

*Is it*

**CATHOLIC  
APOSTASY?**

*by*

*Rev. William J. Smith, S. J.*

*Imprimi Potest:*

JAMES P. SWEENEY, S.J.,  
*Provincial, Maryland-New York.*

*Nihil Obstat:*

ARTHUR J. SCANLAN, S.T.D.,  
*Censor Librorum.*

*Imprimatur:*

✠ FRANCIS J. SPELLMAN, D.D.,  
*Archbishop of New York.*

*New York, September 22, 1942.*

COPYRIGHT, 1942, BY  
THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE  
IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN THE U. S. A.  
BY THE PAULIST PRESS, NEW YORK, N. Y.

# IS IT CATHOLIC ACTION?

By WILLIAM J. SMITH, S.J.

Director, Crown Heights School of Catholic Workmen, Brooklyn, N. Y.

## FOREWORD

The title of this booklet, "Is It Catholic Action?" is a challenging question. The booklet itself is provocative. It is meant to be both a challenge and an instrument to stir up intelligent discussion.

We have plenty of Catholic Activity going on throughout the nation. How much of it or how little of it is real Catholic Action? The following pages are intended as a measuring rod, a norm, a spiritual blue print. They do not deal with the *structural organization* of Catholic Action; they attempt to test the *spirit*, the soul of your Catholic Action. The amount of organization that you have established indicates the *extent* of your Catholic Action. This booklet will act as a gauge of its *intensity*.

The National Council of Catholic Men has devised a scheme for the structural organization of the movement that can be readily adapted to both men and women's groups. It contains all the essential elements of official Catholic Action. It provides a plan of organization from the parish unit right up to one on a national scope. The program is definite, detailed and has been tried out along practical lines in sixteen dioceses. N.C.C.M. is located at 1312 Massachusetts Avenue, Washington, D. C.

We recommend this program and advise its adoption everywhere. The purpose of our treatise is to provide the necessary spark and spirit which must precede and accompany the exterior execution of the plan. We offer a background for action and supply the proper motivation for it. Our claim is that without the preparation provided by this, or some similar booklet, our attempts at Catholic Action will differ but little from the sincere efforts of those who work for the betterment of society merely from a natural or even selfish motive.

## PRESENTING THE CASE

EVERYWHERE we find an increasing number of Catholic men and women who are restless, impatient, dissatisfied with the present state of society in which they live. They are anxious to be up and doing. They yearn to correct the evils which today hamper and hinder themselves and their fellow citizens in the peaceful pursuit of their daily lives.

The word *Catholic Action* caught their fancy the moment they first heard it. It has a ring to it. The imagination is stirred and dormant dreams become alive as their thoughts race through their minds, seeking expression in words and deed. One can almost hear the challenging echo of other days, "To Arms!" as knights and lords swiftly buckle on their shining armor to dash forth to the combat of a great crusade.

To many it will come as a surprise and to some a disappointment when we state that *Action* is not the first step in *Catholic Action*. Something of greater importance than exterior action must precede the actual execution of our plans. Catholic Action, it is true, is a call to combat. Stout-hearted, strong-willed men and women must fill its ranks. There is no place for the weakling and the cringing slacker. But the clash of arms is not that of steel on steel or bursting shrapnel. The conflict is that deep, swift, silent struggle that was first witnessed in the courts of heaven when Michael joined battle against the rebel Lucifer. The noise and the din of human sound that may accompany it is but an incidental circumstance from which human effort seldom is able to free itself. *Essentially* and *fundamentally*

Catholic Action is a *spiritual* crusade. The spiritual descendants of Michael still carry on the conquest over the dominions of darkness.

We cannot talk of Catholic Action and leave out Christ. We cannot think of Christ in Catholic Action in any other way than as the Leader to whom I am personally devoted, as One whom I love intimately and for whom I am prepared to make cutting sacrifices that His cause may be advanced. How can I presume to be closely allied with Catholic Action, of what real strength and value will my pledge of allegiance be unless I am *thoroughly acquainted with Him*, until I have learned to *associate intimately with Him*, until I have *sincerely identified my cause with His*? Christ must be the center, source and inspiration of our Catholic Action if it is to produce the results we seek. This does not mean we are expected to suddenly become saints overnight. Nor can we change our mode and method of living in some drastic fashion. It simply means that little by little we must learn to *Christianize*, to “put Christ into” our activities in a way that will distinguish Catholic Action from every and any other work that is carried on. To do this we must first make serious efforts to *know* Him, His Life, His Motives and His Methods. From such a study the inspiration that is really needed to elevate Catholic Action to its proper plane will follow almost spontaneously. Analyze your thoughts, check up on your plans, examine objectives and the motives upon which you have been acting. Test them with the question, “How much or how little of it stems from and is directly concerned with Christ and His interests?” Your answer will tell you the degree of real Catholic Action that you have so far attained.

In determining the scope of our activities and in plotting out our plans and policies it is very vital to success that we acquire the *proper mental attitude*. Local circumstances will dictate the specific actions that must be undertaken. The *correct approach* to the problems at hand will be common to all Catholic Action. An appreciation of and the studied evaluation of the *nature* of the *forces at work*

in the world today will prevent us from harming our own cause by rash and imprudent ventures.

Whether or not it is generally recognized, the fact seems fairly well established that a *social revolution* is sweeping the world. Age-old traditions, time-honored customs are being tossed aside with a gesture of impatience or of scorn. Unnatural, immoral and inhuman practices are promulgated with impunity. The conventional and respected procedures of other days are being supplanted by crude, cheap and flimsy ways of living. The dignity of the individual, the sacredness of the home and the common trust to protect the general welfare of all are being sacrificed upon sacriligious altars erected to satisfy the whims, desires and ambitions of men whose lives are devoted to power, greed and polluted politics. Hatred is a dominating influence in the lives of many in high places. Great numbers of the common people caught in the whirlwind of conflicting forces, unconsciously perhaps, yet none the less truly, *are in revolt*, mentally at least. Against what, they hardly know. Society, itself, seems to be in the throes of a suicidal struggle against itself. Organized forces of an evil stripe are taking advantage of this world-wide unrest to stir up, to foment, to foster and to further various diabolic aims that suit their own purposes.

