels, which are the laws of the spiritual life; and Christ, who is our pattern and model.

Our perfection, then, consists in the closest possible union with God, even to the point of transformation, and He stands ever ready to bestow more and more grace upon us until that transformation is realized. Here on earth, our union with God is effected by embracing Him with the two supernatural arms of knowledge and love: faith and charity. But since our union with God is not fully realized in its perfection from the first infusion of grace, it must be effected through growth or progress in the spiritual life. This progress, in turn, connotes a cooperation with grace and the meriting of new graces through the workings of the virtues and the gifts. In a word, growth in perfection demands some kind of activity.

Now the root and foundation of every kind of activity is some kind of love. There must be an impulse toward an object, an attraction, a going-out which will be the impetus of action. In the supernatural order charity is the inclination which directly reaches out to God and draws us to Him while at the same time it draws with it all else that we have or do. For that reason, charity is called the form of the virtues and the bond of perfection. Faith, it is true, also unites us to God, but it brings Him into our minds from the aspect of this or that divine truth; charity carries our heart out to God as He is in Himself.

THE STATES OF LIFE

Granted that the Christian must grow in perfection through the activity of charity, all men do not exercise their charity in the same manner or condition of life. This leads quite logically to the general division of life into active and contemplative and, when applied to the exercise of charity and growth in Christian perfection, it means simply that the life of the individual Christian will be characterized by a predominance of either the interior or the exterior acts of charity. In the mystical body, says St. Paul, we are not all one and the same member, but many; for if all were one member, where would be the body? Further, wherever there is a diversity of functions and members, there will also be found a gradation of excellence.

Without discussing the detailed types of particular vocations which fall under the general division of life, we shall content ourselves with a consideration of the active and contemplative phases of life, for this lies at the very core of the problem of the relationship between external activity and Christian perfection. We insist, however, that we are not confining ourselves to active and contemplative religious orders and therefore we do not exclude from our considerations the layman or the parish priest. Each and every Christian, regardless of his particular vocation in life, can be classified as either active or contemplative.

Summarizing the doctrine of St. Thomas,³ we may say that the division of man's life into contemplative and active is based on the intellect, which is in turn divided into speculative and practical. The end of knowledge is either the knowledge itself of truth, and this pertains to the speculative intellect, or knowledge in relation to some kind of action, and this pertains to the practical intellect. Now certain men are especially intent on the contemplation of truth, whereas others are particularly concerned with external actions; from this it follows that man's life is fittingly divided into active and contemplative. "As in every mixture one of the simples predominates, so too in the mean

³ See I Cor. 12:12-31.

⁴ See IIa IIae, q. 179-82.

state of life sometimes the contemplative, sometimes the active element, abounds."⁴

The one act whereby the contemplative life is completed and from which it derives its unity is the contemplation of truth, although there are several acts which lead up to this final one: the understanding of principles, the deduction of conclusions from these principles, and finally the contemplation of the truth itself. But prior to these intellectual activities which lead directly to contemplation, a man must perform other acts:

Man reaches the knowledge of truth in two ways. First, by means of things received from another. In this way, as regards the things he receives from God, he needs *prayer*, . . . while as regards the things he receives from man, he needs *hearing*, in so far as he receives from the spoken word, and *reading*, in so far as he receives from the tradition of Holy Writ. Secondly, he needs to apply himself by his personal study, and thus he requires *meditation*.⁵

In addition to these activities, the moral virtues have a role to play in the contemplative life, although they do not belong to its very essence because the end of the contemplative life is the contemplation of truth.

The moral virtues belong to the contemplative life dispositively. For the act of contemplation, wherein the contemplative life essentially consists, is hindered both by the impetuosity of the passions which withdraw the soul's intention from intelligible to sensible things, and by outward disturbances. Now the moral virtues curb the impetuosity of the passions, and quell the disturbance of outward occupations.⁶

Consequently four things pertain to the contemplative life: first, the moral virtues so far as by their exercise a man disposes himself for contemplation; secondly, the other acts exclusive of contemplation, such as meditation, study, reading of Scripture, and hearing divine truth expounded; thirdly, consideration of the divine effects in the visible

⁴ See *ibid.*, q. 179, a. 1 ad 2 (trans. English Dominicans, Benziger edition). "All the occupations of human actions, if directed to the requirements of the present life in accord with right reason, belong to the active life which provides for the necessities of the present life by means of well-ordered activity. If, on the other hand, they minister to any concupiscence whatever, they belong to the life of pleasure, which is not comprised under the active life. Those human occupations that are directed to the consideration of truth belong to the contemplative life" (*loc. cit.*, ad 3).

