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Athanasius

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“
...Seeking
only God”
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A CALL TO PRIESTS
TO THE INTERIOR LIFE

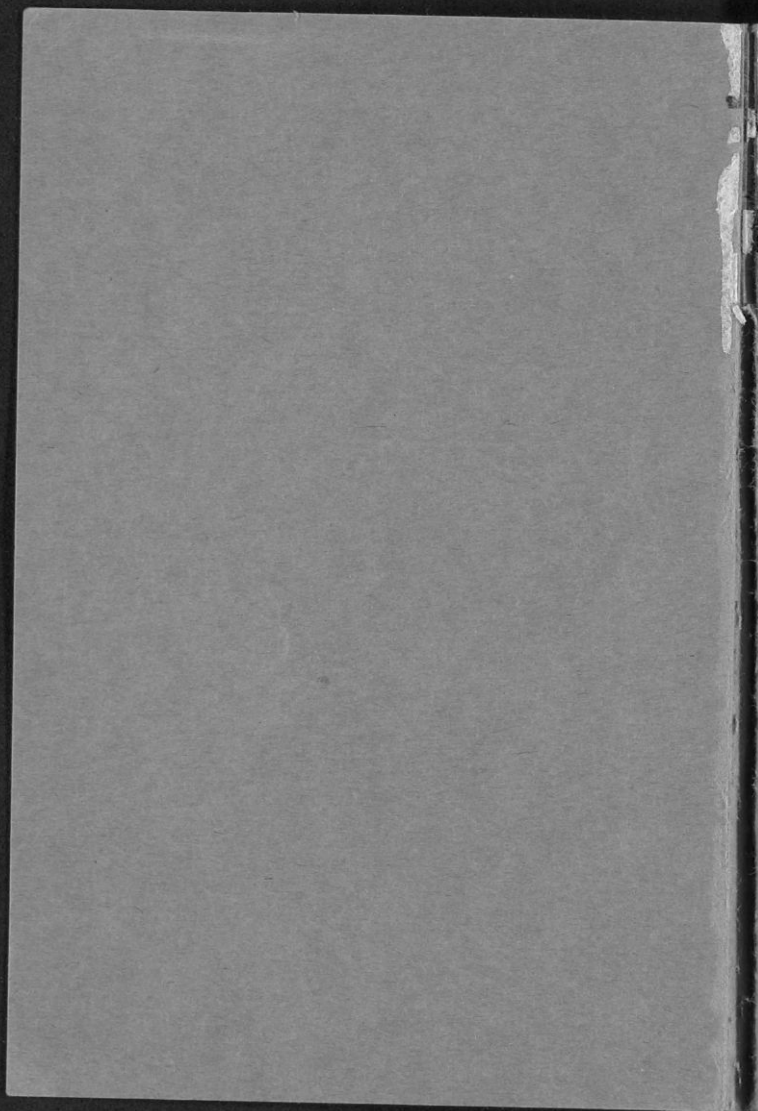
By Athanasius Bierbaum, O.F.M.

AMERICAN EDITION

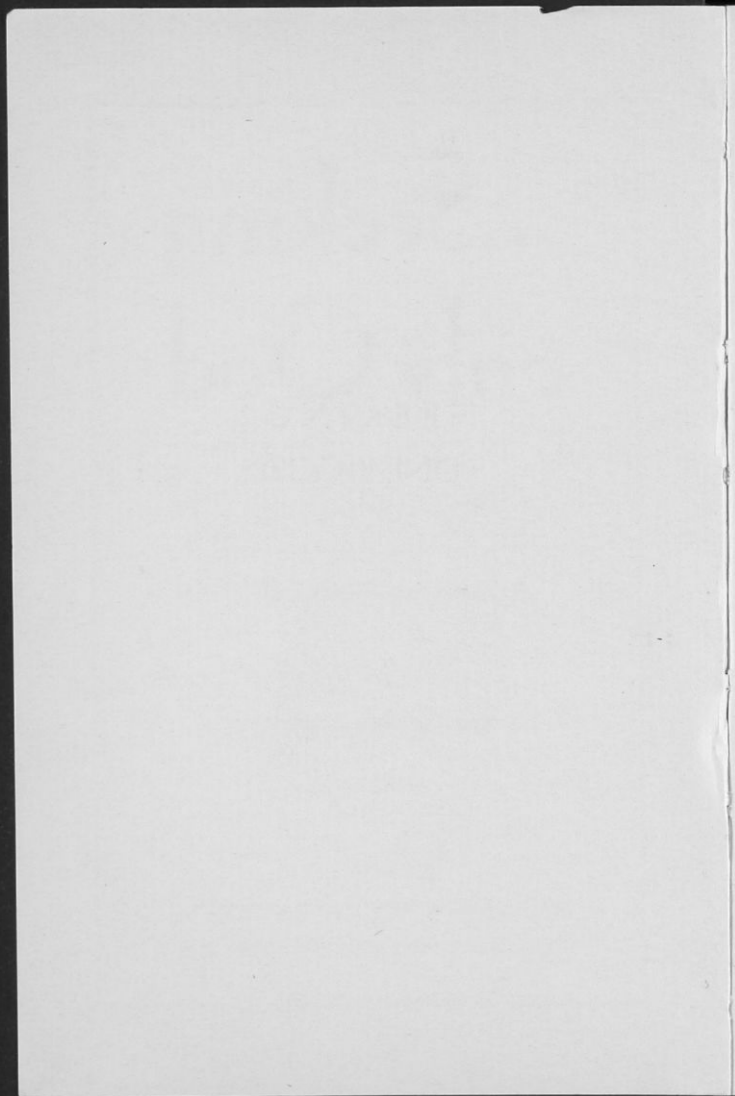
By Bruno Hagspiel, S.V.D.

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Franciscan Monastery, Paterson, N. J.





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By **Athanasius Bierbaum, O.F.M.**

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Revised Edition

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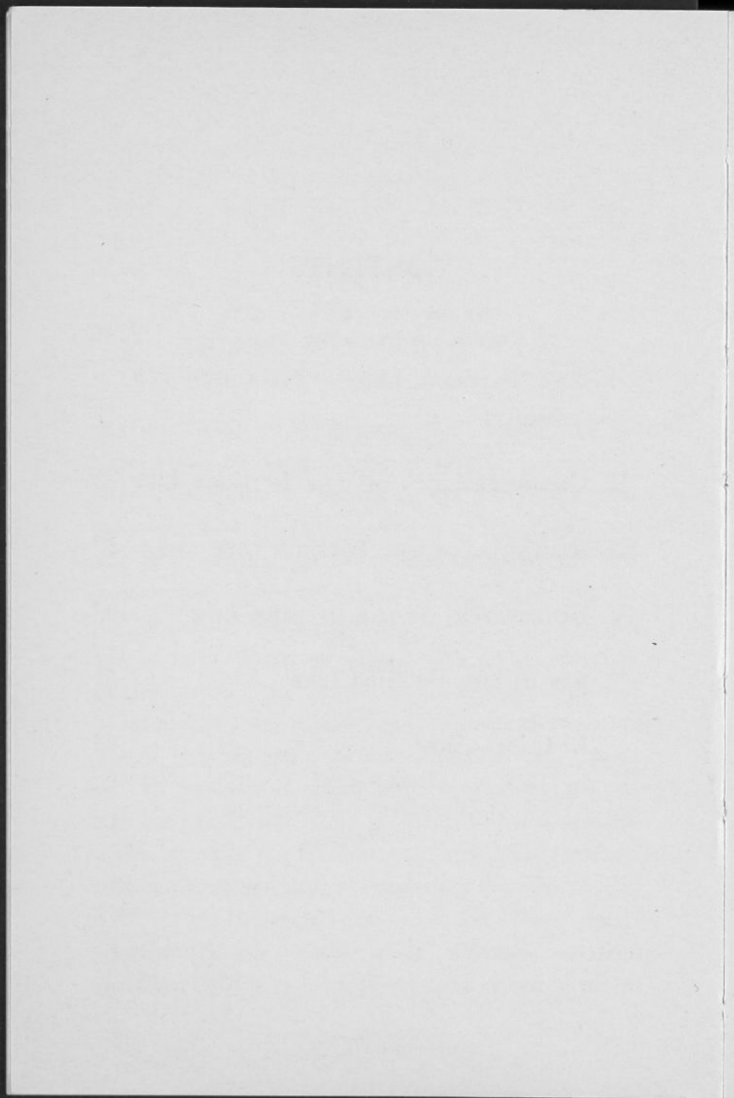
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I

