

## THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY THROUGH CATHOLIC ACTION.

The Twentieth Century is witnessing the rapid growth **and** development of two world-wide movements within the Catholic Church—the Liturgical Movement and Catholic Action. The close connexion between these two movements is not always appreciated, for both of them have been considerably misunderstood. The authentic Liturgical Movement is not just a rampage for quilismas and outside chasubles; nor is authentic Catholic Action just a drive for Clean Films, still **less** a pretext for an intensified campaign of what has been called ‘ecclesiastical ballyhoo.’

On closer acquaintance it will be found that both these movements are instinct with the same idea—the renewal and increase of active participation by the laity in the life and work of the Church, the utilization to the full of the power conveyed by the Character of Baptism and, especially, of Confirmation. The chief objective of the Liturgical Movement is active lay participation in the Church’s worship; it is a revolt from the lamentable state of things which tended to make the layman little more than a passive spectator of the public worship of God. in favour of a return to the corporate congregational worship of the primitive Church. Catholic Action is formally and authoritatively defined by the Holy Father as (active) *lay participation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy*. It may be regarded as a revolt from the tendency to consider the layman as existing to **be** ministered unto but not to minister, a reaffirmation of his right and duty to take an active part in the Church’s official mission of salvation.

The word *Apostle* means ‘one who is *sent*.’ *Apostolate* and *mission* mean one and the same thing. It is instructive to see how the word is used in the New Testament.’

The Apostle *par excellence* is ‘the apostle and high priest of our confession, Jesus’ (Heb. iii, 1) who as He Himself constantly affirms, was *sent* into the world by His

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<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of the conception of the Apostolate in the New Testament, see H. Dieckmann, S.J., *De Ecclesia*, Vol. I, pp. 197-285.

Father. His Apostolate or Mission was the atonement **or** reconciliation of mankind with God—the reunion of God and man. His Mission was therefore essentially a *Priestly* mission, an apostolate of mediation. He brings man to God through the supreme priestly act of worship through His Sacrifice; He brings God to man by His priestly ministry of labour for souls, by proclaiming the Word of **God** and bringing His Grace to men. His apostolic action is theandric (*i.e.* Divine-human) action: His Humanity the instrument (*instrumentum coniunctum*) of Divine power and activity.

He is the ‘*one* mediator of God and man.’ (I. Tim. ii, 5.) But His priestly mission was not confined to the few years of His earthly sojourning, nor His apostolic action of salvation to the space-limitations of His visible bodily contacts. He formed a Body, a mystical, social Body, which would transcend the physical limitations of space and time of the Body He took of Mary. In short, He founded a Church which, in Bossuet’s famous words, ‘is Jesus Christ Himself, but Jesus Christ continued and extended in time and space.’

In this Body ‘we have many members, but all have not the same office’ (Rom. xii, 4.) He appointed ‘some *apostles*, some prophets, and other some evangelists, and other some pastors and doctors. . . .’ (Eph. iv, 11.)

But, more particularly, ‘He chose *twelve*, whom He also named *apostles*.’ (Lk. vi, 13.) These are *The* Apostles in a quite peculiar, distinctive, technical sense. To them He hands on His own priestly power and mission. They are the inheritors of the mission he Himself had received of His Father. ‘As the Father *sent* me, so *send* I you.’ (Jn. xx. 21.) ‘All power is given to me in heaven and in earth: going therefore teach ye all nations. . . .’

These are Apostles *supra modum* (11. Cor. xii, 11.) In them, and in them alone, resides a full share in Christ’s priestly apostolic power and authority which they, in their turn, handed on to their successors, the Hierarchy of Bishops united with the Chief Bishop, the Successor of the Prince of the Apostles.

## THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY THROUGH CATHOLIC ACTION

But it is not the Twelve alone, nor yet the Twelve with Paul and Barnabas, whom we find exercising in various ways and degrees the apostolic ministry of Christ. Nor yet those alone who were certainly endowed with the sacerdotal character. From the beginning there were lay *collaborators*, men and women. There were the Seventy-two who, whatever may have become of them afterwards, were certainly not priests when 'the Lord sent them two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself was to come' (Lk. x, 1.)<sup>2</sup> There was the Gerasen 'who began to publish in Decapolis' how great things Jesus had done for him, and all men wondered' (Mk. v, 20.); the Samaritan woman who induced many to believe in Him (Jn. iv, 39.); one who cast out devils in His name yet did not so much as follow the Twelve (Mk. ix, 37.) There were the numberless lay helpers of St. Paul of both sexes whom we find exercising distinctively ministerial work. And so it has continued throughout the whole history of the Church.<sup>3</sup>

The Lay Apostolate is a historic fact, as old as the Church Herself. The Holy Father is emphatic on this point. 'Since the time of the Apostles there have been collaborators of the Apostolate' (Address to C. A. pilgrims, August, 1926) 'It is a work which has never been unknown from apostolic times onward.' (Letter to Card. Bertram.)