⁵ See *ibid.*, q. 180, a. 3 ad 4.

⁶ See *ibid.*, a. 2.

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universe; and fourthly, the complement of all which is the contemplation of divine truth itself.⁷ Finally, St. Thomas points out that although the contemplative life consists chiefly in an act of the intellect, it has its beginning in the appetite, since it is through charity that one is urged to the contemplation of God. For that reason St. Gregory makes contemplation consist in the love of God because in loving God we are aflame to gaze on His beauty. And since the end corresponds to the beginning, the term of contemplation will consist in the delight in the appetite. This is the ultimate perfection of the contemplative life; that is, that the divine truth is not only seen but loved.⁸ "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet."⁹

As has been stated, the active and the contemplative life differ according to the occupations of men bent on different ends: the contemplation of truth or the external works of the active life. Obviously, the moral virtues, although they pertain dispositively to the contemplative life, belong essentially to the active life, because they are chiefly directed to external activity. And since justice directs a man in his relations with his fellow men, it is the chief virtue of the active life, for the active life is defined with reference to our relations with other people. It consists in these things, not exclusively, but principally.¹⁰

But if the active life is inspired by passion, self-interest, or self-love, then it is in opposition, not only to the interior life, but also to the true active life.¹¹ For it is not the proximate or immediate end, but the ultimate end which specifies, and the final orientation of the active life is to glory (not even to an increase of grace on earth); that is, beatific union with God. Yet this ultimate or final end of the active and contemplative life leaves intact the proximate or immediate ends. Therefore it is one and the same ultimate end for both lives: perfection and union in glory; but the immediate end of the active life is the expression of charity for one's neighbor whereas the immediate end of the contemplative life is the expression of love of God. Yet it is to be re-

⁷ See *ibid.*, a. 4.

⁸ See *ibid.*, a. 7 ad 1; a. 1.

⁹ Ps. 33:9.

¹⁰ See *IIa IIae*, q. 181, *passim*.

¹¹ See *IIa IIae*, q. 179, a. 1 ad 1 and 3.

THE HERESY OF ACTION

membered that there can be no true contemplative life without the virtues, and the virtues without the interior life are imperfect.¹²

It is of utmost importance to remember that the contemplative aspect of life is not reserved for periods of prayer nor is it peculiar to those in the contemplative state. Some persons, although living an active life, also cultivate the contemplative aspect, as is evident from the lives of St. Brigid and St. Catherine of Siena. Others in the contemplative state may reach such a peak of charity that they forego divine contemplation, though they greatly delight in it, in order to serve God in the salvation of souls, as is witnessed in the life of St. Bernard.¹³ But the contemplative type is comparatively rare, and the charity of most Christians is effective rather than affective. On the other hand, those who pass from the active to the contemplative exercises usually build upon a more solid foundation because as a rule they are less given to illusions and sentimentality. Therefore, though a man can admirably dispose himself for contemplation in the contemplative state, true contemplatives and mystics are also found in the active state. Indeed, it would be difficult to say whether the proportion of saints in the contemplative state is greater than in the active state.

ACTION AND PERFECTION

The use of the terms active and contemplative is likely to be misleading because contemplation is also a type of action. Basically it is nothing more than recollection in God or the interior life consciously lived.¹⁴ Therefore, before proceeding to a consideration of the relative

¹² In technical language, the *finis operantis* of both lives is the perfection of the interior life through union with God. The *finis operis* of the active life is the love of neighbor; that of the contemplative life is love of God. Therefore, in the contemplative life the *finis operantis* and the *finis operis* are one and the same, giving the contemplative life a marvelous unity. However, St. Thomas points out (*III Sent.*, dist. 36, a. 3 ad 5) that any Christian in the way of salvation must to some extent partake of contemplation, since the precept is binding on all: *Vacate et videte quoniam ego sum Deus* (Ps. 14:2).

¹³ See *De caritate*, a. 11 ad 6. "But I am straitened between two: having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better. But to abide still in the flesh, is needful for you" (Phil. 1:23). "For I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ, for my brethren, who are my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3).

¹⁴ See *IIa IIae*, q. 179, a. 1 ad 3.

excellence of the active and contemplative lives and their role in Christian perfection, it will be necessary to understand clearly the definition and division of action.

The word "action" is ambiguous if one confuses the nominal definition or the vulgarly accepted meaning with the real and scientific definition. Action, the philosophers say, can be of two kinds: immanent or transient. These types are essentially different and have only an analogical likeness; transient action belongs to the category of action and merits the name purely and simply. It designates that action which is wrought on another, a patient, in which the effect of the action is produced and to which it communicates its motion or power. This is the action whereby we act upon material things. It is, as its name implies, a passing or transitory movement.

