

when the Church prays: it is his sacrifice that is offered when the Mass is offered, and the single member of his Mystical Body is no longer the isolated worshipper, with no words that can be adequate to express a love so far beyond his reach. He has his own gift to make, it is true; incorporation in the Body of Christ does not mean an end to the work of the will. But the dimensions are altogether changed now. The love of God is no longer an idea in the mind: it is a reality made available and closer than hand or heart. It has been achieved in the supreme act of love which the liturgy reflects in all its splendour. And it is more than reflected: it is made for man's sharing, for such is the effect of redemption and grace. *Audemus dicere*: we can dare, now, to utter the words of Christ.

'I am the vine, you are the branches', and the living tree spreads over the whole world, and there is no one who is an alien or a stranger any more. Lifted up, Christ has drawn all men to himself, and the liturgical prayer and praise of the Church is but the sequel to that prophecy fulfilled.



THE LOVE OF GOD IN OUR LIVES

AMBROSE FARRELL, O.P.

SUPERNATURAL charity, 'is the love which refers all things to God above all things, even man himself'. *Caritas* or Agape is essentially a grace. From the New Testament we learn that God's 'design was and is to animate man with his own love that man, in and through God's love or grace, should have a kind of equality of friendship, such that he could know God as God knows himself, and love God as God loves himself in the Blessed Trinity'.¹

St Paul's preaching of love was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles mere folly. This is a love which abandons all thought of self, and becomes lost in its object. Its very opposite is that type of self-interest which makes people use others for their own ends, or to gloat over their

¹ *The Mind and Heart of Love*, Martin D'Arcy, S.J.; pp. 77, 79.

misfortunes. The well-spring of brotherly love is man's love for God. It embraces all men irrespective of race, country or creed. The love of God radiates to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the Saints, to the Church, to friends and to enemies. It contains all other loves, and bestows on every undertaking a Christian value, ennobling every deed.

An act of the love of God springs from the habit of charity, which embraces both God and his creatures according to the dignity which they possess in his eyes. It radiates towards our neighbours, as companions and friends beloved of God. All these are brethren for whom Christ died. Our nearest neighbour is self, whom we must also love in God and for whom we must desire sanctification and salvation.

The pattern of fraternal love is the love of Christ for his disciples. 'A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.' And again St John writes, 'He that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not? And this is the commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God, love also his brother.'

The Christian conception of charity as a vital force is, therefore, far removed from mere philanthropy, public service, or humanitarianism, with which it is commonly identified. It may, like other virtues, grow, not indeed by extending its range, but in intensity and in the mastery over every corner of life. There can be no properly formed virtue which is not alive with the love of God. Charity has been compared happily to a wedding garment with which the soul is adorned. But it is more: it is a dynamic force vitalising the members of Christ's mystical body as by a second soul. St Paul speaks of the hollowness of life without charity: 'If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal . . .'

Charity is unselfish, seeketh not her own. The invisible God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is to be worshipped and served in the visible image of God in man. This brings into play a faith and a hope that are enlivened by love. 'Man made to

the image of God is not just a divine footprint in physical nature.' His true social life transcends the political ideal of the free and independent citizen, and stretches to familiar intercourse with God.²

The profound paradox of the New Testament is that the love of God and of our neighbour is imposed by law as something due. Yet true love may not be compelled, it is spontaneous and almost instinctive. And so the love which is charity is not simply exacted by an outside law, since God bestows on his lovers the power to love him from within themselves. Without this love, grace is no more and every virtue is like a withered and dead leaf.

The motive of charity is overwhelming; it is God himself. Its manner is to love God beyond measure. But the full duties of charity are a social necessity, protecting society against itself. As Bertrand Russell recently remarked, 'there is grave risk of the human race exterminating itself with unprecedented skill'.³ There can be no other result of a godless progress. But even so, the chief problem is not one of physical destruction by man's own hand, but of the perversity of human wills who are ready to let it loose.⁴

The love of God has a variety of expressions. It should work in every good action; for a good action is one which complies with the will of God. In his Reith Lectures Professor Toynbee recently said, 'Any way of life is an indivisible whole in which all the parts hang together and are interdependent'. This is a principle which has particular application in the Christian life. Our Lord himself said, 'If you love me, keep my commandments', and 'if any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him'.

Charity begins at home but does not end there. It loves, not humanity, but our neighbour as ourselves. Our neighbour is the man who fell among robbers, and lay stricken on the other side of the street. He was a mere stranger to the priest and the levite who passed by. Only the good Samaritan had that within him which made him into a neighbour.

² *Between Community and Society*, Thomas Gilby; p. 184.

³ *Sunday Times*, February 15th, 1953.

⁴ cf. Thomas Gilby, o.c., p. 295.