We *must* remember that this chaotic condition did not spring up overnight. Nor will it be set right in a day. It is a stage in the decay and the deterioration of society which showed its first signs of disease over four hundred years ago. The first phase of it may have been begun through human negligence; it has been fed and nurtured by the spirit of evil. The victims of this terrible scourge are *human beings*, men and women, with spiritual souls and living bodies. They can be helped, protected and again elevated to a state of sane living and peaceful stability through the efforts of their fellow beings acting and working for and with them in a *thoroughly human way*. According to God's plan, now established for the human family, the only manner in which we can be completely

and thoroughly *human* is to be completely and thoroughly *Christian*. Since Christ has come, human society, if it is to be human, can never again be Christless.

The problems of present day society can be solved. The evil influences that disrupt the harmonious relations of men can be curbed and rendered impotent. But it will never be accomplished by *mere natural* means. The full strength of all the *spiritual* power that we can muster must be employed. The *supernatural* life of the *individual* revived and restored to a vigorous, battling, surging state of health, will be the first indication that he is actually alive and alert to the ailment that afflicts him, as well as society at large. Great masses of the people stirring and moving and pushing forward with that unmistakable mark of spiritual strength will be the sign that the Second Spring of the Social Order is under way.

*Mass Action*, in itself, will never bring that miracle to pass. Organization and unity of action, alone, without the vital spark that comes from Christ and no where else, is little better than "make believe" Catholic Action. It can even be a mockery of it. Christ first and action after—with Him—is the dictate of Wisdom, the demand of Right Order, the call of Common Sense. It can be, likewise, a challenge to each of us—a challenge to our courage, our humility, our Catholicity. If the challenge is accepted, eventually it becomes an ultimatum to the Prince of this world and his fawning followers.

To learn the lesson of the *power of the Personality of Christ, Our leader*, is the first step in Catholic Action. That knowledge will generate the *spirit of Catholic Action* for which our souls now hunger. It is necessary for us to re-create in our daily lives the *atmosphere* in which that spirit can live. The following pages will be helpful to that purpose.

## Suggestions for the Discussion Period

### Chapter I

1. Catholic Action is defined as "the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the Hierarchy."

What is meant by the laity? Does it include religious lay-brothers and religious Sisters? What is the Hierarchy? Does it include priests? What is an apostolate? Specifically just what work did Christ give the Apostles to do? What preparation did they have to fulfill the mission He gave them? How did the mission end—for themselves? for the Church?

2. It has been said that the term "Catholic Action" is misleading.

Do you think this statement is true? Why? Would the term "Apostolic Action" be a better title for the work? If so, why? How far does the "participation" of the laity extend into the work of the Hierarchy? Who are supposed to be the leaders of Catholic Action—the clergy or the laity? Why? What characteristics would you demand of a leader of Catholic Action? Put down in writing each trait suggested by the group and discuss it. How can the suggested traits be developed in one who at present lacks them? What obstacles stand in the way of the development of such a leader? What means would you propose to another to overcome the obstacles? For your own personal satisfaction and profit study your own character and apply the same test.

3. There can be no true Catholic Action without Christ.

Do you agree with that statement? What are your reasons? Can Catholic Action be performed by an organization made up of Catholics and non-Catholics? What practical difficulties stand in the way of such an effort? Would such united effort be *Catholic*



Action? What do you mean by a practical Catholic? Can a lax Catholic engage in Catholic Action? Give reasons for your answer.

4. What is the proper "mental attitude and approach" to our present-day social problems?

What is meant when we say a "social revolution" is sweeping the world? What are some of its manifestations? Its causes? How will it be curbed?, by the individual, by organizations? Why not by mass action alone? Discuss the "human" angle in the solution? What think you of Christ?

## II

### THE KINGDOM OF CATHOLIC ACTION

CHRIST came to found a Kingdom. It was to be a realm, not of land and water, but a reign and a rule over human hearts—the hearts of all men. He has invited every human being to be a citizen of that Kingdom. Some have accepted; great numbers have declined. Today the world is divided between those who are with Him and those who are against Him. The work of Catholic Action is to inspire those within to live vigorously the life that membership imposes upon them; to draw those without into the fold.

In some instances success will be attained by offering the glad hand of fellowship; in others it will be necessary to put on the armor of Christ and do battle with the enemy. At all times the activities of those engaged are limited to the aims, objectives and ideals already established by the King Himself in the Personal Campaign which He waged. Leaders and rank and file alike are subject to the restrictions that He has imposed; no one can deny to them any of the liberty that He, the King, has granted them.

The whole campaign, the plan of battle, the weapons to be used are to be mapped out by officers ordained by the Sovereign for that purpose. Personal initiative is urged

and rewarded. Any action of the individual or a group that goes beyond, or is outside of the authorized blueprint, may have a temporary advantage for the individuals involved. It must be considered, nevertheless, in the nature of "guerilla warfare." It is not entitled to bear the name "Catholic Action."

It will be profitable for us to consider briefly the history of this Kingdom and its relation to Catholic Action. God promised a Redeemer to Adam. He was to be the Saviour of the world. He was to be a definite person, a descendant of a definite family. In the course of time God chose a man named Abraham as the father of the family from whom the Redeemer was to spring.

Never in the history of the world has the divine destiny of any people been so clearly revealed. For two thousand years the children of Israel, as they were called, preserved and protected that sacred trust. We know the story well. For twenty centuries the hope and the dream and the desire "of Him Who was to come" smoldered or burst into flame in the hearts of the Israelites. God's promise to Abraham was the light of their lives. It was part and parcel of their every move. God's revelations and their own very existence were interwoven as in a single fabric. Israel was God's nation and nothing could break their burning faith in the destiny of their race. Yet withal, the history of God's chosen children was a strange mixture indeed.