THE INTERIOR LIFE

A NECESSITY FOR PRIESTS

THE interior life, inwardness — these are concepts that have become foreign to many moderns. Cast into the whirlpool of modernity that relentlessly sucks us downward, we lack the time and the peace necessary for the interior life. Or we no longer recognize its supreme importance, and blinded by the glittering externals of our day, with an air of superiority, we attribute it to the so-called ingenuousness of an age that retained an understanding and appreciation for true interior piety. Or — and in this we have the real reason for the aversion to and misunderstanding of the interior life — faltering faith has weakened the understanding and appreciation of interior reflection. Hence the complaint Father Menge, O. F. M., raises in "The Way to Interior Life": "We moderns become daily more poverty-stricken in the interior life. Unbelief has robbed millions

of peace in God and focused their attention on creatures. This is why there is so much groveling materialism in science, so much repellent naturalism in art, so much inordinate love of pleasure and sensuality."

As children of our times we priests come in for some share of this bitter criticism. Clerical life, and particularly the religious life, suffers increasingly in true inwardness. How else explain the disinclination for the outward expressions of the religious life, for solemn church services, for pilgrimages, processions and age-old customs that are rooted deep in religion? In an attempt to justify ourselves we call these things wearying or childish: forgetful that a full interior life pushes upward and outward for expression, just as the tree with roots deep in rich soil raises aloft a luxuriant crown; forgetful too that our forebears of the Middle Ages, steeped in the inner life, gave evidence to the world of a deep inward spirituality in magnificent piles of masonry, incomparable religious art, literature that breathes true mysticism and homely folk customs that are the poetic expression of a deeply religious spirit.

At any rate, the blight of superficiality has spread to the point where a reaction has already

set in. This is true even in non-Catholic circles. The anxious strife and fretful labor in the service of Mammon have awakened a realization of interior emptiness, and a belated consciousness of the truth uttered by the great Doctor of Hippo: *Fecisti nos, Domine, ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.*

But in every reaction there is danger of going to the other extreme. And so it is in this. There are those who wish a complete divorce from externals, such as sermons, sacraments and services, taking the indefensible and unreasonable position that religion is something purely internal. There are those too who deride the Church, particularly the Catholic Church, as an obstacle to the interior life, alleging that she smothers it with her many externals.

Virtus in medio! And this golden mean is expressed for us by the God-Man Who in the sphere of the interior life too is our Teacher and Exemplar. Christ, Who prayed in the dark hours of the night and labored in the bright hours of the day, Who through His Church presents this ideal in the lives of Martha and Mary, thereby condemns this over-emphasis on the interior life, as well as these unqualified attacks on His Bride as given too much *ad exteriora.*

Let us give thanks to the Lord if we still remain what the Apostle declares us to be: *Vos autem in carne non estis, sed in spiritu* (Rom. VIII, 9). If, however, we have been infected by the poison of the time, if our spiritual lives have suffered, if the interior man is suffocating under an avalanche of external labors, then let us resolutely and confidently start work anew on the remodeling and expansion of the inner life; rejoicing in the thought that out of it will spring a noble humanity, a zealous priestly life and a fruitful shepherding of souls.

Ennobled Human Nature the Fruit of the Interior Life.

We children of men — and we priests are and remain human beings, even though the All-Highest has chosen us, and the bishop's hands have consecrated us — cling to this earth. Consciously or unconsciously we recognize full well the maxim: *Domine, bonum est nos hic esse!* The cry resounds from lip to lip: *Venite ergo et fruamur bonis, quae sunt, et utamur creatura . . . quoniam haec est pars nostra, et haec est sors* (Wis. II, 6, 9). Eating, drinking, entertainments and amusements, play and sport — these are the centers about which

men's thoughts revolve. Alban Stolz once remarked of a worthy representative of this class that "he is fettered to the earth, and heaven is to him as incomprehensible as to a dumb animal. His world revolves around food, money, the feminine, and something to sate his curiosity."

In this, lamentation is futile. Our lips are closed and silent for the spiritual, the eternal, because our nature is corrupted by original sin. *Corpus enim, quod corrumpitur, aggravat animam, et terrena inhabitatio deprimit sensum . . .* (Wis. ix, 15). Man's mortal flesh is a dead weight tied to his spirit preventing it from taking flight to God and things divine. *Adhaesit in terra venter noster*. We bury ourselves in our labor for days without end; we are such slaves to it that we are prevented from returning to our true selves. The evils that flow from this condition are inevitable. The vineyard of the soul, submerged in earthly things, as strikingly pictured for us in the book of Proverbs (xxiv, 30), is laid waste with the thistles of sin and the thorns of passion, *et maceria lapidum destructa erat*: the wall of grace, about which we so little concern ourselves, has fallen in ruins.

We may be inclined to characterize this clinging to the earthly, with all its sad consequences,

as human; but unfortunately it is not worthy of a human being. Through the din of the earthly and the fleshly pierce the voices, the insistent voices of another world. *Fecisti nos, Domine, ad te!* cries out Saint Augustine. *Quae sursum sunt, quaerite, non quae super terram!* cries out Saint Paul. *Quaerite primum regnum Dei!* cries out the Wisdom of the Word made Flesh. *Ad majora natus sum!* comes from those who have risen above an earth-bound horizon. And the Church sums up these calls in her daily cry: *Sursum corda!* Raise aloft your hearts, and souls, and minds!

If then this clinging to the earth is neither according to the mind of God, nor worthy of our human nature; if man ascends only with his vision fixed on the spiritual; if noble souls inhabit only the higher sphere — what then is the way to this life? Hettinger answers in his "Timotheus": "Just as the sparkling water springs from the depths and not from the sandy surface, so also in the spiritual life. Every great person, in all the fields of human endeavor, in literature and art, was characterized by a true interior spirit." And he closes with this significant sentence: "In fact, the life of the spirit is our only real life; life as it appears in the externals is only its echo."

“Renowned men, recollected men:
Interior life, true life”

— an aphorism worthy of remembrance.

Hettinger is supported by Alban Stolz whose works may be called without hesitation texts of the interior life. In his delineation of the spiritual, Stolz remarks: “Man’s activities appear at times as a drama, unconsciously presented. . . . The spring that motivates these marionettes is the stomach and, in general, the demands of the body. The moment that men’s actions are in accord with God’s will, they cease to be a drama and become real. And the players are not wooden marionettes but human beings, who are aware of what they do and why they do it.”