Furthermore, not only is the patient perfected by the action but that same action bespeaks a definite perfection in the agent performing the act. The perfection of the agent, therefore, must be antecedent to the activity as its principle or source. But the total effect of the transient action as such is in the patient; all that the agent can acquire through his transient acts is a greater facility for subsequent actions. Finally, the patient is as necessary to transient action as is the agent himself. The philanthropist needs the poor if he is to be a philanthropist; the apostle must have persons to influence, else there will be no apostolate.

Immanent action, on the other hand, is characteristic of our spiritual or psychic life. It requires no external patient for its function or perfection because it begins and ends in the agent. Indeed, philosophically speaking, it does not belong to the category of action at all, but to that of quality. It concerns, then, the perfection of the agent himself, so that a man's immanent activity gives him not only greater facility in the use of a particular potency but also a definite increase in the perfection of his very being or personality. In this way the acts of knowledge and love and the interior acts of the moral virtues can perfect a man without any external manifestation.

Applying these philosophical notions to the two principal states of life, we find that they can be considered under a triple aspect: that of immanent action, that of transient action; and that of the states of life

as such. Considering immanent activity, the contemplative life will be characterized by the interior acts of the virtues and gifts which are directed immediately to God (e.g., charity, gift of piety), and the active life will be characterized by the interior acts of the virtues and gifts in relation to one's neighbor (e.g., patience, temperance). The transient acts of the contemplative life will be those external acts, especially of the virtues of religion and charity, which are immediately ordained to God; the transient acts of the active life will be the external virtuous acts toward one's neighbor, especially the virtue of justice and the corporal works of mercy. The third aspect is that already treated above; namely, either those who leave all things to practice the immanent and transient acts of the contemplative life, or those who spend their lives principally in the performance of the immanent and transient acts of the active life.

The virtues and gifts, then, operate in both the active and the contemplative life, but under different aspects. We have already seen, under the guidance of the Angelic Doctor, that the exercise of the moral virtues, though essentially pertaining to the active life, serves as a disposition to the contemplative life. This is especially true in persons who by temperament are more suited for the active life because either the interior or the exterior exercise of the moral virtues will drain off excess energy from the soul and establish a state of equilibrium and tranquillity.¹⁵ But when these virtues reach their fullness and perfection, they will no longer be dispositions to the interior life; rather, they will be an addition or an overflow from perfection attained. That is the reason for the statement that there can be no contemplative life without the practice of the virtues (as dispositions), and no perfect exercise of the virtues (as an overflow) without the interior life.

EXCELLENCE OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

In view of the foregoing doctrine and distinctions, the excellence of contemplation over action should be obvious. Its excellence stems from a threefold source; namely, by reason of the object of the contempla-

¹⁵See Menéndez-Reigada, "Psychological Aspects of the Struggle for Perfection," *Cross and Crown*, March, 1949.

tive life, by reason of the activity of the contemplative life, and by reason of the effects of this activity in the agent. As to the first, St. Thomas states that the contemplative life is concerned with divine things whereas the active life is concerned with human things,¹⁶ and he enlarges this by saying:

The root of merit is charity; and while charity consists in the love of God and our neighbor, the love of God is by itself more meritorious than the love of our neighbor. Wherefore that which pertains more directly to the love of God is generically more meritorious than that which pertains directly to the love of our neighbor for God's sake. Now the contemplative life pertains directly and immediately to the love of God; on the other hand, the active life is more directly concerned with the love of our neighbor. Wherefore the contemplative life is generically of greater merit than the active life.¹⁷

Secondly, the contemplative life is more excellent by reason of its activity because it is the immanent activity of that which is best and most proper to man; namely, the intellect.¹⁸ Dom Aelred Graham neatly summarizes the teaching of the Angelic Doctor on this point:

St. Thomas states the underlying principle in the fewest possible words: "In the operations of the soul, especially of the sensitive and the intellectual soul, it must be noted that, since they do not pass into external matter, they are acts or perfections of the agent . . . because actions which pass into external matter are rather actions and perfections of the matter transformed. . ."¹⁹ In other words, contemplation is an *immanent* movement or activity of the soul, whereby it perfects itself through its faculties of intelligence and will, whereas action is a *transitive* movement or activity perfecting rather the material with which the action has to do. Contemplation, though implying quiescence in respect of things sensible and materi-

¹⁶ See *Ia IIae*, q. 182, a. 1.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, a. 1. "Sometimes a man is called away from the contemplative life to the works of the active life on account of some necessity of the present life, yet not so as to be compelled to forsake contemplation altogether. . . . Hence it is clear that . . . this is done by way not of subtraction but of addition" (*loc. cit.*, ad 3). "Nevertheless it may happen that one man merits more by the works of the active life than another by the works of the contemplative life. For instance, through excess of Divine love a man may now and then suffer separation from the sweetness of Divine contemplation for the time being, that God's will may be done and for His glory's sake" (*loc. cit.*, a. 2).