Idolatry and adultery broke the hearts of her holy prophets, while saintly souls warded off the thunderbolts of God's avenging justice. But through it all, in days of prosperity and long years of exile, in years of poverty and years of plenty, this unique race of people clung to the thought of a promise made by God to the father of their families. They kept the Faith in the worship of the one true God. Other nations were steeped in heathenism. They, from their tents and their temples, sent up their cries to the God Who loved them; they clamored and wept and sighed and prayed for the day of deliverance when the King would come. For two thousand years they were the

hope of the world. Upon the slender thread of a pledge between God and one man, Abraham, rested the salvation of the world. God had mercy upon that world and fulfilled His promise in spite of human weakness and woeful instability. The King has come.

What is Catholic Action? It is simply the acceptance, the restoration and the spreading of His Kingdom. It is a vital sharing in the life of the King. It is an active participation in the reign of His Kingship. Catholic Action is not something new. The name is new; the adaptation to modern circumstances is novel. In its essence it is as old as God's relationship to man. The Kingdom of Catholic Action is the Kingdom that God promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. It is the Kingdom that was kept alive in promise by Moses as he led the Israelites to the promised land, it is the Kingdom proclaimed and pictured by the prophets of old, it is the Kingdom that was actually brought to earth by One, Who was born as a Babe in Bethlehem, Who walked among men in the street-clothes of a carpenter, Who came and lived among the common people and worked and suffered and died that He might prove His claim to the eternal throne for all time. Today that Kingdom *is* your Catholic Church. Against every movement in the world that would dispossess God from the hearts of His children it stands as the indestructible fortress. Within its walls, in one way or another, it embraces every organization and every activity approved by her authorities. To coordinate, unify and present a solid front both for offense and defense, she calls upon every member of her spiritual family to enroll beneath the banner of Catholic Action.

This call to arms is not merely a warning cry of danger. It is not the despairing whisper of a helpless, dying victim. It is the battle-cry of Victory. It is the clarion, trumpet call of a conquering army. It is the confident, jubilant, rousing hymn of battle to stir the hearts of 300,000,000 marching men and women to go forth fighting behind a Leader Who has never lost a war in two thousand

years of conflict. Catholic Action is positive, Catholic Action is constructive. Catholic Action is a constant building up of broken lines, a constant pushing forward into the territory of the enemy.

It is a mistake to think that curbing the Communists, boycotting an offensive newspaper, protesting unwholesome legislation is the sum and substance of Catholic Action. That is the defensive side. Such activities break down obstacles, prevent further encroachments on the Kingdom of Christ. They do not constitute the *whole*, nor even the *better* part of the movement. Catholic Action is pro-Christ and His Kingdom, not merely anti-something or other. It tears down in order the better to build up. It aims at the *spiritual renovation of the world*. No generation of Christ's followers ever had a harder task to do. No sterner stuff was ever needed by any leader of men.

There is nothing in this modern, material-mad world about us that can inspire us in this crusade. The world just does not have what it takes. This battle is the battle of the spirit. Back we must go to the first soldiers of the Cross and learn from them what it was that made them invincible. Peter and John and Paul and Stephen. They can tell us. What was their secret? They inflamed their souls anew with the spark that had burned in the hearts of their ancestors for two thousand years. They *saw* the *King* and they *learned to love Him*.

## **Suggestions for the Discussion Period**

### **Chapter II**

#### **1. "He who is not with Me, is against Me."**

How do these words of Christ apply to the present state of society? Give examples that show how negligence and indifference toward the spiritual life militate against Christ. What are some of the restrictions placed upon members of Catholic Action by the very example of Christ's own life? May a Christian hate any human being? How much liberty may we demand in the exercise of Catholic Action? Mention

specific examples of freedom which cannot be denied the followers of Christ. Who has the authority to limit the work of Catholic Action? From the definition of Catholic Action in the preceding chapter can you prove that the Government has no right to interfere with it?

2. One weakness in the so-called progressive social movements lies in the fact that they have cut themselves off almost entirely from the past.

Why should this be considered a weakness? What is the value of linking up our present actions with those that have passed into history? What would you say is the outstanding lesson we might learn from the history of the Jewish people? Can we find one nation today whose spirit is similar to that which motivated the Israelites of old? Is it reasonable to expect that there should be a nation possessing such a spirit? How will that spirit be generated? Will it come "from the top down" through legislation and leadership of those in high places or from the bottom up through the infusion of Christianity among the masses of the people? What conclusion do you draw for yourself and your group from your answer? What practical steps must you take immediately if you are to participate in such a revival of the true spirit?

3. To check the inroads of Communism will not restore the Social Order.

Do you agree with that statement? If so, give your reasons. Is Communism the cause of the disorder in society or the effect of other disorders? State some of the evils that lead to Communism? Would a just, family wage to the majority of workers have any bearing on the decline of Communism? Why? Is greed and ambition for power on the part of "capitalists" in any way related to the progress of Communism? How can such evils be cured? If Catholic Action is positive and constructive, what specific,

practical action can you as an individual or your members as a group take to make a beginning and to further the movement?

### III

## THE COMING OF THE KING

THERE is one glaring fact that stares us in the face at every turn. No matter how you view present-day conditions this embarrassing truth is ever-present. *We, as Catholics, are not exerting the influence upon modern society that we should.* In proportion to our numbers, in the light of our historical record, in view of our world-wide organization the results of our activities give us too little cause for rejoicing.

There must be a reason for this. There is. At least a two-fold cause can be offered in explanation. First of all, *too many have lost sight of the goal for which we are striving.* The true and strict aims and objectives of Christian life have become dimmed by our contacts with a non-religious public. We have absorbed something from our every-day surroundings that has affected our thinking and consequently has distorted our vision of our own aims and ideals.

As a result, the proper course of our actions too often are out of line with what is best for us and for our world of today.

The second cause is akin to the first. It is partly due to the same reason and partly due to a certain negligence and lack of alertness of our own. *We are substituting something else besides Christ as the motivating power of our lives.* Isn't it true that in our studies, our discussions, our plans, our sermons, too often the very last thing we think of, if we include it at all, is the thought of Christ? We have been brought up on a catechism. We have filled our heads with definitions. How much do we know of the personal life and the specific characteristics of Him about Whom that book speaks? Do *all* our plans for social, civic, educational betterment begin with the thought that we are

doing this *personally* for Him? In the sermons you hear is Christ the main figure and moving actor or is He looked upon as an interested spectator or a minor character? If you can honestly say that "Christ and Him crucified" is the central thought of your daily life you are fortunate. If not, you have still to find the real beginning for your work in Catholic Action.