And so it must be. The interior life, in the final analysis, consists in nothing less than an *adhaerere Deo*, and the inner man will, to a greater or lesser degree, be characterized by the words of the Apostle: *Mihi vivere Christus est!* God and the Divine do not occupy the last place in his heart. For the *sapientia terrena, animalis, diabolica* of which Saint James speaks (III, 15) there is scarcely any room; the dead load of sensuality, if not entirely removed, has been reduced to a minimum; and if the law of the flesh, striving

against the law of the spirit, continues as the inescapable consequence of original sin, nevertheless it is spent in the fury of the battle. God reigns in the soul and transfigures the whole man: *Vivo, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus!*

On the feast of one of the most renowned masters of the spiritual life, Saint Peter of Alcantara, the Church sings, in the words of the breviary of the Seraphic Order: *O virum ineffabilem, qui vivens in carne, spiritu ambulavit, et nihil in terris desiderans, conversationem suam semper in coelis habebat* — "O wondrous man, who living in the flesh walked in the spirit, and desiring nothing of earthly things, had his mind always set on heavenly things. . . ."

Such are the best among the truly good, and they achieved the coveted goal by assiduously cultivating the interior life. Noble humanity springs from this soil.

Priestly Piety the Fruit of the Interior Life.

What are we priests? The chosen from among the many. According to Numbers (viii, 14) we are the *Separati*, according to John (xv, 16) the *Electi*, according to the Acts (xiii, 2) the *Segregati*; in short, the chosen of the people. For this

very reason the words of Saint Ambrose are applicable in all their brevity to us: *Nihil in sacerdote commune cum multitudine.*

Hence the Apostle of the Gentiles remarks of the many: *Terrena sapiunt* — "Of earth are their thoughts" — and we can forgive them because of their multitudinous earthly cares and their superficial training. But far different demands are made of us priests, who have been lifted out of these material cares and who can look back upon a training that constantly directed our thoughts heavenward and enlightened and compelled our hearts, according to the words of Saint Augustine: *Tene Deum, quia numquam vilescit, quia pulchrius nihil est.*

Cui multum datum est, multum quaeretur ab eo, the Master tells us in the words of Saint Luke (xii, 48). Though the religion of the many be *terrena sapere*, our program must ever be: *Nostra autem conversatio in coelis est* — our activities are supra-natural, heavenly, divine (Phil. iii, 20). The very idea and essence of the spiritual life demand it. But if we, the chosen of the Lord, we who are schooled at length in the science of God, were to be strangers to the life of the spirit, then the same dear Lord Who chose us out of His ineffable love, and these years of study in the science

of the Divine, would bitterly reproach us with the pertinent question: *Cui bono?* . . .

What are we priests? The *dispensatores mysteriorum Dei*.

It is illuminating that among the divine mysteries, the *mysteria tremenda super altare Dei* are particularly referred to. Then would we officiate at this tremendous mystery, transfused with the love of an Omnipotent God, as cold functionaries, robots, or stupid piece-workers at a machine — without soul, without spirit, without heart? Dare we do so? Have we done so?

What was it that struck our attentive ear at ordination? In the words of God and His Church the bishop admonished us: *Agnosce quod agis!* Seek to penetrate into those sacred precincts that are delegated to you! Draw lovingly closer to the holy things that you daily hold in your hands! Penetrate into that mystery of the Divinity that you are privileged to transact every morning on the altar! *Agnosce quod agis!*

Does it not come to this: hold to the spiritual, the interior life, without which our labors become a corpse devoid of all life, the sacred mysteries are profaned, and that which is consecrated to the service of God becomes a source of scandal? Is it

not clear that every movement of the priest at the altar or the communion rail or in the sacristy is thus subjected to a critical estimate; that he is either a man of God or a hired laborer? . . .

What are we priests? The *praecones Altissimi*. To us is delegated the sublime task of singing and proclaiming the praises of the Almighty in behalf of the people who are all too prone to forget this obligation. *Pro hominibus constituitur*. This we accomplish in our breviary prayers, a chorus of praise that continues undiminished with the circling of the sun about the globe, a chorus that is echoed by the "Holy! Holy! Holy!" of the blessed in heaven.

The breviary, however, must not degenerate into a dead mechanism for turning out prayers; it must not consist in that cold and heartless mumbling of which the words of Holy Scripture are an apt condemnation: *Appropinquat populus iste ore suo, et labiis suis glorificat me, cor autem eius longe est a me* (Isa. xxix, 13). Naught remains then but to enter into the spirit of the psalms, the hymns and the canticles, not so much with the dissecting knife of the critic as with the longing of a heart devoted to God. This, however, presupposes a certain measure of the interior spirit, of joy in a life of spiritual recollection. Only the

priest who is interiorly recollected is conscious of the fact, when taking the breviary in hand, that he is coming into the presence of God; that according to God's own economy, he is the representative of the world in singing the praises due the Creator — thoughts that demand an abiding recollection, love and fervor at the recital of the breviary. He who is a stranger to the interior life will discharge the divine office because he cannot do otherwise; his eye is fixed impatiently on the end rather than calmly on the matter; he sees the words rather than the spirit and meaning, the depressing burden than the sublime end, the discharge of the duty rather than the prayer itself.

How much more acceptable to God would the hours of breviary prayers be if they were approached with a true interior spirit!

Success in Pastoral Labors the Fruit of the Interior Life.

As pastors of souls we must lead the people toward heaven. Daily we cry out to the world, *Sursum corda*; every sermon, every instruction, every admonition is nothing other than a new call: *Quae sursum sunt, quaerite, non quae super terram*. Sunday after Sunday we preach to the people the word of God, that may be summed

up in one sentence, *Quaerite Deum, et vivet anima vestra* (Ps. LXVIII, 33). And we would cling to the earth in the face of this *Sursum corda* — rather than fix our eyes on the heavenly objectives, we would grovel in the dirt — we would rather love the contemptible world than an all-loving God — we would be pathfinders for others to God but for ourselves poachers in other preserves. . . .

Alas, we can understand why so many sermons fail in results among the faithful: *Sermo multus et fructus nullus*, in the words of Saint Bernard. The smoothness of marble, but also its coldness! How could it be otherwise? Did it not issue from a heart cold and closed to God? *Nemo dat quod non habet*. The heart that is without the fire of divine love can impart no warmth and fervor.

Yes, the success of such laborers of the Middle Ages as Bernardine of Siena, Vincent Ferrer, John of Capistran, Berthold of Regensburg and many others, who effected such incredible transformations of whole peoples and nations, is understandable. Saint Robert Bellarmine has said that their sermons were so simple and unpretentious that they were considered hardly worth the trouble to read. But these were the utterances of men of God, men of the interior life, men burning with supernatural love. This is the secret of their

glorious successes. *Pectus est quod disertum facit.* If we today lack the results, Saint Robert Bellarmine has provided the diagnosis: *Deest anima, deest vita, deest ignis; breviter, magna illa charitas deest, quae sola potest verba dicentium animare et accendere et corda audientium inflammare et commutare. . . .*

Our labor of preaching, if it is to be blessed by God with results, cries out for the spirit of the interior life — a submersion in the Divine that will enkindle in us a fire of zeal and love, and thus inflame our utterances with a fervor that makes them irresistible. It is an indisputable fundamental of all pastoral activity — such as at the altar or in the pulpit, in the confessional and at the communion-rail, in school and at meetings, when visiting the sick and in all private relations with people — that the priest imbued with the spirit of the interior life is blessed with entirely different results than he for whom the life of the spirit is hardly more than a name. Moreover, did not the Apostle proclaim: *Vos, qui spirituales estis, . . . instruite* (Gal. vi, 1)? Does not this rule contain the demand that only those who are truly spiritual, truly of the interior life, rise up as teachers of Israel? . . .

