

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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CHARITY GIVES LIFE

BY

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CHARITY GIVES LIFE

As we look backwards towards the dawn of man's day upon earth, we behold a sorrowful picture. We see a strong man, his hands reddened with blood, cry out in defiance of Almighty God: Am I my brother's keeper? This man was Cain, the murderer. It was the first time in history that man set upon his fellow man in anger and hatred that he might kill. A fateful day! A revelation of the evil that can surge forth from our hearts! A warning that man, made in the image of God, is also fashioned from the dust of earth! If this were all, we might well despair. But there is another picture which we must also face. Centuries later we see another dying—this time upon a Cross, likewise a victim of anger and hatred. He had been condemned to die, subject to that terrible mockery which is law without justice. Yet, in the wisdom of God, His life had been given, not taken. He had offered Himself as a sacrifice for many. "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*John 15:13*). This Man was Christ, the Redeemer. He had given His life as an atoning gift for every man that comes into this world.

Here, in contrast, we see the two ways of life which are open to man. The one is pagan; the other

is Christian. The pagan lives for himself. He is hard, and cruel, and proud. If his fellow man is weak, he feels contempt for him. If he is strong, then the feeling may be fear, or envy. Even the greatest among them thought thus. The brilliant philosopher Aristotle taught that some were by nature destined to be slaves. Here is a man whose wisdom was to guide the world for over twenty centuries, yet he could not see the shadow of the Divine in the eyes of his neighbor. The Christian has a different philosophy. His law is the law of love. "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" (*John 13:34-35*). This is the standard of Christ.

The law of charity was not given as an ideal for the few. It is the law by which all men shall be judged. Our Savior tells us of a day to come "when the Son of Man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty: and all nations shall be gathered together before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats." Then Our Lord goes on to give the catechism of

judgment, for the king will say to those on his right hand: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me." But the just, looking upon the splendor and majesty of the king of glory, will ask in amazement: "When did we do all this to thee?" And the answer will be given: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me" (*Matt 25:31-40*). Here is the challenge of the Christian spirit to the selfishness of man's heart. Here is the great law that through the centuries freed the slaves, built great hospitals and homes of charity, tempered justice with mercy, and gave man on earth a foretaste of the happiness of heaven.

Today, thank God, we take this standard for granted. We are kind to the unfortunate. We contribute generously to the community fund, the Red Cross, to our local charities. The news of some disaster, such as a flood, an earthquake, or famine touches our hearts, and we do not fail our brethren in need. As we read in our New Testament the story of the good Samaritan,

we may be able to say: I too have helped the stranger in distress. I have seen Christ in the misery of my fellow man, and have given far more than the cup of cold water, which is blessed from above. Yes, even in time of war, I hate evil, but I love my fellow man. I do not seek blind revenge. I would not enslave the enemies which I have conquered. Rather I seek only to free them from the bonds of war-making leaders, so that common men of every nation may dwell together in peace and harmony.

All this is true, but it is not enough. There are other claims of charity which men overlook, not perhaps from malice, but through carelessness or ignorance. We refer particularly to the social question. For example, during the last ten years we have had as many as fifteen million unemployed. As high as four million families were on relief. In our cities slum conditions have been appalling. Millions of our fellow citizens still live in homes which breed disease, crime, and vice. Whole families are crowded together in a single room. Children grow up without knowing the meaning of wholesome games and recreation. Even in our farmland there are regions where poverty is bitter. Many workers who roam from harvest to harvest have a harder lot than the slave conditions of yesterday. There are

tenant farmers who have never had a decent meal or a real suit of clothes. This is *our* shame, not a story of darkest Africa or South Sea jungles.

Knowing this, some persons become socialists or communists. They are embittered at needless suffering and would overthrow the entire social order. Because a few are callous exploiters, these thinkers would destroy free enterprise and turn over all industry to the State. Communists preach hatred, revolution, and utter destruction of all who oppose them.

Others take a different approach. They blind themselves to reality. They deny the facts or overlook them. Millions really do not know how the other half lives. What they do know, they dismiss smugly. They assume that misery is the fault of those who suffer it. Some say that poverty and destitution are necessary evils, inseparable from the present economic system. During the depression such persons said that anyone who really wanted a job could find one. As a result a person could be jailed for permitting an animal to starve, but our laws had no concern when men and women were left without resources. All these things have happened within the memory of living man.