The Jewish people missed the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their two thousand year vigil. By the time He came they were looking for *another kind* of a Saviour and a *different kind* of a kingdom. It seems that in many ways we are making the same mistake. They were looking for a military leader who would appear spectacularly and rescue them from the bonds of Roman tyranny. They had visions of Israel arising once again as an Independent, Sovereign State that would guarantee economic, civic and political freedom to them for all time. The Carpenter from Nazareth had none of the qualifications that they had anticipated. His pronouncements that His Kingdom was not of this world did not fit in with their preconceived, misdirected notions of the new world. The Scribes and Pharisees had misled them to believe that religion and religious responsibilities could be served by *outward actions* and the *observation of external ceremonials*. His challenge that *inward sanctification* was the first law of the new kingdom was met with resentment. We know the sad results of their lack of understanding. We should pray that God may hasten the day when Israel will return, as has been predicted, and accept the Messiah that had been sent. In the meantime let us look carefully to ourselves that we do not fall into the same sad mistakes.

In our eagerness to check the onslaughts of the anti-religious forces by Catholic Action and to correct the evils we see practiced by others, we must first make sure of our own position. Each one of us has a very essential decision to make. What are we aiming at? Are we striving *first and foremost* for the Kingdom of God and merely making use of all things else toward that end? *or* are we

intent upon gaining supremacy in the worldly affairs of men, hoping that from this success right order will follow? We must make up our minds. It is all-important. If it is the first, we share in the assurance of a divine guarantee, "I will be with you all days even to the end of the world." If it is the second, we are battling alone and doomed to disappointment.

Fierce as the conflict, even for our daily existence, may be; as unfair and as unjust as our enemies may become; we cannot go beyond the limits of competition that were set down by our Leader. We can use no other means but those sanctioned by the King. If the whole world turns anti-Christian and bombards us with weapons of their own making, we on our part can never be anti-Christian in return. We cannot make use of their weapons in our own defense. "Evil can never be done that good may come of it." Our kingdom is not of this world. We might as well make up our minds to that right from the beginning—or lay down our arms. We can enjoy the things of this world only as a means to obtain the riches of the next, only as stepping stones to a leadership that will plant the cross of Christ on a higher place. As Catholics, it is not our right to seek the honors, pleasures, positions and preferments of this temporal kingdom as ends in themselves, *merely* for the temporal advantages they afford us. We have a higher duty to perform. We are not spiritual isolationists. We are descendants of the saints. We are "blood relations" of the King. His cause is our cause, or we are cowards and craven quitters. We may fall often. But at least in earnest desire, we aim to be worthy of Him.

He entered a world ruled over by the ruthless savagery of a Roman dictator. No where do we read that He urged His followers to supplant that regime by "putting their own into office." He did say, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." Catholic Action has no place in "politics" as the word is commonly accepted in this country today. Conversely, the "politician"—even though he may be nominally a Catho-



lic—who is part of the intrigue, the deceit, the bribery of “ward” politics has no place in Catholic Action. Statesmen, great or small, we can and should honor. Grafters, stooges and “rubber-stamps” should be forced out of public life by an aroused people. Through the education of voters, publicizing the moral issue involved in public questions, demanding that public officials show forth fruits worthy of confidence, Catholic Action can and should exert its influence for the common good.

No where do we read that the Saviour of the world exhorted His followers to institute indiscriminate boycotts against those who refused to accept Him. He did say, “They have persecuted Me; they will persecute you.” “Take up your *Cross* and follow Me.” No where does He promise a life of ease and comfort. He does guarantee peace and protection with *victory through trials*. He offers life eternal to all—but on *His terms, not ours*.

It is legitimate for His followers to wrest from the world as much of the goods of the earth as they can by legitimate means. They are entitled to enjoy the “things of this life” as much as anyone else, provided at the same time that enjoyment does not harm the spiritual life that Christ came to bestow upon all. The advantages of the material world can neither be gained nor held by the follower of Christ in the same way that it is done by those who defiantly reject His rules. This distinction puts the Christian at a distinct disadvantage in the pursuit of material objectives. In the lives of many it is just this unfair competition that constitutes the *Cross*. Are we willing to carry it?

## Suggestions for the Discussion Period

### Chapter III

1. “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.”

This is the divine guarantee that the triumph of Christ was complete and that the enemies of the Church will never accomplish her destruction. Does

this promise insure salvation to every Catholic? Does it guarantee economic and social security to her members? Will it prevent the Church from suffering or her members from being persecuted? Does it offer any assurance that *you* will not succumb to temptation or fall by the wayside in times of trial? Does it relieve the individual of responsibility to co-operate, by human effort, in the work of the Church? What specific, particular responsibilities has the individual Catholic today in the protection, preservation and the spreading of the Faith? Are we living up to those responsibilities? If not, why not? What is the Church? Is it true or false to say "*we are the Church*"?

2. "Christ and Him crucified" must be the motivating thought in Christian life.

Do you agree with that statement? If not, what would you suggest as a substitute? Is it morally right to have a wrong motive in performing an action? Why not? May I have two motives, both good, for instance to seek a certain public office and at the same time serve God and use my power for the good of others? Which should be the more prominent motive? If an action is neither good nor bad in itself, for instance—to make money—how do I transform it into a good act? how into a bad one? Why do we say that a *personal devotion* to Christ is vital to Catholic Action? Why not just a vague, indefinite, sentimental attachment to Him? What important decision to be made is demanded in the preceding chapter? Why is it necessary?

3. "My Kingdom is not of this world."

Where and when did Christ make this statement? What relation does it bear to Catholic Action? Can you find one sentence in the Scripture where the Divine Master advocated "political" action for His followers? Has a Catholic any duty to be interested in and to participate in civic affairs? State your reasons. Are there

actions of a civic nature which fall within the scope of Catholic Action? Are there some that have no place in Catholic Action? Enumerate the distinctions. What is a boycott? Is it wrong to boycott indecent literature? Communist propaganda? any group of people because of race, creed or color? Would it be wrong to boycott a *specific* group of people for a very *definite* injustice? Discuss the interpretation of the "Cross" given above.