As shepherds of souls we dare not, in spite of external activity, languish in spirit.

Our life and our strength belong to our people. Today this means untold care and labor, particularly since our priestly labors must be performed in the midst of a *generatio mala et adultera*. We must strive unceasingly in church and school, in family and society circles, lest we suffer the same tragic lot as some of our European brethren, of whom a certain bishop bitterly complained in a gathering of clerics: "Forty thousand priests in the country, and yet the faith here wavers and is faint! What a mystery!"

Alas, poor country! this is no mystery. The fault lies with your pastors who, however blameless in their private lives, have kept themselves aloof from public life, and immersed in the clerical *otium cum dignitate*, have forgotten the command of the Lord: "Go out into the highways and hedges"; forgetful, too, of what was written of the Master Himself: *Pertransiit!* Here we cannot speak of a mystery, rather: *Perditio tua ex te, Israel!* . . .

Among us also there are those who look upon social labors as something to be shunned by the priest or at least considered as a necessary evil. For these the words of Cardinal Faulhaber should

be written in bright letters: "Social and charitable activities of priests in organizations are necessities of the times, hence the will of God." Hence if we would be shepherds of souls who understand the times in which we labor, then we who for the most part carry on our activities in urban parishes, are forced to lead an active life in the world and *importune, opportune* to hurl ourselves into the raging stream of modern life.

But we are, for that very reason, bound to be on our guard, according to well-defined rules, particularly that one expressed by Saint Paul: *Attende tibi* (1 Tim. iv, 16). Else the raging stream that longs for its victims will draw us imperceptibly into the depths. Woe to the priest who, because he labors in the service of others, forgets himself or can no longer return into himself. Woe if from ceaseless activity comes distraction, abandonment to a deadly routine, and from this latter, at the very next deception or temptation — and they surround him on all sides — the fall! *Diabolus tamquam leo rugiens circuit* — the devil knows no rest in pursuit of priests. . . .

The Pauline recipe, *Attende tibi*, can well be turned in our own words: If we as priests in our endless labors for others would not languish in spirit, if in our anxiety for the souls of others we

would not endanger our own souls, then let us give thought to the interior life. At any sacrifice, I beg of you! He who would look deep into the heart of a priest would make this apostolic exhortation one of obligation, in the face of almost daily experience. Who has not known him who shone in the glory of an admiring world, who was a ceaseless laborer in the Lord's vineyard, a tireless and effective social worker, a renowned orator, a popular demi-god — until of a sudden we hear the whispered question: "What — he?" A clerical scandal was before us. *Ulula, abies*, the Prophet Zachary cries out warning and admonishing (xi, 2) to the careless, the superficial and the self-reliant in clerical garb, *ulula, abies, quia cecidit cedrus*. Beware, thou slender tree, I have seen the cedars of Lebanon crash. . . .

We dare not censure these external activities that are in accord with the will of God, but rather the priest who neglects the necessary cultivation of the interior life that God demands of us. The interior life provides an anchor in the Divine, prevents the priest from meeting with ruin in externals and permits him to return to God. *Hoc enim faciens, et teipsum salvum facies, et eos, qui te audiunt* (1 Tim. iv, 16).

As priests we are in need of internal support.

Our lot is one of suffering. "If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also," our Lord reminds us. Bitterness and deception will always be the portion of our reward as we extend and multiply our labors. Who does not know the well-intentioned pastor who is misunderstood by his own children! How many sharp criticisms are directed at him by his own confreres! What disillusionments come to him from his duly appointed superiors, who perhaps unconsciously exercise authority with official reserve rather than sympathetic participation in a subject's joys and sorrows!

And the result? We are cast forth from every haven, lie crushed under our broken ideals, are dejected, relinquish our zeal, become sullen and unhappy and at a loss as to what to do. . . .

Must it come to this?

No, indeed, to this it must never come.

The psychological explanation for this occurrence is presented in a striking manner in "Custos," xvii, 320. A certain Pancratius was given the following answer: "Your dejection arises principally from your neglect of the interior life. Some of us disregard the interior life out of sloth, others for lack of time, as they claim. A multitude of duties so lay hands upon them that there is precious little, or no time at all, left over for cultiva-

tion of the interior life. Along with this an almost imperceptible lessening of appreciation for the interior life is creeping upon them. 'For such things I have little or no time; that is for those in the cloister or in the small parishes who have little else to occupy them. But I. . . ' Hold, please! If then such persons meet with failure, there is no restraining them. They are too much engaged with externals; the blessing of God is lacking in their endeavors, and the accusation of neglecting the interior life makes them doubly and trebly sad!" Weigh each word. The interior life is the rock upon which, according to our Lord, the wise man built his home: *Et descendit pluvia, et venerunt flumina et flaverunt venti, et irruerunt in domum illam, et non cecidit: fundata enim erat super petram* (Matt. vii, 25).

The storms of failure, disappointment, disillusionment and opposition scarcely affect the man of God who has cultivated the interior life; he remains upright because he is supported by God. But he who lacks the foundation of the interior life is like to the man who builds his home on sand. Scarcely have the first rains fallen when it crashes . . . *et fuit ruina illius magna.*

If we priests would have a spiritual support to help us meet the inevitable vexations of the

pastoral life with strength and fortitude, and to rise above them, we must anchor ourselves on the bed-rock of a truly spiritual, interior life. A deep inwardness will never fail.

If we shepherds of souls lack this foundation of an internal spirit, then in our boredom, most certainly in our trials and tribulations, we will seek our own recreation and relaxation where the harassed men of the world seek theirs: at best in purely worldly enjoyments — but more usually in the *siliquae quas porci manducabant* . . .

Priests of the interior life — men of true nobility, men who have overcome and subdued their all-too-human traits and who, in full consciousness of their high calling, refuse to grovel in the dirt; men in short, whose lives are regulated by the Divine.

Priests of the interior life — priests as they should be: rising above the crowd, cultivating a familiar intercourse with God, truly spiritual *dispensatores mysteriorum Dei*, zealously and devoutly reciting the prayers of the *Officium divinum*.

Priests of the interior life — pastors according to God's pleasure and with God's blessing: fervent and zealous leaders to the heavenly Jeru-

saalem, never languishing interiorly regardless of the multitude of their external labors, never losing a divine balance in spite of all the difficulties in the service of the Lord.

Omnis gloria ejus ab intus! Who then will say that there are no rewards for inserting a zealous cultivation of the interior life into our daily programs?

Just a few more strokes in the picture of the priestly interior life. Behold the holy Saint Francis of Sales. Of him his disciple, the great Saint Frances de Chantal, declared: "It seemed that our Lord again appeared in human form. The spirit of his soul was constantly elevated over all nature, the harmony of his life was other-worldly. Conformity to the will of God was the motive of his every act, love of God the soul of his soul, so that he could cry out with David: 'Lord, Thou art my portion and my inheritance forever!' Thus he was, thus he spoke, thus he lived, yet not he but Christ in him."