¹⁸ See *Ia IIae*, q. 182, a. 1.

¹⁹ See *Ia IIae*, q. 31, a. 5.

al, is itself the highest form of activity. . . . The repose and absence of discursive thought which the mystics emphasize in their experiences should not be confused with the state of mental inertia. . . . Sharing the divine secrets, the contemplative reproduces on the creaturely level something of the immobility of God Himself gazing eternally into His own essence. Not . . . an immobility of potentiality, of having perfections yet to acquire, but the immobility of act, of being in a state to which there is nothing to add.²⁰

The third reason for the excellence of the contemplative life, namely, the effects of its activity, is evident from what has already been said concerning immanent and transient action. It is better by far to perfect one's intellect through study than to paint pictures; so also it is much more excellent, all things being equal, to go directly to God through faith and charity than to perform the corporal works of mercy.

Before leaving the consideration of the states of life, we must say a word about the "mixed" life. Although St. Thomas speaks of this aspect of life when treating of the kinds of religious orders,²¹ it is by no means restricted to the cloister. Indeed, it belongs generically to the active life because it is characterized by external activity which is directed to the salvation of souls, but it is the eminent degree of the active life so far as it is activity proceeding by way of overflow from contemplation.

Accordingly we must say that the work of the active life is twofold. One proceeds from the fulness of contemplation, such as teaching and preaching. . . . And this work is more excellent than simple contemplation. For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate. The other work of the active life consists entirely in outward occupation, for instance almsgiving, receiving guests, and the like, which are less excellent than the works of contemplation, except in cases of necessity.²²

Previously St. Thomas had made reference to a type of activity which flows from the contemplative life "by way of addition,"²³ but

²⁰ Dom Aelred Graham, O.S.B., *The Love of God* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), p. 185.

²¹ See *Ia IIae*, q. 188, a. 6.

²² See *ibid.*, q. 182, a. 1 ad 3.

²³ See *ibid.*

he insists that these external occupations must not cause the soul to forsake contemplation. Speaking of the mixed life, however, he makes allowance only for those external activities by which a man imparts to others the very truths which he has contemplated. The exercises of the mixed life, therefore, will be restricted to preaching, teaching, and writing and their allied activities.²⁴ The mixed life is the most excellent, consequently, not by reason of the activity of preaching and teaching as such, but because these activities, although external actions, are merely a prolongation of the contemplative life.

St. Augustine, St. Gregory and St. Bernard are among the greatest Christian contemplatives, but each of these men combined with their contemplation a life of prodigious activity. They were not dreamers absorbed in heavenly things while ignoring opportunities for well-doing around them. Like Christ Himself they were ever at the service of men, and just as His unceasing contemplation did not diminish His activity, so could they enter upon the active life without losing the fruits of the contemplative. They did not lead the "mixed" life, if by that is meant the disconnected and haphazard alternation of periodic prayer with external good works. Their activity was of the sort in which they remained at home while they were abroad. Their lives, simplified and reduced to unity by love, were fulfilled in works of charity. They were true disciples of Christ in that their contemplation led them inevitably to become apostles. The life which Christ Himself led, St. Thomas teaches,²⁵ was better than the life which is merely contemplative, for it flowed from the abundance of contemplation. With reason then we may conclude that, apart from the direct worship of God, the work of preaching and teaching divine truth, when it proceeds from the superabundance of contemplation, . . . is that by which most of all we are conformed to the likeness of Christ.²⁶

Although the mixed life is generically reducible to the active life, its excellence over the contemplative and active lives in no way militates against the statement that the contemplative is more excellent than the active life. This is evident from what has already been said of the mixed

²⁴ "Teaching belongs sometimes to the active, sometimes to the contemplative life. It belongs to the active life, when a man conceives a truth inwardly, so as to be directed thereby in his outward action; but it belongs to the contemplative life when a man conceives an intelligible truth, in the consideration and love whereof he delights. . . . The other object of teaching is on the part of the speech heard, and thus the object of teaching is the hearer. As to this object all doctrine belongs to the active life to which external actions pertain." (See *ibid.*, q. 181, a. 3).

²⁵ See IIIa, q. 40, a. 1 ad 2.