## IV

### THE KING

Every one should agree that the first Christians had the *spirit of Catholic Action*, though they had never heard the name. They had no printed catechisms, no encyclicals, no Gospels even, as we have. One lamp lit their paths; one spark enflamed their hearts.

They had the *knowledge* of a Man who had come out of Galilee, Who had talked to them, walked amongst them, lived with them and died for them. Some of them had seen and talked to Him. Great numbers of them had only heard of Him from others. But the *realization* of Who He was and what He thought and what He had done was burned into their minds. That picture *inflamed their hearts*. *It stirred their souls*. They were compelled by the very force of His personality to count nothing else of any worth in this life unless it could be of service to Him and to His cause.

"Christ and Him crucified." That was it. That was the dynamo that drove the first apostles and disciples into the highways and the byways and to the ends of the earth to spread the truth. That was the torch that lit up the dark recesses of the catacombs when political tyrants pushed them off the streets of ancient Rome. That was the balm that soothed the souls of a million slaves and gave to them the first ray of consolation that they had ever known in their earthly existence. That was the sword that cut the proud

insignia from the cloaks of royal Roman officers and gave them courage to shoulder the symbolic wood of a rough cross. That was the living water that quenched the pain of fire in the souls of the martyrs even as their bodies were consumed by the flames of the pyres that had been set to destroy them.

“Christ and Him crucified.” That is it. Let us catch something of that spark and our Catholic Action becomes a *living* thing. That is the lubricant we need to make the dry, creaking wheels of Catholic Action turn with speed and smoothness. Until we do, much of our activity will bear no lasting results. We will be Catholics “acting,” rather than followers of Christ spreading *His* gains by means of Catholic Action.

American Catholics in one way are the best Catholics in the world. We crowd the churches on Sunday morning. Novena services mystify our non-church-going fellow citizens. Holy Name parades and Eucharistic Congresses are conducted on such a gigantic scale that our co-religionists in Europe almost refuse to believe it. “American ballyhoo” is their cynical reaction at times. Our school system is the glorious monument that has been erected to the memory of those millions of self-sacrificing parents who gave unstintingly of their meager substance in many generations. Yet when all is said and done, there is something lacking. Catholic Action has not yet “clicked” in America. The reason is not hard to find. Briefly it comes down to this: We have not yet learned to translate our Faith into a *personal devotion to our Lord and Leader, Christ the King*. We depend too much upon *external* stimuli; we do not recognize or realize the *absolute need of Christ* as the *personal inspiration* of our *every day lives*.

Every great movement in history has been centered about one, living, leading figure. The masses were inspired by the leadership of a captivating personality.

We have the noblest, the most inspiring, the most courageous, the grandest Leader ever known to man. His personality is irresistible. His cause so all-consuming that only

the ingrate and the fool decline to follow in it. Put to death over nineteen hundred years ago, He still lives and reigns gloriously both in heaven and on earth. He has stirred the hearts of a hundred million men and women to do the most death-defying deeds of daring for Him. Yet we of our generation take it all so "matter of course," so coldly, so short-sightedly. Why? Because we really do not *know Him*. We cannot love Him intensely and fight for Him—because we have not yet come to really *know Him*.

We will never understand Him, we will never know even ourselves, we will never appreciate what it means to be personally devoted to Him, until we make a serious effort to study Him, His Life, His cause. That means time and sacrifice. We must learn to *associate* with Him as we would a friend, a neighbor, one of our own family. We must bring Christ to the world. We must first know Him intimately in our own hearts. The world is going to learn of Christianity from human lips. It is going to accept it when it is convinced that it works in the lives of those who profess it. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Founder, the Protector and Living Leader of our religion. How are we ourselves going to share in that Life, how are we going to persuade others to embrace it, if we are ignorant of it, unless we make it a part of our every hour?

Again we must say that you cannot possibly gain the proper knowledge of this most marvelous Personality from the pages of a tiny booklet. We must be willing to spend the time and make the sacrifice to study it. The Gospels are the authentic history of His Life. They portray His character. Many men have written splendid accounts from the original sources. Shall we say we are not interested? Are we willing to admit that it is not worth while? Do we dare to even think that it is not necessary? Are we so silly as to believe that the Holy Ghost will pick us out for a special revelation? God expects us to use our heads and our hearts. Isn't it time that we went to work at it?

You have seen pictures of Christ, no doubt, that portray Him in a soft, sweet, almost sentimental light. Such por-

traits should be burnt. Fifteen years of grueling, biting toil in a carpenter shop would never develop anything like an effeminate trait in a man. Christ's hands were rough and calloused. They had to be. The saw and the hammer and the rough timbers from the woods of Galilee made it so. Christ's muscles were tough. Wrestling with two by fours and ragged stumps made them so. Christ's features were firm and strong and manly and mature. He was a man's man—every inch of Him. Examine the schedule of just one day's work in His Public Life and see if you could stand the wear and the tear of it. He was just as truly man as God, and as man He had to endure the same weariness and fatigue and hunger and thirst and nervous exhaustion that you and I experience when we put every ounce of energy we have into some work. Let's find out a little more about this Leader of ours and see just what kind of a man He was.

His battle with the Scribes and Pharisees is a gripping story of dramatic tenseness. One man standing up against a nation. One man struggling against forces of earth and hell. A nation, an empire, a world is at stake—a world of human souls. Those who can help Him most understand Him least. Those whom He would help, His greatest hindrance.

Every trick, every technique, a hundred unfair tactics are thrown against Him. We see them mirrored today in our own struggles. He trounced His adversaries at every turn. He beat them at their own game—but never in one instance does He bow to their methods.

Cutting logic, the persuasion of eloquence, the power of Personality, the lesson of His Own Life, the grace of the Father through prayer—these were His only weapons. He gave His life in the victory, but the triumph was complete. We still share in it today. How much do we share in it? We have a world to conquer. Can we do it without Him? Can we find any better means than He used, can we improve upon His Plans? It is too hard, did you say? Not half so hard as it will be, if we fail to play a manly part.