Et anima mea illi vivet — God and not the world!

II

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
INTERIOR LIFE

SHALL we priests not determine to be each one of us what God, the Church and the world — if not our own souls — demand of us, namely, a *homo Dei* as man, as priest and as pastor of souls? The cultivation of the interior life can and will bring us to these divine heights.

We are, in a consideration of this objective, first of all confronted with the question: What is the interior life?

An easy question, to which however a more or less laborious answer must be given. In a single, thought-provoking phrase it could well be turned by the expression, *Adhaerere Deo*. For the recollected man who has cultivated the interior life, God and things of God take first place in his heart. He seeks nothing but God. We will tread a surer path if we proceed *ex effectibus ad rem*. Hence we must meditate on the characteristics of

the interior life, which, by the way, will disclose to us its beauty as well as its necessity.

Here we are at the threshold of the misunderstood, because so little known, sphere of mysticism. Many are inclined to shudder even at the mention of the word. And yet it has nothing in common with exaggeration, queerness, visions or hysterical sentimentality. In the final analysis, it means nothing more than the cultivation of the love of God, such as the more intimate friends of God in the Middle Ages were wont to foster.

The love of God has nothing singular about it. How then can we refuse using measures that further it? Indeed, we can say that in the same measure as the love of God is demanded of us, we must take to heart and make use of the proper form of mysticism: who more than we priests, upon whom an immeasurable amount of love of God was showered!

And now *ad rem*.

First Characteristic: Consciously Working for God.

If God is the *Deus cordis nostri*, if the *adhaerere Deo* has penetrated into the marrow of our bones, then it will be our pride and our pleasure to do, think and act all for God. God is constantly

present to the inner man, He lives in his consciousness, to the end that the will be directed solely by the one norm, *Omnia pro Deo!*

The theological question whether a good intention is necessary to make meritorious a good work, or whether the state of grace suffices, does not concern the inner man. *Mihi adhaerere Deo bonum est!* Firmly anchored in God, there is a sweet compulsion before every labor, and frequently during its course, to raise the heart and soul to God Who is her all, and again and again to cry out: *Omnia pro Deo!*

A deep spiritual desire leads the soul to the recital of the divine office: discharging this duty at one time only in case of necessity, and otherwise rejoicing in the Lord to come before the Throne of God seven times in the day to cry out lovingly and longingly: *Domine, in unione illius divinae intentionis. . . .*

The praise and eulogy of the world leave the priest who is devoted to the interior life unmoved. Though grateful to the well-wisher, he is all the while recalling in his innermost heart: Lord, Thou knowest all, Thou knowest also that I love only Thee and hence that I have labored for Thee alone. His lively consciousness that all his labor has been

consecrated solely to the service of God and His glory prevents both excessive self-praise in success and despondency in failure.

Seeking only God!

Second Characteristic: Intercourse with God.

Thomas a Kempis, the most popular of the mystics, admonishes us: *Apud Altissimum sit cogitatio tua* (II, 1). And the Seraphic Doctor demands in his Nineteenth petition: *Continue mentem tuam ita habeas ordinatam cum Deo, quod omne opus tuum atque exercitium tam mentis quam corporis sit oratio*. To live the interior life demands a mind constantly anchored in God. Never to lose sight of God, never to leave His side, always to move in His presence — these are necessities, as well as joys, for the soul steeped in the interior life. Nor will such a one ever be diverted from this path. Whether alone or in company, in school or at a public gathering, whether among pleasant companions or in the study, this soul never leaves His presence, and is repeatedly finding ways and means to raise the heart to Him.

God so lives in the heart of the man devoted to the interior life that He is its first thought on arising, its last at night; and every society, enter-

tainment or lecture is insipid, empty and inane unless it reminds him of God. In this regard there is full agreement with Saint Bernard: *Si scribas, non sapit mihi, nisi legero ibi Jesum. Si disputes aut conferas, non sapit mihi, nisi sonuerit ibi Jesus.*

Inconspicuously and without effort he leads his thoughts back to God, now by a glance at a picture, now by the striking of the hour, again at recreation and the lecture, and indeed, *raptim et furtim*, as the Seraphic Doctor in his treatise, "De sex alis Seraphim" (vii, 11), so aptly says. Thus the man of interior life is ever concentrated on God, he walks in and with God, and to him are applicable the words of the "Imitation of Christ" (ii, 1.): *Homo internus cito se recolligit, quia numquam se totum ad exteriora effundit.* Upon one who has such intercourse with God, whose days are filled with pious aspirations, no amount of external labors — and this is of importance for us priests — will leave their impress; he uses the world as though he used it not, he conducts his *conversatio in coelis*, conforming to the command of the Apostle. But he who fails in this intercourse, particularly the priest for whom hours and days pass without a thought of God — he dare not claim the *adhaerere Deo*; for him the interior life is far removed, for him the program

of *Dominus pars*, chosen at ordination, is more a lip service and lip mockery than a life work.

Seeking only God!

Third Characteristic: To Refer All Things to God.

I may be pardoned at this point for relating a harmless yet significant experience in my youth. I once visited a saintly priest, since deceased. A snowstorm had somewhat exhausted me, and in youthful irritation I railed at the abominable weather. He heard me out to the end, and then with a certain calm solemnity asked: "Young man, why cry out against the weather? Is it not God's weather?" This is the voice of one who thinks and judges in terms of the inner life. For such a one all things — weather, achievements, misfortunes, visitations, wars — are to be referred to God, in the firm conviction that "Nothing happens aimlessly, everything comes from a benign Providence." And since this is so — they logically conclude — everything must have something of God's goodness in it. Hence they merit the praise of the Apostle: *Spiritualis judicat omnia*; the spiritual man of the inner life, with his advantage of a watch-tower viewpoint, judges with

unerring accuracy. *Ipse vero a nemine judicatur*; on the other hand, he never lowers himself to an earthly level for all things are judged in terms of the divine (1 Cor. xi, 15). Yet we read in the daily papers of, or are perhaps witnesses to, tragedies and catastrophes which yet scarcely arouse in us the faintest thought of God and His Providence. Sterile in thoughts of God and His love, we cling dumbly to things of earth. . . .

Alas! when will we become seekers of the divine?

Fourth Characteristic: Zeal for God.

Once the heart has anchored itself in God, once the *adhaerere Deo* has become second nature, once the man has become a true *alter Christus*, a friend of God, then he is constrained to labor for the love of his heart. Frequently ejaculations will wing from his lips: "With God"; "God willing"; "Deo volente"; "May God reward you"; "All for God"; "In nomine Domini"; "In God's name"; "Thanks be to God" — and similar cries of the heart at every turn in the day's labors: not so much consciously fashioned and executed as spontaneously coming from a heart filled with love and

zeal. *Uni omnia* — as a great soul once noted in his diary on the day of his first Mass.

Such zeal illumines especially sermons and the teaching of Christian doctrine. The audience instinctively realizes that the priest does not preach of himself, that the love of God consumes him. Inspired with this zeal for God, the priest who is devoted to the interior life is constantly striving to win new zealots for God. It is a pleasure for him to follow the counsel of Alban Stolz: "Whenever you converse with anyone, make use of the opportunity by so speaking that his thoughts will be turned to God or his soul elevated." How much can be accomplished in this unostentatious manner! But where there is an interior vacuum, little of spiritual conversations can be expected. *Ex abundantia cordis loquitur os* — and conversely.

Seeking only God!