What then are we to conclude? That the Communist is right? That man naturally exploits his fellow

man, and that the masses must arise and smite down their oppressors? By no means! This attitude is not so much cruelty as blindness. It springs not from callousness, but from ignorance. Individually we are kind. As a group we are often cruel. We fail to see that the social problem is distinct from our individual problems. We lack social consciousness. For example, the average business man wishes to be kind and fair to his workers. As a rule, the higher up he is, the more tolerant he becomes. Sometimes under the pressure of competition he may be forced to do hard things. But this is a matter of sincere regret. He would much prefer to live and let live. Here is where the radical is wrong, in looking for evil motives where there are none. Yet, by overlooking terrible evils, even with the best of intentions, we feed fuel to the flames of revolution.

To make this point clear, we might treat one phase of the social problem, the question of unemployment, in the light of Christian charity. That idleness is an evil, none would deny. We might next ask: Do good people consciously bring about such a blight upon the land? The answer is: Yes, and no. It is no, in the sense practically no employer wants to see workers destitute and starving. Yet, from another point of view, the answer

is yes. We do deprive men of jobs by striving constantly for increased efficiency. We welcome new inventions which allow one man to do the work of ten. This cuts costs and increases output. But what of the other nine? What is to happen to them? The chances are that the average employer would have no real answer to these questions. He has never thought out the social effects of his actions. Even if he had, he feels that competition and the demands of his stockholders should be heeded. Regretfully he may dismiss the workers, but the fact remains that they are out of a job.

Here is a real problem. We have not thought enough about it. Every time it reaches the danger stage, we have been able somehow to escape. Perhaps some great invention like the automobile leads to jobs for millions. Perhaps a major war draws off our reserves of the unemployed. Thus far we have successfully evaded the issue. But are we going to be able to evade it forever? Inventions and discoveries today may lead to fewer jobs, not more. Then what shall we do? We must have an answer, or we play into the hands of those who preach that capitalism is rotten and must be overthrown. Here is a real example of the need for a social approach, not merely individual charity.