## Suggestions for the Discussion Period

### Chapter IV

#### 1. No one ever fell in love with the Milky Way.

This is just another way of saying that human beings will not respond by enthusiastic action to an abstract idea or general principle. We need the inspiration of a living leader to arouse us to action. Do you agree with that? Christ, as a living model, was the inspiration of the first Christians. Is He our inspiration? If not, why not? What advantages did the first Christians have that we do not have? What disadvantages? What advantages do we have over them? What disadvantages? What means can we use to make Christ more the center of our activities? What would you do if you desired to know the character of Washington, Lincoln or Lee more clearly and intimately? How would you go about developing a friendship with a new neighbor who had just moved in next door to you? Does your answer give you any hint on how to become more intimate with your leader, Christ? Is He a living leader? Where in particular will you find Him dwelling? Is He hard or easy to approach? Write down all you know of His personal character and discuss the traits with the rest of your group. Can the knowledge of Him which you have through Faith become clearer and stronger? Would prayer help any? Would the intimate association afforded by Holy Communion make your knowledge of Him greater? How often may an ordinary Catholic receive Him in Holy Communion? What are the objections and obstacles to a frequent reception of the Sacraments? Is it logical to say that reception of Holy Communion once a month is sufficient to develop a strong, fighting, alert soldier of Christ in Catholic Action? Will personal piety help or hinder Catholic Action? Is anything else needed?

2. You cannot learn Catholic Action merely by reading a pamphlet about it.

Why not? What practical means must be taken to gain a real knowledge of Christ? Are these means easy? What obstacles must be met? How will they be overcome? What is needed to make our efforts successful? Is the effort worthwhile? Is there anything else that I would like to do as valuable as learning Christ? Why or why not? What means did our Leader use in His battles with His enemies? Can they be used today exactly as He used them? Write down the particular movements of the present that are hostile to Christ. What particular weapons must be used against them? How can the weapons He used be adapted to our times? to our individual effort? Can we win without Christ? If not why not? What will be the result if we refuse to play a part?

## V

### THE CROSS—OUR HERITAGE IN CATHOLIC ACTION

ONE of the first, if not the first, of the official acts in the Public Life of the God-Man was His dramatic entrance into the Temple and the smashing advance upon the buyers and the sellers. With majestic grandeur and divine indignation He drove the racketeers of the Temple from their places of entrenchment. With one sweeping blow He established Himself in the public mind as one coming to them with authority.

Unfortunately, we find followers of the Divine Teacher among us today who take this incident in the life of our Lord as their symbol of Catholic Action. They yearn to imitate Him in this action, quite forgetting the rest of His Life. They have grasped neither the meaning of this divine gesture nor the scope of the mission which the Son of God came on earth to preach.

The incident was full of meaning to the Master and its



implications were pretty well understood by those who experienced the effects of His anger. The import of the incident rests in this fact: The Son of God was serving warning on the masters of Israel that He had come to take possession of His Father's House. He was informing them that their day of power was done. He was manifesting in a dramatic way the interior thoughts of His Sacred Heart in regard to the Temple and the practices that had arisen in relation to the divine service. He was in no way offering His example as a line of action to be followed by His disciples. Never in His life does He even intimate that the right which He assumed, by divine authority, in this scene, was to be passed on as a prerogative to individual, unauthorized followers. It was a *personal* display of authority that He chose to exercise at that moment. It was one of perhaps a hundred thousand actions that He performed during His lifetime. It has no bearing on Catholic Action, except in so far as it reveals to us *one* characteristic of His Personality, one emotion of His Heart, one step in the development of His Public Mission. It is to be pondered with humble reverence, not to be played with as a possible means of putting a stop to the progress and the pressure of anti-Christian elements.

Catholic Action, if it is ever to accomplish what it was established to do, must follow the true Christian tradition. It must be as modern as our telephone or radio in its methods; it must be as conservative as Christ in its underlying principles, its motives for action, its aims and ideals.

There is one salient truth of Christianity, one inescapable fact in the life of our Leader that can never be forgotten. Miss it and you miss the entire aim and object of Catholic Action, lose sight of it and the whole idea of Christianity itself is gone.

Christ our King was above all else—a *priest*. For that was He born. For that came He into the world. From His first conscious moment in the stable in Bethlehem, through the years at Nazareth, along the dusty roads of Galilee and in the quiet solitudes of the mountains, His mind's eye was ever upon one day, one moment of that day—the day when

He would hang upon a cross and give up His life to the Father in atonement for sin. He came to us, primarily, *to offer sacrifice*. On the Cross He brought that eternal desire to its fulfillment. On the Cross He was both priest and victim. That Cross can never be dissociated from *any* Catholic activity. It is of the very substance of Christianity.

*The participating in and the sharing of the benefits of the Sacrifice of Calvary constitutes Christian life.* To understand Catholic Action that one thought, that sentence must be studied, meditated upon and mastered. Catholic Action is not something outside of or foreign to the Christian life. It is a modern means of protecting, preserving and spreading the benefits that Christ won for us on Calvary. Refuse to accept that thought and you destroy the movement at the root.

The night before He died, the Divine Master, looking forward in vision, beheld the sufferings that were soon to be inflicted upon Him. He saw the climax of that night of horror reached on a cross the following day. With that in mind, He took bread and blessed it and said, "This is My Body." He took wine and said, "This is My Blood." In a mystical oblation He then and there offered to His heavenly Father that Body that was about to be bruised and beaten and broken, the precious Blood that was to be poured forth to stain the innocent earth. That was Calvary in anticipation. The next day the actuality took place.

On that same night He ordained His first priests. He gave them the power to change bread and wine into His own living Body and Blood. That was and still is the first sacred function of the priesthood. He had given them great powers. Later on He would give them still others. He would establish them as a single, organized society to carry on His mission and to spread the benefits of His unending sacrifice to all the world.