Fifth Characteristic: Joy in God.

Cor meum et caro mea exultaverunt in Deum vivum (Ps. LXXXIII, 3). And this is applicable to the true man of God. Why not rejoice, then, when it can be said: "God and I are friends — we know and love one another"? Peace and joy are the

rewards of the interior life, for they are specifically characterized by the Apostle as *fructus spiritus*. Thus it is that interior souls bear the mark of joy on their countenance and they spread its blessings whithersoever they go. Thus it is, too, that interior souls find joy and peace in everything that lies to hand: walks in the great out-of-doors, elevating music, the vision of the starry heavens, the sight of an innocent child, and thus through all life's contacts and experiences. God shines forth in all things for them; they are constantly using creatures as stepping stones to the majesty of the Creator.

Would that we had such God-loving people in our joyless midst today! People like Saint Francis of Assisi, who as Brother Joyful has for seven hundred years filled the world with envy of his pure joy; like Saint Gertrude, who was in ecstasy at the sight of a lowly flower; like Alban Stolz, who everywhere — in the hills of the Black Forest, the streets of the metropolis, the museums of Munich and Dresden, or the company of unkempt shepherds — could rise to God, and who "could direct his thoughts with joy and recollection to God": an apt characterization of the inner spirit that he made during his journeys in the year 1847.

The present demands for more joy can only be satisfied by a greater devotion to the interior life. *Et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo.*

Seeking only God!

Sixth Characteristic: Relying upon God.

True interior spirit is of its nature humble. The *adhaerere Deo* springs from the consciousness of its own impotence coupled with the firm belief: *Sufficiencia nostra ex Deo est* (2 Cor. III, 5). God must find a way — thus thinks and speaks the man of the interior spirit. And it is in this spirit that his work is carried on. Instead of placing all reliance upon human counsel and assistance, every labor, sermon, instruction, is preceded by a humble prayer to God: *Deus in adiutorium meum intende.*

And he continues: *Adiutorium nostrum in nomine Domini.* GOD will do it — *et ipse faciet!* Thus he shrinks from no task, no difficulty: *Omnia possum in eo, qui me confortat.* He assumes, if necessary, a kind of foolhardiness: *In Deo faciemus virtutem.*

But God, of Whom it is said, *Prope est omnibus invocantibus eum* (Ps. CXLIV, 18), blesses the labors of His faithful, often with unsuspected fruits.

Let us priests turn in these things to our Exemplar, Christ. Did He not, in crucial moments, withdraw Himself into the world of the interior spirit, thus to commune with His heavenly Father? Before He chose His Apostles He meditated throughout the night. Before calling the dead to life, before the institution of the Blessed Sacrament, before His Passion, He held intimate communion with His Father — not merely interiorly, but as the Scriptures have it, by raising His eyes to heaven: *elevatis sursum oculis* (John xi, 41; xvii, 1).

And how intimate a part of our liturgy is this simple though meaningful action! *Munda cor meum . . .*, we pray before the Gospel and turn our eyes to heaven. *Suscipe, sancte Pater. . . . Offerimus tibi Domine. . . . Veni Sanctificator. . . . Suscipe, sancta Trinitas. . . . Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro. . . . Te igitur. . . .* And each time our vision is directed upward. We look heavenward when about to consecrate bread: *elevatis oculis . . .*; we look heavenward when about to bless our children in the Faith: *Benedicat et custodiat vos. . . .*

Shall we priests not take our cue from these indications? Shall we not, as is befitting an *alter Christus*, lift our countenance and spirit from the sordid earth toward God, particularly in important

matters and as an introduction to crowded hours? For him who has achieved the spirit of the interior life, this *elevatis oculis*, this communing with God — and (what comes to the same thing) with His saints, particularly His beloved Mother — is not only a loving concern and care, but a deep-seated necessity and joy.

Seeking only God!

Seventh Characteristic: Peace in God.

Those interior souls who have made the *adhaerere Deo* an accomplishment in their lives, are anchored in God and have erected their edifice upon a rock. The thought of God explains everything for them; the thought of God, without Whom not one sparrow falls to the ground, supports them at all times and permits them to maintain an interior calm and an imperturbable peace in the face of every sorrow and disaster. *Permanent immobiles!* In them the words of the "Imitation of Christ" are fulfilled: *Converte te ex toto corde ad Dominum et relinque hunc miserum mundum, et inveniet anima tua requiem. . . . Frequens illi visitatio cum homine interno, grata consolatio, multa pax.*

Yes, indeed, *multa pax*: but a peace far removed from fatalistic resignation; a peace *quae exsuperat omnem sensum*, that interior souls constantly enjoy.

The well-known mystic Tauler, so the story runs, once met a beggar clothed in rags and covered with pitiable sores, and wished him a pleasant day. "Why," responded the derelict, "I have never had an evil day." Astounded at these words the other was curious to know how that could be possible under the circumstances. "I am perfectly certain," was the answer, "that the good God sends me every bit of poverty, every suffering, every painful incident as a manifestation of His love, for He knows that these are all within my power to bear. Hence I rejoice and praise God in all things that make up my life; everything is a gift and hence every day for me is a good day." What wisdom hidden beneath those rags! We immediately recognize in this the efficacy of a virile, living faith and an intimate union with God, a union that revolutionizes our outlook on life and in whose light, as Alban Stolz remarks, the lofty appears lowly, pleasure bitter, suffering agreeable, the rich poor, poverty estimable, the world a shadow, heaven within reach and — God in the soul! *Memor fui Dei et delectatus sum.*

How insignificant we are alongside such souls, we who complain and lose our composure at every disagreeable trifle. The interior life of the spirit is so foreign to us — and also we have comprehended only faintly that suffering does not always come in the wake of sin, but is rather sent to purify the life of the inner spirit, to strengthen us in the service of souls, to deepen our spirituality and to sharpen our appreciation of the spiritual and interior life. This is the norm and example of the Apostle of the Gentiles, who in the midst of a tidal wave of suffering cried out: *Licet is, qui foris est, noster homo corrumpatur; tamen is, qui intus est, renovatur de die in diem* (2 Cor. iv, 16). Exteriorly crushed, interiorly waxing strong in God's love. *Protegar in velamento alarum tuarum.*

Seeking only God!

* * * * *

With these seven characteristics of the life of the spirit as our guide, we can make a close examination of the condition of our own interior life.

Everything, particularly the science of the saints, as the interior life has been aptly characterized, must be learned, but not as one of the optional accomplishments of life. Priestly life must be a perpetual attendance in the school of the

interior life — else we priests are no different from those who live *ad exteriora*; we are *homo Dei* in name only, not in any real and actual sense. Would that, like a great contemporary disciple of the interior life, we could cry out in all humility: "God, Thou sweet Word, Thou blessed Thought, Who art so near to me and I so far from Thee — draw me to Thee, press me close to Thy divine Heart! . . . Renew me at least for the battle of life and labor for Thee."

Let us meditate on the century-old prayer of another master of the spiritual life:

"Eternal Father, I beg of Thee with all my heart and all the powers of my soul, that Thou vouchsafe to me, in the innermost recesses of Thy paternal Heart, a constant and deeply interior spirit, in word, thought and deed. Also, that in all spiritual exercises I may not be distracted by externals, but may be and remain wholly absorbed in Thee, a bright image of Thy most divine will, before the eyes of Thy Majesty, in which Thou art ever clearly mirrored and dost behold the sublimity of Thy divine nature. Amen."