Such is the *fact*; what is the explanation?<sup>4</sup> How can it be that laymen can exercise this apostolate, which, we have

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. Dabin, *L'Apostolat laïque*, p. 19. 'We do not think it extravagant to see in this successful mission of the Seventy-two the glorious firstfruits of Catholic Action.'

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Dabin, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-53.

<sup>4</sup> For fuller treatment see especially the brilliant and profound (but spirited and thoroughly readable) essay of Dr. Rudolf Graher: *Die dogmatischen Grundlagen der katholischen Aktion*. (Haas und Grabherr, Augsburg, 1 Mark.) See also Dabin *op. cit. passim*, and the article *L'Action catholique et l'enseignement dogmatique* by P. Glorieux, in *La Vie Intellectuelle*, May, 1934.

## BLACKFRIARS

seen, is a *Priestly* mission, a *Divine* work? How can those who are not Bishops or priests have the Divine Power which saves souls in the name and with the power of Christ? How, in short, can a layman be in any sense an Apostle? Would it not be more true to say that the term 'Apostolate of the laity' is really a complimentary but inexact term indicating the fact that sometimes the Bishops and clergy call upon the laity to lend a hand in work which does not really belong to them? That the Apostolate, even in this loose sense, is therefore not a normal part of the life of a layman, but something additional and exceptional?

Doubtless there are writers who might lead us so to suppose. But the teaching of the Holy Father on this point is unequivocal. He writes to Cardinal Segura :

The Apostolate is one of the duties inherent in the Christian life. If we ponder upon it we shall see that the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation impose— among other duties— this apostolate of Catholic Action which is a spiritual service to our neighbour. Through Confirmation we become soldiers of Christ. A soldier should labour *and* fight, not so much for himself as for others . . . Baptism also, in a way less obvious to the uninitiate, imposes the duty of the apostolate since through it we become members of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ . . . .

From this authoritative statement, which may be paralleled by several others, three fundamental truths emerge. First, that the Apostolate is *inherent in the Christian life*, that is to say it is a normal and intrinsic part of the *life* and duty of every Christian. Secondly that this is so in virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism which makes us members of the Mystical Body which carries on the work and mission that Jesus Christ began in Galilee. Thirdly, that the Sacrament of Confirmation has some particular relevance to the apostolate of the laity.

In this last fact we must seek for the solution of the problem, for it is agreed that 'Confirmation deserves to be called the Sacrament of Catholic Action' (Mgr. Fontenelle.) This is so, not precisely in virtue of the grace which the Sacrament confers (which is sanctifying grace, conducive

immediately to the personal holiness of the recipient), but to its *character*.

We all learn in the Catechism that three of the Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation and Orders, confer a *character*; but that of confirmation, especially, has not received the attention it deserves, even from professional theologians. The call to Catholic Action will doubtless occasion the deeper study of this dogma.

It is impossible in the space at our disposal to give any adequate idea of the doctrine and theology of Sacramental Character. But attention must be drawn to certain fundamental principles.

And first of all to the sublime doctrine of St. Thomas that sacramental character is 'spiritual power' (*Summa*, III. lxiii, 2.) whereby 'any believer is deputed either to receive or to hand on to others those things which pertain to the worship of God' (*ib.* art. 3.) Hence 'the sacramental characters' (not only the character of Holy Orders) 'are certain participations in the Priesthood of Christ, derived from Christ Himself' (*ibid.*) It is clear that Baptism gives *inter alia* the passive 'spiritual power' which empowers us to receive a share in Christ's priestly work, and that Holy Orders gives the active 'spiritual power' to co-operate as instrumental agents (*instrumenta separata*) of that priestly activity in *handing on to others* the effects of that work. But what of Confirmation?

It is certain that the power conveyed by Confirmation is an active power demanding a special outpouring of the Holy Ghost; it is, like the Sacrament of Holy Order, administered (normally) by a Bishop<sup>5</sup> with the laying on of hands and anointing, indicating consecration to a definite state or office. It is equally certain that it is not the Sacrament of Holy Order, but a distinct Sacrament differing from it not merely in degree but in kind.

The particular work to which this Sacrament consecrates us is variously described. Most commonly it is said to be that of a 'soldier of Christ.' This is evidently

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<sup>5</sup> The oil at least, *must* be consecrated by a Bishop.