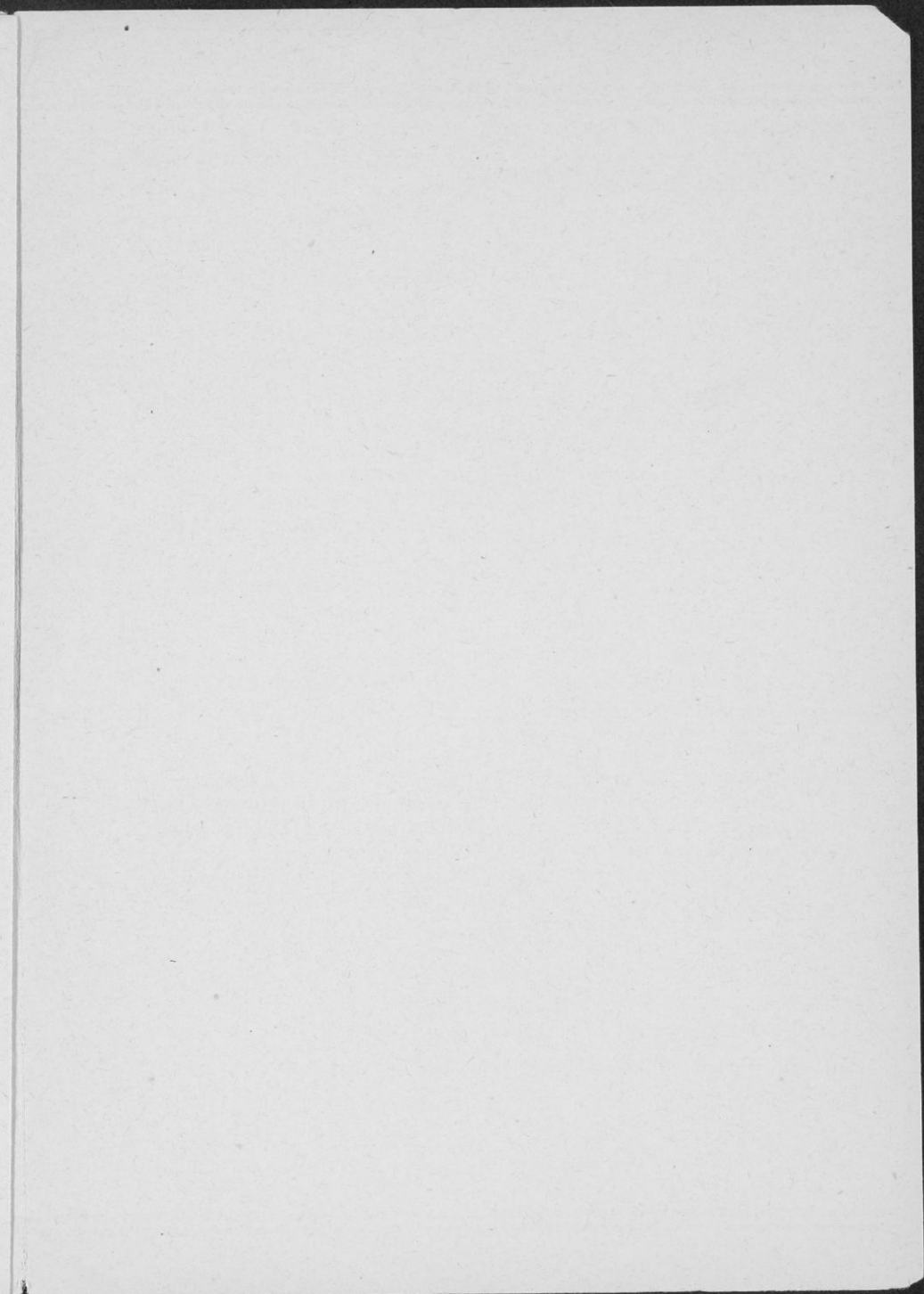
So much for the causes of idleness. But the same thoughts apply to the remedies for this evil. In our Christian fellowship, we would not let anyone starve. If we know of a deserving family reduced to misery, we are the first to help. This is good. It is in the spirit of Christ. But it is not enough. Deeper remedies are needed, so that men can have not merely relief, but work. They wish to keep their dignity and sense of self-reliance, not merely to live on the sufferance of others. And it is in this more basic charity that we fail. As a nation we have offered no constructive program for private jobs for all who need work. We had no program during the depression years, and we have none for the coming days of peace. In a few years, thirty million workers will have to be relocated or absorbed. Little has been done about it. In fact, it has been the fashion to sneer at planning or theorizing, as if it were practical to face the future with no program and no policy. Furthermore, when some form of public help has been necessary, many of us have treated it as a joking matter. Others have been angry because the misery of our fellows has led to increased taxes. We have been ready to criticize, but slow to offer a workable alternative. And while we quibble and complain, there remains the shame

of our age, the indictment of modern capitalism, that millions who seek work, seek in vain.

This is but one example. Many others, equally telling, could be offered. Much could be said about our duties towards other nations. Certainly national selfishness can be a factor leading to war. When people are desperate and see nothing but darkness ahead, they may well gamble upon the power of their armies. Who can say that we are completely guiltless of Europe's problems and Europe's wars? When a brother asks for bread, we do not give him a stone. But in many an hour of crisis, our only gift has been criticism and advice. At times, in fact, we have condemned others when we were anything but innocent ourselves. We are shocked, we say, when colonial peoples rise up in rebellion, yet at home we have our grumbings of discontent. Should there be a riot in Calcutta, our experts have a complete solution. But there have been riots in American cities as well. This does not mean that we are smug or selfish or hypocritical. We are not adopting a double standard, one to judge others, another and a more lenient rule for judging ourselves.

Rather this shows once again the shortsightedness of our charity. We see the miseries of individuals, and we help them. The dramatic suffering of nations moves us. But this is impulsive, surface aid. It leaves untouched the hidden sores which fester deep within us. It passes by the real causes of much that is sordid and embittering. Impatiently it rejects slow, tedious reform, and demands a quick cure or none at all. But hasty remedies are often worse than the disease.

This, then, is the challenge to our age, to develop a charity steeped in wisdom and insight; a love that cures, not the hurried sympathy which merely soothes. Today, and above all, tomorrow, millions of our fellow men will lie by the roadside, wounded and distressed. We must not pass them by. They will cry: I am hungry—feed me; I am homeless—shelter me. Our answer must be the answer of Christ. Nothing less can save the world. Soberly and carefully we must shoulder the common burden. The misery of our fellow man is a command to our charity. We would be unworthy of our heavenly Father were we to fail.



THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 41,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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