Today we recognize that commission of Christ as it has been and still is being fulfilled in the teachings and the approved activities of the Catholic Church. Your Catholic Church *is* the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

Catholic Action is the participation of the laity in the spiritual mission of the ordained successors of the Apostles in that Church. It is not a sharing in the sacred orders of the priesthood. Neither is it something distinct from the work of the Church. It is an organized movement of the laity to help the clergy perform their sacred functions with greater efficiency, with greater spiritual profit to the souls of men. It is a lay apostolate by which the layman, in a manner fitting to the unordained, may partake of the apostolic mission of the priesthood. Material and worldly affairs come within its scope only in so far as they are related to faith and morals and the spiritual life. In its essence Catholic Action is *of the spirit*, the soul and those things that pertain to it.

The field of operations in Catholic Action is first of all on the battleground of *one's own heart*. From the individual it moves into the *home*. In the world about us, the natural starting place for exterior, organized action is the parish, which is the center of Catholic community life.

Doesn't it seem reasonable to presume that the immediate objective of Catholic Action in the parish should concern itself with the Sacrifice of the Mass, the renewal of Calvary whose benefits we hope to spread throughout the whole world? How, when, where can the laity be of help to their priests in making the members of the parish "Holy Mass conscious," in increasing attendance of lax members, in arousing all to a more fervent and frequent reception of the Sacraments? If the *benefits of Calvary* and the *spreading of them* are really the basic interests of Catholic Action, should not the question of the Sacrifice of the Mass in our own parish be one of the very first considerations to which we should turn our attention? Certainly, at least one section of our Catholic Action group should concern itself with this vital subject. From this first step we will logically come to the discussion of the economic, social, educational, political conditions in the parish or beyond which hinder the priest in the full performance of his sacerdotal functions. The specific objectives of Catholic Action will vary according to

local needs and conditions. The unity or lack of it will depend upon the amount of organizational work that has been done. Groups not formed on parish lines will need the "mandate" of the bishop of the diocese to be included in the work.

An objection: Will not the enemies of the Church prosper while we are following this line of action? The answer: In some cases it may be necessary to begin the formation of Christian lives all over again. If that be the case, let us not blame the enemy for our own deficiencies. Mere opposition to the enemies of Christ will never achieve the aims of Catholic Action. At times such action may just add fuel to the fire. In most instances, however, the positive program of building up our own forces and the necessary defensive work of combating irreligious forces can go hand in hand. They can complement one another, each element contributing an impetus to the other. Let us not deceive ourselves, however. Nothing can take the place of solid interior formation of the individual. We cannot *spread the benefits of Calvary* to others if we deliberately neglect to participate in them' ourselves and to share them with our own.

## **Suggestions for the Discussion Period**

### **Chapter V**

#### **1. Violence breeds violence.**

Can you prove the truth of this statement from the example of Germany and Russia? Did either of these countries solve their social problems by the methods they employed to eradicate abuses? Why not? Can human problems ever be solved by inhuman means or methods? In regard to the dignity of man and the rights of the individual, what particular point must always be kept in mind? Discuss the meaning of the word *human*. Does physical oppression destroy the wrong ideas in men's minds which cause abuses and injustice? How can you combat a vicious idea? Can you destroy it by a law? Can you curb it with a whip? What faculty in man must be in-

fluenced if truth is to take the place of error? In the ordinary course of life what part must the individual citizen play in correcting false notions that are prevalent? What is meant by the words "public opinion"? What means must be taken to build a sound public opinion? Is there any need of the promulgation of moral teaching to sustain and make profitable for the general welfare a sound public opinion once it has been established? What practical steps can your group take to form a sound public opinion in *your own community*? What action is essential on the part of your members, if your fellow-citizens are to be induced to accept and act upon a code of ethics?

## 2. "Drive the buyers and the sellers from the Temple."

What relation have these words to Christ? What right has the individual citizen to use them as a slogan for Catholic Action? Is there danger of harm resulting from the rash repetition of such emotional appeals? Does violence undertaken through mob-action usually arise suddenly or is it the result of sullen thoughts that have smoldered in men's minds and which at length is whipped into a fury by the fiery appeal of some demagogue? Why should Christians constantly check their thoughts and emotions in order to consider action with calm self-control? How did Christ normally meet the attacks that were brought against Him day by day? Have we any better guide than He? Is enthusiasm for a cause the same as "emotionalism"? Is it possible to be enthusiastically active, to battle fiercely and yet to keep a calm discipline upon our thoughts, words and actions? What is needed to reconcile these seeming contraries? Discuss the meaning of "the benefits of Calvary." What is the source of them? Where find them today? Discuss *real* Catholic Action.

## VI

### ONE LORD—ONE LIFE

“I HAVE come that they may have *life* and have it more abundantly.” These are the direct words of Christ. They give us a reason why He came amongst us. They offer us a cue to Catholic Action.

What do the words mean? Certainly, they do *not* mean that He has come to give us *natural* life. We already have that by our birth. There must be another life, a life that differs from that of the senses which we experience. There is. The soul vitalizes, gives life to the clay that we call our body. That is *natural* life. This other life, this new life which Christ came to bestow is the *life of the soul—a supernatural life*. You cannot touch it, taste it, see it. You can understand it and appreciate the supernatural effects of it if you are spiritually alert.

We do not adore a dead or dying Christ. We worship and work with and live in a living, glorious Christ. The link between His *personal* life and *my living* soul is *sanctifying grace*. Is that too deep a thought to ponder? You can never form a *picture* of it in your imagination. Your *mind* can master the *thought* of it. If we would but grasp it, it would make all the difference in the world in our daily lives. *We are one with Christ*. Not *physically* as my body and soul make up one living being. Each soul in sanctifying grace is still a distinct entity, nevertheless *actually* our soul-life is joined in a *living union* with the living Christ.

The tree with its roots, its trunk, its branches are *one* in life. The Divine Master has said of the living union of Himself with us, “I am the Vine; you are the branches.” It is a tremendous thought. In some mystic way we actually share His own life, *we live His life with Him*. Does that mean anything to you? It should. It means that I can never again live my own life as though it belonged only to *myself*. My every thought and action has a relationship to Him and to every other member of that Mystical Body. I cannot be negligent of my spiritual life without *slowing up*

the life-stream of Christ and His members. A personal, deliberate mortal sin paralyzes an important branch of the Vine that is Christ. A deliberate injury to any living being for whom Christ died harms not only the victim, but the whole life of the Body: I cannot be content to merely live my own little life and disregard the spiritual needs of others unless I callously wish or am willing also to cripple the supernatural life that flows through me and others. I must be on the alert to make that life flourish not only within myself but in the soul of every other person who constitutes with me the one living family of the human race. Christ has said, "He who is not with Me is against Me." We either live and work and strive to keep that living union with Christ flourishing and growing or by our negligence allow it to die or to fail to take root in someone else.

