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The Confraternity
of
Christian Doctrine

The Appeal of the Church
to the Laity

MOST REVEREND
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AN ADDRESS DELIVERED TO
THE
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OF THE
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The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine

TO THE LAITY

ON THE occasion of this Fifth National Catechetical Congress of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, it is my pleasure, as representative of the Supreme Pontiff Pope Pius XII, to address this message to you of the laity. On the morning of September 1 in an audience of leave-taking after my brief visit to Rome, I was in the august presence of the Holy Father and the conversation terminated when His Holiness affectionately recalled the loyal activity of the bishops and clergy of this country, and directed me to extend his paternal and fervid blessing to all those who co-operate with their pastors, bishops and priests, for the increase of religion and the good of souls.

The Appeal of the Church to the Laity

This fatherly blessing of the Vicar of Christ is especially bestowed upon those who give their name and efforts to the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. The field of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine is so vast, fertile, beautiful, useful and necessary that, whether endowed with exceptional or ordinary talents, all are invited to enter into it to assist in the gathering of an abundant harvest. The instructions given in this regard by the Holy See are most explicit: "In every parish . . . there shall be instituted — and before all others — a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, embracing in its membership all who are capable of teaching or promoting catechetical instruction, especially school teachers and those who are experienced in the training of children." All parish priests are ordered to introduce a "Catechetical Day," if such is not already customary, on which a Feast of Christian Doctrine should be celebrated with the greatest possible solemnity, with fervent prayers, a special

discourse on the teaching of the catechism, a distribution of books, pamphlets, leaflets and similar suitable material, and with a collection for the promotion of catechetical work. It is furthermore established that "in places especially where the clergy are so few that they cannot satisfactorily discharge the office of teaching Christian Doctrine, the Ordinaries shall strive to provide *qualified catechists* of both sexes to assist the pastors and give religious instruction in the parochial and public schools and in the remote places of the parish" (Decree of the S. Congregation of the Council *On the Promotion of Catechetical Instruction*, January 12, 1935).

Catechists

For you of the laity in particular the Church has reserved the honorable title of "Catechists." The function of catechists in mission countries is well known. They are lay people who accompany the missionary; even the great apostle St. Francis Xavier made use of them. So necessary are they that, without them, missions could neither be founded nor de-

veloped. Under this name of catechist are included the lay people of our dioceses who assist the bishops and pastors in the teaching of Christian Doctrine, and those who prepare and organize this important work by providing centers for the classes and by gathering together those to be instructed. The field is open, therefore, to all the faithful of good-will, and to render it more accessible, courses have been organized in many dioceses for the formation of catechists. The programs are clearly outlined, and seek better to distribute the various tasks of this apostolate among the good laity, according to individual qualifications, and in proportion to the time and means available.

Impelling Motives

The appeal of the Church is of itself enough to induce you to respond generously. But it implies much more: It invites you to be ambassadors of our Lord and to take some part in His work of Redemption. It calls you in the name of Jesus Christ Who, during the three years

of His public life, carried on a work that was eminently catechetical instruction, and associated with Himself in this work both the Apostles and disciples. The clergy, charged with this ministry by their vocation, are not sufficient of themselves to provide for its fulfilment. Even in parishes having a goodly number of priests, it is impossible for the clergy to reach every individual. Distances create difficulties, especially in the South and West of the United States. Moreover in some sections there are few churches, and consequently a special organization is necessary to provide means of transportation to gatherings. At times it is difficult or impossible for the priest, occupied in the many duties of his ministry, to approach all his parishioners regularly, and there are some individuals who may easily be reached by the laity but not by the clergy. The first Christian school for children should be their own family and home, but too often this is not the case. Frequently we see homes wherein Christ is neglected or forgotten, to the immense detriment of souls and of society itself.

A Noble Social Work

If you were to be called by the confidence of the public to provide for a social need in your nation, or even in your immediate community, in some medical, educational or other humanitarian cause, you would esteem yourselves honored by the invitation, and would strive to do your best. Yet in such an instance it is a question of a merely temporal and passing boon; in the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the Church, by a commission of great trust, cordially and insistently asks you to prepare children and adults for eternity, to render them conscious of their duties to God and neighbor. It invites you to provide for the greatest spiritual need, that casts its reflection in civic society also, in promoting obedience to the laws of God, without which there can be no true obedience to the laws of men: "It is evident that in the Catholic training and instruction of children and adolescents, the safety of the State is also involved. For it is to the greatest interest of the State and Religion alike that citizens, while learning the principles of

merely human knowledge and civil education, shall at the same time imbibe the Christian spirit" (Decree of the S. Congregation of the Council *On the Promotion of Catechetical Instruction*, January 12, 1935).

The supreme norm in the practice of charity is to offer assistance especially where it is most needed. Where, then, is there a more urgent necessity in the midst of people of all classes than that of spiritual formation for the present and the future, and of co-operation with the clergy in influencing our neighbors to live as children of God?

Those to whom religious instruction must be brought are countless. There are the Catholic students in public elementary and high schools as well as in secular colleges, the adult laity and non-Catholics; and there are many services to be rendered in reaching these several groups. The question is not merely one of providing teachers; numerous home visitors are also needed to seek out the indifferent and negligent. Helpers are to be enrolled to aid the teachers to prepare instructional materials, to provide trans-

portation for pupils and to redistribute Catholic literature. In the fertile field of adult religious instruction, numbers of discussion leaders are needed in every parish to make possible the study of their religion by the adult laity, "that the Christian man will not be ignorant of those things which pertain to religion, or hold these things merely as a hereditary tradition, but will know and grasp them in such a way that they will prove fruitful to themselves and to others" (Decree of the S. Congregation of the Council *On the Promotion of Catechetical Instruction*, January 12, 1935).

Enroll in the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine

Men and women of all ages and conditions, you should give your names and contribute your activities to the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Your zealous bishops and pastors, gathered today in the National Catechetical Congress, ask this of you in the name of God, Who gave you talents and means to employ in His service. The Church has defined this

work in the words of the Vicar of Christ on earth, as the choicest field of Catholic Action, and "your choicest co-operation or participation in the Apostolate of the Hierarchy of the Church." Any assistance you may give, whether material or technical, is destined to enlighten souls in the radiance of God; and Holy Scripture assures us that "they that instruct many to justice [shall shine] as stars for all eternity" (Dan. 12:3).

The learned John Gerson (1363-1429), the Chancellor of the University of Paris, is a celebrated example in this apostolate. Though a man of lofty studies and profound learning, he was happy to spend all his free time in the catechetical instruction of the poorest and neediest children of Paris. Upon being asked why he did not dedicate himself to more important things, he answered that it was impossible to find a more important or a more noble task. Imitate him, and even in this life you will enjoy, as he did, many consolations and benefits, for catechetical instruction and co-operation in it is not merely intellectual but also moral and spiritual work; indeed, it is based not

only on knowledge of the truth, but principally on faith itself and on divine grace, which will increase in you, and on the love of neighbor, which will become a strong bond of perfection.

May the choicest benedictions descend upon all of you, and may the Lord with divine generosity grant you His consolations and rewards!

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