III

REQUISITES OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

QUIDQUID *recipitur, per modum recipientis recipitur.* This axiom of philosophy is applicable to the subject in hand. Only after the soil has been prepared can the interior life grow and develop in our hearts. If this seed is strewn on stony ground or among thorns, if our hearts are hard through lack of self-knowledge, if we permit ourselves to be tied to the treadmill of labors and cares without respite for returning to ourselves, the interior life will wither and die.

Self-knowledge is the first step in the direction of the interior life. The greater our conviction that we, above all, stand in need of the interior life, of an ever-increasing permeation of externals with the interior spirit, and to this end, an ever-increasing strengthening of our spiritual life and its advancement, the smoother will become our path to the interior life.

First Requisite: Clerical Knowledge.

Truth and goodness, science and the love of God, mind and heart, philosophy and mysticism, must never be separated. "If theology is merely an achievement of the intellect, it will be anaemic, lack warmth and vitality. Mysticism wanders off into dangerous bypaths of ecstasy and pantheism if there is turbidity of concept and dullness of intellect. The most renowned theologians of the Middle Ages were eminent both in philosophy and mysticism, even though they excelled in one or the other" (Luedtke, "Church History"). The same thought is also well expressed in the axiom: *Scientia sine pietate inflat. Pietas sine scientia aberrat. Scientia cum pietate aedificat.*

The practical conclusion to be drawn is this: We must not permit our dogmatic theology to become but a dim memory; and if with the passing of years since our studies, it seems to recede farther and farther into indistinctness, we can at least scan the summaries and theological periodicals that are available to us. A recent issue of one of these journals rightly declared that one of the first requisites of the interior life is a thorough training in the science of religion, the acquisition of definite

religious knowledge, so that we not merely know what must be believed, but can justify such belief and also, insofar as it is possible, can achieve a deeper understanding of the truths of the Faith. Study and study-table must be a part of the equipment and arrangement of every priest who is striving to make himself an expert in the interior life. Devotion to study, however, must flow not from ambition and the mere love of knowledge, but rather from a yearning to vision more of the majesty of God, and to unite one's soul more closely with God. Rather, a thousand times, a heart inflamed with love of God than a mind illumined with the cold light of knowledge. Here we can best imitate Saint Bonaventure, "who constantly strove to transform the light of knowledge into the flame of love and a zealous life, and who sought to develop in his readers a relish for the truth."

Second Requisite: Deep Appreciation of Our Priestly Vocation.

We must recall again and again the nature of our vocation. *Ignoti nulla cupido!* He who does not come to a clear and full appreciation of his sublime calling will never achieve the transformation to a *homo interior*.

What then is our vocation? *Dominus pars*. How quickly these words are uttered and yet what unfathomable depths they contain! Would that we took to heart the pointed admonition of a well-known spiritual writer: "*Dominus pars hereditatis meae. . .* Does not this recall to your mind those solemn hours when, on bended knee before the bishop, you uttered the following words: 'The Lord is my inheritance and my portion; Thou it is Who wilt return to me my inheritance'? Glorious words! On that very day God was your inheritance; you forsook worldly pleasures and possessions thus more fully to consecrate yourself to God, and to rejoice in Him, and to find in Him your highest bliss. These days have, perhaps, long since passed, but has this holy zeal that permeated your spirit retained its vigor? Is God still your only inheritance? Or have you meanwhile found pleasure in worldly things and possessions? Is your labor consecrated wholly to God, or to the vain-glorious esteem of the world? Or, indeed, even to the accumulation of money? *Dominus pars hereditatis meae. . .!*"

How much more closely would we cling to God, how much more wholly and solely, if the consciousness of our holy vocation burned more brightly in our souls! *Quis mihi tribuat, ut sim*

juxta menses pristinos . . . sicut fui in diebus adolescentiae meae, quando secreto Deus erat in tabernaculo meo? . . . Would that even today we pushed forward to the interior life in and with God, and cried out with Alban Stolz: "As the plants reverence and reach out for their god, the sun, receiving light and heat in return for color and perfume, so may Jesus be my Sun, and I a drop of dew in which the Sun is reflected."

What is our office? God and the Divine.

The task imposed on us by God is expressed in the words of the Apostle of the Gentiles: *Constituitur in iis quae sunt ad Deum* (Hebr. v, 1). The discharge of our duties partakes of the Divine, as is evident in the distribution of the sacraments and the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the altar; divine, too, are the teaching and preaching offices, that would lead souls to God; divine the office of mediator *inter Deum et hominem*, by which we are ambassadors of oppressed mankind before the *curia coelestis*. Εἰς Θεόν! We must lose ourselves entirely in God, consecrate ourselves wholly to Him! Εἰς Θεόν! What a motive for every movement of our souls, for every thought, act and word.

"This presupposes that he [the priest] associates with God, stands in intimate relationship with Him, knows God better than men, and is capable

of effecting more before God than the man in the world. He must find his consolation in God, draw upon God for courage and strength, find his peace and joy in God. He must be *cujus pars Dominus*. Such a one is a spiritual person." This is an apt definition of the interior spirit in a priest and no less an argument for its unqualified necessity. Our vocation, office, name—*omnia clamant Deum!* All demand the interior life in the cleric. But we will only be led to this spirit if we arouse within ourselves a lively consciousness of the divine nature of our office and vocation.

Third Requisite: A Priestly Heart.

Even the most vigorous plant will fail to take root in impoverished soil. So, too, the spirit of the interior life will wax and grow strong only in a priestly heart.

Those priests of whom the words of the Apostle are apposite — *Terrena sapiunt* — who cling to things of earth, and are inmates of a world poverty-stricken in spirit and joy, can never attain to that interior life in God. *Amicitia hujus mundi inimica est Dei*, Saint James tells us (iv, 4). Dagon and Jahwe can never be associates. They are diametrically opposed to each other. . . . *De mundo non estis* (John xv, 19).

Those tragic ones, unhappily in clerical garb, who in life represent the condition expressed in the words, *Ego carnalis sum* — alas, how can they be men of the interior life? *In malevolam animam*, according to the words of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Wisdom (I, 4); *non introibit sapientia nec habitabit in corpore subdito peccatis*. Not only *non introibit*, alas! — we are here dealing with a most lamentable *impotentia*. For it is written: *Animalis homo non percipit ea quae sunt Spiritus Dei. Stultitia enim est illi* (1 Cor. II, 14). Who has ears to hear will hear; and who would make his own observations need not search far. . . .

A requisite for the true interior life is a heart that is far removed from the giddy whirl of the world, a heart that has irrevocably rejected everything of the flesh, animal and evil spirit — a heart that, as the heliotrope turns to the sun, the magnetic needle to the north pole, is always directed toward God, faithful to the divine admonition: *In terra eorum nihil possidebitis, nec habebitis partem inter eos; ego pars et hereditas tua in medio filiorum Israel* (Num. XVIII, 20); a heart whose thought of God is the first, the most loving and most joyful thought of all the hours; a heart, too, that deserves the praise of the Lord: *Beati mundo corde!* For only the clean of heart are close to God.

Fourth Requisite: Clerical Prayer.