²⁶ Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

life as a prolongation of the contemplative life. Nor can it be objected on philosophical grounds that, since immanent activity is superior to transient activity, the active life and the mixed life are both inferior to the contemplative life. The exercises peculiar to the mixed life, such as preaching and teaching, are not of themselves harmful to the contemplative or interior life of the individual; rather they may fortify and perfect it even more, for such activities serve to intensify the exercises of contemplation.²⁷ It does seem in line with the Angelic Doctor's thought, however, to confine the mixed life only to those activities, such as preaching and teaching and writing, wherein the matter or object of the external action is the same divine truth which has been the matter of contemplation. The other activities of the apostolate, since they pertain essentially to the external works of the moral virtues, should follow from a high degree of the interior and contemplative life, but they can exist without it.²⁸

The superiority of the contemplative life over the active life and of the mixed life over the other two is evident to anyone who realizes that the true excellence of the Christian life is measured by the grade of charity and that charity cannot reach its perfection without the interior or contemplative exercises.²⁹ The formality of Christian perfection con-

²⁷ See IIa IIae, q. 182, a. 4 ad 2.

²⁸ It should be clear from what has been said that in treating of the contemplative life St. Thomas is not referring merely to mystical or infused contemplation as the activity proper to the contemplative state. This is evident from the fact that he bases his division of the states of life on the natural operations of the intellect and also from the fact that he lists various operations, such as prayer, study, hearing, and meditation, whereby man acquires a certain degree of contemplation. Further, mystical or infused contemplation is not something that can be had at will or regulated by the laws of a religious institute. Any Christian is in the contemplative state of life, then, whose contemplation is not something that can be had at will or regulated by the laws of a religious institute. Any Christian is in the contemplative state of life, then, whose principal and predominant activity is the consideration of divine truth. Mystical or infused contemplation maintains its position as a normal (but generally infrequent) development of the life of grace. It is not restricted to the contemplative state but is available to all Christians, even the most active, if they faithfully cooperate with grace.

²⁹ "Our actions . . . have their value from the end for which they are performed, in other words from the thoughts and intentions which direct them. . . . It is for this reason that contemplation is, in itself, worthier and more meritorious than external activity, for it is that loving knowledge of God and His will in our regard of which Christian morality should be the outward expression. To find this teaching we need not turn to the Greek philosophers but to the gospel itself. In the commandment to love God and our neighbor is summed up the whole law and the prophets. This love depends in its turn on that knowledge of God which is eternal life. All our good works must proceed from the knowledge and love of God, that is, from faith and charity. And these are the twin sources of divine contemplation" (Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 180).

sists in the *act* of charity,³⁰ which is an immanent activity directed immediately to God and which, therefore, pertains to the contemplative life. But when charity is perfect, it does not remain idle, for true love is expansive, and hence the prodigious activity in the lives of many of the saints.

It has been pointed out that "The formula of the two lives, the active and the contemplative, derives from Greek philosophy and according to its original Greek conception does not fit exactly on to the Christian life."³¹ Unless the implied antithesis between them is rightly understood there must result an oversimplified view of the multifarious ways of serving God which fails to take account of their diversity. St. Augustine, in his exegesis of the scriptural story of Martha and Mary, and St. Thomas, dividing human activity into an exercise of either the contemplative or practical intellect, were all aware that the complexities of every-day life cannot always be fitted into such a neatly tabulated scheme. In practice man is as incapable of perpetual contemplation as he is of unremitting activity. His life is contemplative when, as a whole, it is directed towards the contemplation of divine things; it is active when, as a whole, it is directed towards the performance of external works. But it is an error to regard action and contemplation as mutually exclusive. It is unfortunately true, as St. Thomas points out,³² that our external activities lessen the purity of contemplation; the reason being that the senses, which are necessarily engaged in each of our actions, tend to distract the mind from its direct preoccupation with God. This is why contemplatives enter upon activity with a certain reluctance. Nevertheless their charity, which cannot be idle, together with the natural tendency—never suppressed by mortification—of man's sensitive life to express itself outwardly prompt them to action.³³

Finally, the fact of the superiority of the contemplative over the active life is not merely speculative; it is very practical. Two important conclusions can be drawn from it: First, contemplation, as the apex of the soul's activity, is not a means in relation to the virtues; it is the other way around. Without the exercise of the virtues and the active purifications the soul cannot proceed to contemplation. Conversely, contemplation or union with God through love and knowledge is one of the

³⁰ See Passerini, *De hominum status et officiis*, I, 184.

³¹ Dom Justin McCann, *Saint Benedict*, p. 179.

³² See Ia, q. 112, a. 1 ad 3.