## BLACKFRIARS

metaphorical, but conveys forcibly, as the Pope says, the idea of active service for others. St. Thomas shows that the benefit of the Sacrament is not purely personal but social when he remarks that it **is** conferred at an age 'when a man begins to communicate his actions to others, whereas he had hitherto (as a child) lived as it were to himself' (III. lxxii, 2.) It confers 'spiritual strength for battle' (*ib.* art. iv.) Of its character he writes:

**By** the Sacrament of Confirmation there is given to man 'spiritual power' for *actions* other than those for which **power** is given in Baptism. In Baptism he receives power for doing those things which pertain to his **own** salvation . . . but in Confirmation he receives power which pertains to spiritual warfare against the enemies of the Faith . . . against *visible* enemies, *i.e.* against persecutors of the Faith, by *publicly proclaiming the Name of Christ*. (*Ib.* art. 8).

The resemblance of these **activities** to those to which we are called by Catholic Action is at least obvious enough to suggest that there is reason for the contention of Dr. Craber that Confirmation is *das Weihesakrament des Laienapostolats*—the Sacrament of Consecration to the Lay-Apostolate.

To return however from probabilities to certainties, the apostolate is unquestionably something 'inherent in the Christian life.' Hence Catholic Action is deliberately defined as *participation in*,\* not merely collaboration with,

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\* The philosophical notion of participation which, as Aristotle remarked, is vague and undefined in Plato, becomes a definite concept in St. Thomas and subsequent Catholic theologians. 'To participate signifies, as it were, *partem capere*. Hence when anything receives according to measure what belongs to another in its entirety, it is said to participate it.' (Comm. in De Held. 2.) 'Apostolate' is predicated primarily and in all its fullness of the Hierarchy, analogically of the laity. Not, however, by mere attribution or extrinsic denomination, **for** the laity receive *intrinsically* according to their own proper measure what belongs in its fullness to the Apostles *supra modum*, the Hierarchy. P. Dabin's treatment of this important point (*op. cit.* p. 83) could be bettered.

## THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY THROUGH CATHOLIC ACTION

the apostolate of the Hierarchy. 'Collaboration' would fall short of the idea we desire to express. Though the laity cannot be called an integral part of the priesthood, still, elevated by the hierarchy to the lofty plane of Catholic Action, they very truly *participate* in the apostolate of the Church' (Mgr. Fontenelle.)

But it may be asked, is it not this cleavage by the 'hierarchy' which empowers the layman to participate in the apostolate? Is it not repeated time without number in the instructions of the Holy See that it is precisely the mandate from the hierarchy **which** constitutes and authorizes the lay apostolate of Catholic Action? The answer is an emphatic affirmative. But I suggest that a distinction must be made to solve the apparent contradiction. There is clearly a difference between the *power* and the *authority to exercise* that power in a particular sphere. Here the analogy will be found helpful of the familiar distinction of the power of **Order** (the priestly power of the character of Holy Orders, enabling the recipient to act as an instrument of Christ the High Priest) and *jurisdiction* or *mission* (in its broadest sense). When a Bishop gives a priest jurisdiction or a commission and mandate to administer the Sacraments and preach, he presupposes in that priest the character of the Sacrament of Orders which consecrates him for that work and gives him power to be an instrument of Christ in imparting grace to souls. Similarly, I suggest, the episcopal mandate to Catholic Action presupposes in the layman the power (conferred, it would seem, in Confirmation) to act, in his own particular way as a layman, in Christ's redemptive mission. Both these things are required, power and mission, and both come immediately from the Bishop, the apostolic authority, and ultimately from God through Christ and the Apostles. At all events, the mission is essential. There can be no authentic apostolate without mission or 'sending' by the authority in which the fullness of the Apostolate resides. Possessed of that mission we can be confident that we are 'sent' by Christ as He was 'sent' by **His** Father.

## BLACKFRIARS

The apostolate of the laity is, we have seen, as old as the Church. In its long history it has taken a great variety of forms. 'It should adapt itself differently to varied conditions of time and place,' wrote the Holy Father to Cardinal Bertram. In our own time, owing to the more elaborate and powerful organization of the powers of evil, the shortage of priests and many other circumstances, it has, thanks to the boundless wisdom and energy of the Holy Father, taken the form of organized Catholic Action. The name is comparatively new, as also is the efficient, up-to-date organization and the urgent recall of the laity to its rights and obligations. Other contributors deal with these distinctive characteristics of contemporary Catholic Action. Here we have considered solely the fundamental idea of the lay-apostolate and the truths upon which it is based, together with some deductions which may be drawn from them.

As the Holy Father wrote to Cardinal Segura: 'When these fundamental truths of the Faith are duly considered by the faithful, there is no doubt that a new spirit of apostolate will take possession of their hearts and bear fruit in intense activity.'

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