'Charity', writes Fr Gilby, 'is alien to nothing human, because it is the form, exemplar, and end of all loves. It is not a high thin jet, but a flood; it flows into every interest and into objects not in themselves sacred.' (op. cit., pp. 191, 193.) And in this context the words of Newman are memorable: 'Love is the gentle, tranquil, satisfied acquiescence and adherence of the soul in contemplation of God; not only a preference of God before all things, but a delight in him because he is God, and because his commandments are good; not any violent emotion or transport, but as St Paul describes it, long-suffering, kind, modest, unassuming, innocent, simple, orderly, disinterested, meek, pure-hearted, sweet-tempered, patient, enduring. Faith without Charity is dry, harsh, and sapless; it has nothing sweet, engaging, winning, soothing; but it was Charity which brought Christ down. Charity is but another name for the Comforter. It is eternal Charity which is the bond of all things in heaven and earth; It is Charity wherein the Father and the Son are one in the unity of the Spirit; by which the Angels in heaven are one, by which all Saints are one with God, by which the Church is one on earth.' (*Parochial and Plain*, 21.)

Prayer is, of course, the breath of love. The Psalmist prayed to God, 'Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight'. Prayer is the language of God's lovers. One who loves God will seek to express himself in speech. Love is not tied to words. Indeed, oftentimes it remains tongue-tied; so that our Lord had to place the words of prayer upon our lips. We are as children learning to spell and pronounce. Prayer, in its raising of the mind and heart to God, is an act of self-surrender. Sacrifice is the soul of prayer, and prayer is the incense that rises from the altar. In and by the Mass it is carried to heaven. Implicit in all true prayer is the phrase of the Our Father: 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', and expressed by Christ in his agony: 'Not my will but thine be done'.

Again, the attitude of mind assumed at prayer is an attitude of love that should be carried over into life as a whole. There can be no reform unless the heart of man is changed, by being brought into harmony with the law of love. This is a lengthy process which cannot be achieved

without suffering and pain, since natural desire seeks only what is agreeable and easy. That is why our Lord insists that to follow him we must carry our cross.

But the endurance of suffering and distasteful things only becomes bearable when the love of God is its support. In his sufferings our Lord shows self-abnegation as a complete and perfect expression of his charity.

Charity, then, is the issue of a new life, deeply affecting the *whole* man. It is operating not only when he is on his knees, or under stress, but also in his normal work. The prevailing law of charity, towards God, towards self, and towards our neighbour, should give a dynamic fruitfulness to Christian moral living. Christian and non-Christian values cannot be completely harmonised. When conscience receives its formation from a contemporary society which is Christian only in name, moral life becomes no more than a technique of convention. Such formation, even where the two cultures meet, is an outward imposition. Whereas Christian morality takes its rise from an inward spring of life, and from a law that is written on the heart. Civic morality is by no means the same as Christian morality, except perhaps in the clothes that it wears. Even a tailor's dummy can do that. But it is clear that an ethical code of human behaviour, dictated by reason or convention, cannot rise to the high level of an ethical system guided by faith, under the shadow of the cross. And so the morality of the sage is not that of the saint.

The main difference is that the virtue of charity has universal effects that outstrip all that modern man means by 'morality'. The love of God in the heart of man gives a growing realisation of God's presence. To those who are faithful to grace this realisation may attain to a high degree of awareness amounting to conviction. Since the life of grace is a sharing in the divine life, it implies a very real and personal relationship with God who is present in the soul, and is the result of God's love for us, rather than our love for him. Charity thus grows out of the life of grace, and establishes a state of friendship between the Christian and God, who becomes present as a friend to a friend. 'God is charity, and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and

God in him.' 'Such is the efficacy of this charity', writes the present Pope, 'that, as though by a divinely established law, it binds God in his reciprocal love come down into us his lovers: . . . Charity therefore, more than any other virtue, unites us closely with Christ, and it is the heavenly ardour of this love which has caused so many sons of the Church to rejoice in suffering contumely for his sake, joyfully to meet and overcome the severest trials, and even to die and shed their blood for him. Therefore our divine Saviour earnestly exhorts us: "Abide in my love". And because charity is a poor and empty thing unless it is shown and as it were put into practice by good works, he immediately adds: "If you keep my commandments you shall abide in my love, as I also have kept my Father's commandments and do abide in his love."' (*Mystici Corporis*, n. 72.)

Charity is the inception of the God-like life which reaches its fullness in heaven. The love of God, therefore, ranks first among the means necessary for salvation. It is a means conjoined to its end. Charity on earth and glory above differ only in degree. Charity, which presupposes the renunciation of all evil, is essential for the remission of sins. It is likewise a source of merit. Through practice it may be made perfect, by becoming more intense and all-pervading.

"The one and all-embracing virtue is to love what you see, and the most sublime happiness to hold as your own what you love."⁵

⁵ St Augustine, *De Genesi ad litt.*, L. xii, c. 26, P.L. 34, 476.