³³ Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 182 f.

strongest impulses to virtue. Secondly, since contemplation is by its very nature superior to action, there can never be an age in the Church when their roles will be reversed. Therefore it is erroneous to speak of the "spirituality of action" if by this is meant the exclusion of contemplative activity. External activity may be and is a disposition to contemplation and perfection but it can never be the very essence of sanctity. Action can also be an overflow from the perfect interior life, but never as a subtraction from it. As St. Gregory puts it: "The more favored a soul is with divine contemplation, with the more ardor does it consecrate itself to action. Only in the beginners and in the imperfect can the one be injurious to the other. . . . In the perfect, this opposition disappears."³⁴

THE APOSTOLATE

The apostolate may be understood in a twofold manner: taken strictly, it refers to the priestly ministry, but in a wide sense it embraces the activity of religious who are not priests as well as the specifically Christian activity of the laity. Hence we speak of the lay apostolate. In either acceptance the apostolate may be either strictly doctrinal (and then it pertains to the mixed life) or it may signify the external acts of charity to one's neighbor which are especially manifested through the virtue of justice and the corporal works of mercy. It is in this last sense, whereby the apostolate belongs essentially to the active life, that we wish to speak of the apostolate, and therefore our considerations will apply equally to priests, religious, and the laity.³⁵

There are two possible extremes regarding man's activity in relation to the spiritual order. Judaism would justify man by good works alone;

³⁴ *In I Reg.*, cap. 2, n. 10.

³⁵ It should be noted that although the parish priest does not belong by vocation to the mixed life, nevertheless he does exercise many "mixed" activities in the course of his ministry; e.g., preaching, teaching divine truths, writing. And whatever has been said concerning the qualifications for the mixed life, will pertain to all priests in regard to these activities which should flow from the abundance of contemplation. The same can be said of the layman who treats divine truth *ex professo* in writing or teaching, although the layman does not have the office or mission that the priest has. Our consideration of the apostolate, then, does not apply to the doctrinal or sacramental ministry of the priest, but to those other activities of his life whereby, under the impulse of charity, he attends to the corporal and spiritual needs of his neighbor.

Protestantism would justify man by faith alone, thus denying the necessity and value of good works. The latter was embraced and followed by the Quietists and Illuminists and was specifically condemned by the Church in various declarations; the former was also condemned by the Church under the title of Americanism, although it is by far the more obdurate of the two. In fact, the heresy of action still re-echoes among some misguided Catholic actionists and priest-workers. Fundamentally, both extremes would make man's justification and sanctification something purely external, as if the supernatural order and grace were a destruction of man's nature and personality.

From the very nature of the age in which we live, the traditional doctrine on good works can make little impression on the mind of modern man. Yet, without an appreciation of this doctrine, one can hardly form a true estimate of the riches of Christian spirituality; rather, it is almost inevitable that men should fall headlong into the heresy of action.⁸⁶ It is but logical that a materialistic age should look upon movement and quantity as the great realities. When millions of people are trained to look upon the latest achievements in the natural sciences as the criterion of man's worth and when power and wealth are taken as the sole measure of a successful life, it is not to be expected that men will contemplate life with any measure of accuracy. Activity is evaluated by the speed and efficiency and quantity in which it is done, rather than in relation to its effect on the worker and its value in human life. The same pragmatic values are transferred to the domain of moral actions. It is the practical man, not the virtuous man, who is worthy of imitation and admiration; the man who gets things done. The true significance of the virtues is lost sight of, and charity becomes a philanthropy rather than good will toward one's neighbor and union with God in love.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The phrase "heresy of action" was used in exactly this sense by Pope Pius XII in a communication to the Father General of the Jesuits on June 16, 1944.

⁸⁷ See Dom Aelred Graham, O.S.B., *The Love of God*, pp. 97 f. "We ask how much a man has done, but from what degree of virtuous principle he acts, is not so carefully weighed. We inquire whether he has been courageous, handsome, skillful, a good writer, a good singer, or a good laborer; but how poor he is in spirit, how patient and meek, how devout and spiritual, is seldom spoken of. Nature respects the outward things of a man. Grace turns itself to the interior. The one is often disappointed; the other has her trust in God and therefore is not deceived" (*The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. III, chap. 31).

Some pious persons, prompted by an indiscreet zeal and perhaps also by a certain measure of vanity, are absorbed in exterior works. They are convinced that by that means alone they can accumulate merits and rapidly advance in Christian perfection. But perfection resides . . . in the interior being rather than exterior activity. The value and merit of our works correspond to the degree of renewal and sanctification of our souls. If we are very holy and always act under the impulse of divine charity, then all our works will be great, valuable, and efficacious in the eyes of God; although outwardly they may appear humble and contemptible. On the other hand, those works that proceed from a heart lacking in generosity are niggardly, even though they may appear grandiose and full of glory.