That is why you cannot be a "lukewarm" Catholic. You cannot have half of the life of Christ and half of a sinful self or of the world. This life of Christ is indivisible. We are *one* with Him or He is one without us. He can live His own life by His own divine power. We cannot. Separate the cell from the body and it dies. Refuse to keep the cells of the body alive by contact with the blood-stream and the whole body grows weaker and may die. That *Christian life* which we talk about as the source of light and strength for the whole world is like that too. As *individuals* we *do* live our own lives both naturally and supernaturally. As *members of society* we must share our efforts and co-operate with one another for the *well-being of society*. As *members of Christ's Mystical Body* we must share our *supernatural* activities with others for the *spiritual well-being of the whole*. This can be done in only one way. By living our lives with whole-hearted enthusiasm according to the teachings of the Church. The Church provides us with all the means necessary to live this life to the full. The Sacraments, the Mass, prayer, devotions, practical good works, a hundred ways are opened to us. One thing the Church cannot do. She cannot force this life upon us. She cannot set the limit of our participation in it. That rests squarely upon our own initiative, our

own measure of courage and sacrifice, our own willingness to "go all out" for Christ.

Catholic Action is a *lay apostolate*. It is a divine mission for the unordained. That great privilege can never be realized by practices of mere *personal* piety. It reaches out, it pushes us forth into every nook and corner of the world where other human beings live and work. It takes Christ into the lives of men and women who will not of themselves come to Christ. We take the place of the priest. We take the place of Christ. Not in the pulpit or on the altar—that is the prerogative of the priesthood. Not by pressure—that is the impudent presumption usurped by propagandists. Catholic Action does its work best and bravest when *each member* has convinced himself that he must be to his neighbor *another Christ*. We shape our thoughts, our aims, our ideals, our every day actions on that principle. To do that successfully we must learn to think as He thought; we must practice to live as He lived. No power on earth can supply that spirit for us. We will find it first in our own hearts or we will be forever impotent. No amount of organization can ever take its place. It is the *personal responsibility* of each one of us to search until we find it, to fan the small sparks of faith and love in our own hearts until they little by little burst into a brighter flame, to dig deep into our souls until we discover what it is that has held us back before. Once inspired with *that* spirit, the unconquerable desire and the undying determination to be another Christ in a Christless world, then we can rest assured that the *organizational* unity which the Church provides for Catholic Action will curb the encroaching advance of her enemies and bring to naught the diabolical efforts of godless men.

This all-too-brief explanation of Catholic Action may be disappointing to some. They have been looking, perhaps, to a solid front of united Catholics, who by sheer weight of numbers would hold back the forces of evil. They realize that the suggestion offered here will not be accepted by millions immediately. Our reply is brief and to the point. Christ is not responsible for the power that evil men have



usurped from their fellow-men. Christ is not at fault if we have been negligent of our obligations in keeping the world Catholic. We must face facts, not be misled by fanciful delusions. The enemies of God have grown strong; the friends of Christ, the brothers and sisters of the God-Man, have grown lukewarm in many ways. Christ died once for the world and laid down the conditions of life upon which we can share His Conquest. He will neither exert His Omnipotence to crush the enemies who have defied Him; nor should we expect Him to resort to miracles to move us to live up to the dignity and the responsibilities that He died to share with us.

He has already shown us the way that the world is to be saved. We have no right to expect Him to revise His Own divine Plan to fit in with our comfortable thoughts of salvation. If lack of co-operation on the part of others inclines us to discouragement in our own efforts, we can be consoled with the thought that He Himself, after a lifetime of labor, found only twelve upon whom He could rely for the completion of His work—and one of those was a traitor. Yet with the foreknowledge of Divine Wisdom He could say, "Have confidence, for I have overcome the world."

## **Suggestions for the Discussion Period**

### **Chapter VI**

#### **1. "I live; not I but Christ lives in me."**

These words were the inspiration of the life of St. Paul. Can we bring them down to have a real meaning in our own lives? Compare the condition of a strong, vigorous athlete with that of a dying man. What does the healthy man look like, how does he act, what is his mental outlook on life, how much enjoyment does he experience through his physical fitness? Study the symptoms and the results of disease in the sick man. Why the difference? What is it that the healthy man has that the weak one lacks? Apply this comparison to the *soul-life* of two men. Do you realize

what it means to say Christ lives in me and I in Him? How is that *life of the soul* weakened? How destroyed? What *practical* means must we use to sustain, increase and develop it? What relation has this life to Baptism? Confirmation? Holy Communion? Penance? Matrimony? Holy Orders? Extreme Unction? Prayer? Good Works? Catholic Action?

2. What do you mean by the word "society"?

Why is the union of families into a society, which we call the State, necessary? What are my obligations toward the other members of society? What do I hope to get out of my fulfillment of those obligations? Can society really be a *human* society unless it participates in the life that Christ came to bestow upon us? Have I any responsibility in serving society? in aiding others to gain and increase in their lives the *life of Christ*? What is the first step in that service? Where will I find the means necessary to carry out my personal mission in regard to society? Upon what does my degree of service depend particularly? Does the *spiritual* side of the apostolate of Catholic Action exclude other activities such as civic, educational, social work? How can I spiritualize even non-spiritual activities? Should I? Why?

3. Is God responsible for the distressful condition of the world today?

Could He have made men machines instead of free beings? Would we have been better off if He had? Have we yet learned the meaning of the precious gift of liberty? How and when will we learn it? Does the success of the work of Catholic Action demand great numbers? How many trained Catholic Actionists did Christ have when He had finished His personal mission on earth? Are we willing to accept Him, His cause, His program and the consequences and results? If not, what substitute have *you* to offer?



850314