Therefore, if our perfection is nullified, owing to our death to the life of grace, then the most excellent works which we perform can avail nothing before God. However ostentatious they may be, they are dead and without avail. . . . As St. Thomas says, "an act is so much the more meritorious when the grace that informs it is greater."⁸⁸ And when, in conformity with that grace, our works are more and more informed by actual charity, then they are also more pure and vital, more free from the dust of earth and capable of increasing grace and glory. . . .

Finally, the more lofty and noble the virtue which is more and more informed by charity, the more meritorious and excellent are its acts. Hence the virtue of religion surpasses all the other moral virtues, and those of the interior or contemplative life avail more than external virtues. Yet all are necessary in their own right and all mutually assist one another. Complete perfection lies in knowing how to harmonize them.

But the interior is of value in itself, whereas the exterior without the interior is sterile and dead. Of little value before God are the many external works performed without a right intention and purity of heart. . . . Of little value are works performed without the spirit of prayer, which irrigates the soul with the rain of grace and the ardor of charity; nor does the world's esteem for such works alter the situation. Indeed, such works can become utterly useless and even harmful if they so absorb the soul that they drain the source of its energies and serve only as a pabulum for self-love and an inducement to vanity. . . .

Nevertheless fervor and devotion are themselves increased, especially in beginners, by outward good works and the pious practices that have been approved by the Church. . . . But in these pious practices he must take care to avoid any sentimental emptiness as well as to shun the many routine devotions that are readily introduced but that are opposed to the Christian

⁸⁸ *In II Sent.*, dist. 29, q. 1, a. 4.

spirit and the mind of the Church. The Church desires that these things serve as a preparation for and not as an obstacle to divine inspiration.³⁹

Hence, the value of all external activity stems from the interior life; and, as we have seen, the interior life consists essentially in grace and formally in charity. The two are inseparably connected, since charity is in a sense grace in action. The manner, therefore, in which we understand charity will color our entire concept of the apostolate and its relation to Christian perfection.

Charity is not, as some have maintained, an absolutely disinterested love in the sense that we should love God for Himself alone without any consideration at all for our part in the union of that love. An absolutely disinterested love is an impossibility. Neither is charity for one's neighbor a love of neighbor for his sake alone. The disinterestedness of charity must be understood in the sense that we love our neighbor for the love of God and that we love God as our greatest good and ultimate happiness. The order of charity is that we love God more than self or neighbor and we love self more than neighbor.⁴⁰ Therefore we seek not self or neighbor in our charitable deeds, but we seek God; yet our detachment can never be such that it absconds from that loving union with God which is the very essence of charity and the foreshadowing of glory.

One must also remember the need of the moral virtues for growth in charity, for, if it is true that there is no supernatural virtue without charity, which is the soul of the virtues, it is equally true that there is no charity without the other supernatural virtues. They are inseparable. Further, the virtue of justice, although it especially characterizes the active life and the apostolate, does not constitute the sum and substance of the active life. Prudence is needed for right direction; fortitude is essential to avoid presumption and vainglory and to overcome sloth; temperance will insure purity of intention and forestall any undue attachments to creaturely things. And each act of these virtues, when ordered by charity, will bring an increase of charity and will strengthen the soul's bond with God. The complete cessation of acts or the

³⁹ Arintero, *The Mystical Evolution* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1949), I, 303 f.

⁴⁰ See IIa IIae, q. 26.

continual repetition of remiss acts, although not able to weaken or destroy charity directly (for it is an infused virtue), will eventually dispose for a fall and invite the growth of evil habits. Charity, therefore, must not lie dormant; it must be ever active and directing us to our supreme end.

By the moral goodness or badness of our actions do we have status as men, by them shall we be judged in eternity if not also in time. . . . It is notorious that religion can make an emotional and intellectual appeal while leaving the moral character practically untouched. A liturgical revival, for example, is not necessarily a sign of a renewal of religious spirit nor an interest in Catholic philosophy a proof of the divine predilection, even a taste for "mysticism" and the refinements of spirituality is compatible with lapses from obvious duty. . . . Only when we have laid firm hold of the infused virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance may we safely set our course for the stars. Charity, as well as faith, must die without good works. And good works themselves are the issue of moral character.

Freedom from habitual sins . . . is an indispensable condition of leading the truly Christian life; but it is a condition and not its end and object. The end, to be achieved in some measure at least even in this world, is a union with God in knowledge and love by comparison with which the closest of earthly unions is but a shadow and a symbol. This is the fundamental truth of Christian morality; it should be the light of all our seeing. The shedding of vices and acquirement of virtues, the more or less painful processes of asceticism which are part of the law of life, take on a new meaning when seen from this angle. They are no more than the tests of the lover in search of his beloved, the trials of the wayfarer on his journey home. The strife and stress of our present existence are not to be avoided on the plea that we are citizens of another world, but they must be viewed in relation to that world. . . . Grace surrounds our actions with an eternal weight of glory, but it never substitutes itself for them. Even though we be raised to a participation in the divine life we have as yet no security of tenure. The vision by which each man lives, the love in his heart, and the deeds which reveal both are the surest sign-posts of the way in which he is traveling. Our every-day actions are the instruments by which we fashion for ourselves an immortal destiny and climb to the summit of the everlasting hills.⁴¹

Evidently, therefore, one cannot speak of a spiritual formation by external activity or the apostolate and omit the interior activity. In

⁴¹ Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28.

other words, recollection in God, prayer, and mortification are essential. Activity is not life; it presupposes life. So Pope Pius XI stated that "the pursuit of one's personal perfection is the principal aim of Catholic Action."⁴² From this it can be seen that a perfect and fruitful active life or apostolate presupposes contemplation as an aid and a source of efficacy; the perfection of the virtues must proceed from charity, and they never reach their full development without intimate union with God through prayer and recollection.

Therefore souls that are but slightly amicable to the interior life rarely produce lasting fruits, however much zeal they manifest and however great the activity which they display, for their activity is filled with imperfections and human considerations. Actually, a person can give only what he possesses and he can influence others only according to his own dispositions. If a soul is imperfect and dissipated, the fruits which it produces will give evidence of its poverty and weakness.⁴³ But if by means of abnegation and the interior life, the soul despoils itself of worldly views and puts on Jesus Christ, it can distribute the treasures of the divine heart with which it is always in communication. Then what is given to others will not be the soul's own, but the everlasting riches of God. Such a soul will dispense more blessings from heaven in a day than others less perfect could do in months or years. A soul which is perfect in its union with God cannot help but lead many souls in its wake, as did the Blessed Mother.

On the other hand, he who is not sufficiently united with God will never produce true fruits of life, however much he may labor. He will have little to give and therefore he will be unable to lead souls efficaciously to God. Lacking the required purity of intention, he will soon begin to exercise his apostolate merely for the love of work or, what is worse, he will make the external activities of his life an end in themselves.

But how can the priest, for example, satisfy the needs of his interior life as well as the apostolate? If the whole meaning of the priesthood comes from his apostolate, what happens to the self sacrifice and de-

⁴² See Arintero, *The Mystical Evolution*, I, 123.

⁴³ See St. Theresa, *The Life*, chap. 13; St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, annotation 29.

tachment of the priest in view of the good of souls? It seems to be a contradiction of the doctrine on the order of charity; namely, that we are to love God more than self or neighbor and love ourselves more than our neighbor. One must not confuse the meaning of self-sacrifice and detachment, however. Self-love and undue attachment to creatures are an obstacle to the apostolate and it is in this sense that every priest must practice self-sacrifice and detachment; but the law of charity still remains: we must love God first and then self and finally our neighbor. In all that he does, the priest should first of all seek God and he includes his neighbor in his love of God as one who can share in this love.

Further, the apostolate can sanctify the priest only so far as it brings with it an increase of charity. No pope has ever said: "Give yourself to the apostolate that you may be perfect," but "Sanctify and perfect yourself so that your apostolate may be fruitful." So the Church does not propose perfection as a result of zeal, but as a requisite for the fruitfulness of zeal. Only true zeal which flows from an intense charity can produce acts which will increase charity and overcome the obstacle to the apostolate.⁴⁴ Therefore, unless the ardent love of neighbor implies also an ardent love of God, the apostle's zeal is only apparent or merely natural, something that flows from an active temperament.

The interior life and the apostolate mutually influence and counter-balance each other: the active life of the apostolate disposing for an increase of grace and charity; the interior life regulating the apostolate. In particular, the Christian engaged in the works of the apostolate must give full play to the practices of asceticism through the exercise of the moral virtues, both acquired and infused, for this is the only sure control over excesses. He must likewise make use of the contemplative exercises of the interior life and specifically prayer, meditation, and the study of divine truth. Then, if he is faithful in these things, his apostolate will eventually become the overflow of a deep and rich interior life, and he himself will be in very truth the salt of the earth and true light of the world.

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