The glories of the interior life are revealed in their fulness only in communion with God, in prayer. Christ Himself said: *Pater vester de coelo dabit spiritum bonum* — the interior spirit is, truly, no evil spirit! — *petentibus se* (Luke xi, 13). As the fledglings in their nests are ravenously looking out for food, so we through much prayer must manifest to God our hunger for the bread of the interior spirit. He, the infinitely Good, will hand us neither a stone nor a scorpion. Let us proceed then to the source of the interior spirit, the Holy Ghost, Whom we priests honor, alas! too little, but from Whom we receive the spirit of the interior life, and Who leads us into the science of the saints, to make us men of the Spirit. Father Weiss, the well-known Dominican, declares in his "Apologia" (Vol. V): "The Holy Spirit is the heart, the center, the source, of all supernatural thought and activity. He who would really penetrate into the supernatural realm will keep it in mind at every step of the way. And only he who seeks to become intimate with this mode of life, finds his way to this sublime life. . . ." Devotion to the Holy Spirit must be a permanent part of the daily activity of a priest. Let us go to the

Immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit, ever mindful of the important fact that she is as much the Protectress of the interior life as she is its model and exemplar. Did any human being ever live the life of recollection and interior devotion, of constant intercourse with God, in a more profound and sincere manner than the ever-blessed Virgin? She who thus began her childhood in the shadow of the Temple walls, and continued unremittingly through the years in the little house at Nazareth where the angel surprised her in prayer, enclosed the Pearl of Heaven in the unspotted folds of her heart, after she had (to use the words of Leo the Great), in the school of the interior life, conceived God in the spirit rather than the flesh, and passed her subsequent days *conferens in corde suo* (Luke II, 19) the mysteries of God, consecrating herself to an ever deeper and more profound spirit of the interior life. O glorious Patroness of the interior life, teach us priests of thy Son to live in God and to grow and wax daily stronger in the interior life! *Interveni pro clero!*

Finally, let us proceed to the Patron of the spiritual life, to silent Saint Joseph. Let us inquire of all who have succeeded in any measure in acquiring the interior spirit, of the great masters of the spiritual life, of Peter of Alcantara, of Francis

of Sales, of Alphonsus Liguori, of Saint Teresa, of a thousand others, how they taught and directed souls over the treacherous way of the spirit. They will all answer us: *Ite ad Joseph et quidquid ipse vobis dixerit, facite!* With confidence let us frequently petition him: Great Saint Joseph, lover and teacher of the inner and hidden life in God, teach us to pray, to meditate and to walk in the presence of God! Be our leader in the spiritual life, and we will be prevented from false paths!

Petite et accipietis, ut gaudium vestrum sit plenum
(John xvi, 24).

Clerical knowledge, a consciousness of our high vocation, a priestly heart consecrated to God, and the cultivation of clerical prayer — these are the requisites of the interior life, the stepping stones that lead us eventually to the heights of the *homo Dei*, and to the innermost recesses of the presence of God.

Separavit vos Deus Israel ab omni populo et junxit sibi, ut serviretis ei (Num. xvi, 9).

Seeking only God!

IV

CULTIVATION OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

MUCH has already been said, more still remains, in this connection. This at any rate is certain: the interior life demands a meticulous and persevering cultivation. It must be learned, but constantly and persistently, without intermission. *Insta opportune, importune.*

I

What, then, does cultivation of the interior life imply? First, that a habitation for the interior life be founded. The concept "habitation" denotes that the various practices which serve to promote the interior life are there at home, and are a part of the daily order of that home. At the very head of these must be enumerated meditation, the *visitatio Sanctissimi*, and the recitation of the breviary.

1. *If you are really sincere about becoming a "homo interior," you will be most serious about your daily meditation.* Whether you make your meditation in the early morning hours, or in the evening, before or after Mass, is of no consequence. *Spiritus ubi vult, spirat!* If you desire to make your meditation in the somewhat wooden fashion (as it seems to me) which requires a prelude, three points, and approximately one-half hour of time, or whether, *meditando et applicando*, you read suitable material (and in this connection the Missal should not be slighted), is of no moment. *Verbum Dei non est alligatum!* Of the greatest moment is this: Set aside one-half hour for whatever manner of meditation each and every day. Insist upon taking this time; indeed, if necessary, steal it! Daily meditation is to the interior life what dew is to plants. To meditate is to grow interiorly. But before approaching the holy task of meditation — and this is an unchangeable rule — collect your thoughts and recite a preparatory prayer similar to the following:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"O my God, in deepest humility and reverence I cast myself before Thy divine Majesty and adore

Thee as my Lord and my God and my omnipotent Creator.

"Thou, O my God, dost see me; Thou dost behold me as though I were alone on this earth; Thou dost behold me as though I alone were to be dealt with.

"Thou, O my God, dost hear me; Thou dost listen to the beatings of my heart, whether they be for love of Thee.

"And Thou, O my God, wilt one day judge me for this hour of meditation.

"Yet, how dare I, miserable creature that I am, approach Thee in holy meditation?

"Alas, my God, I realize that because of my sins I am not worthy to receive the grace of making a good meditation; and yet through the merits of Thy divine Son, in the Names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I beg of Thee, vouchsafe to me and all priests the grace of a fruitful and blessed meditation, for Thy honor and our salvation, for time and for eternity.

"O Mary, conceived without stain of sin, intercede for us who have recourse to thee, and show thyself in this holy hour of meditation to be the Mother of Good Counsel and the Patroness of the interior life.

"Saint Joseph, ardent disciple and teacher of prayer, of meditation and of life in God, teach us to pray, to meditate, and to walk in the presence of God.

"All ye saints, particularly our patron saints and guardian angels, assist us at prayer and at meditation; help us always to walk in the presence of God.

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?

"Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth!

"Veni, Creator Spiritus,
Mentes tuorum visita,
Imple superna gratia
Quae tu creasti pectora."

2. Do you desire to become a "homo interior"? Then pay your daily visits to Him in the tabernacle, the quiet-flowing Source of the interior life! Hour after hour, without ceasing, the little red lamps burn in our churches telling us: *Magister adest* — "The Master is here." Yet how few of us take this really to heart! Simple folk, yes — the Lord has them with Him at all times; but of priests He must utter this complaint: "In your midst stands One Whom you know not." Yet, how our hearts would grow in warmth and light,

how this divine life would unfold within us, if only we went more frequently to the *Via, Veritas et Vita* in the tabernacle! Can we delay this important action any longer?

Let our love live in the tabernacle! Let us un-faillingly make our daily *Visitatio Sanctissimi*. If you live at a distance from the church, or if for any other reason you are hindered from making the visit, then add to your daily order: "Morning and afternoon — about the midday — *Adoratio!*" At the appointed time, whether it be at study or wherever else, interrupt your occupation, place yourself in spirit before the tabernacle, adore, love and make an act of spiritual communion, beseech our Lord for the graces you stand in need of, and renew your good intention: "All for Thee, O Jesus!" How simple and yet how beautiful! After a time it will become a labor of love, and you will be conscious of growth in your interior life, the life of the spirit. *Fac, et vives!* It is a simple plan, and one quickly executed. All that is necessary is to direct the eyes of the spirit to the tabernacle and to repeat with interior recollection:

"My Saviour, I adore Thee in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar. I give Thee thanks for the institution of this profound mystery of Thy

love, for my vocation to the priesthood, for the many holy Masses that I have celebrated, and for the many holy Communion that have been vouchsafed me. Out of love for Thee I am truly sorry for my sins and my indifference in Thy holy service, and I beseech Thee through the intervention of Thy Blessed Mother to take possession of my wretched heart. I want to be completely united to Thee, I yearn for Thee, I love Thee! I unite myself in spirit with Thee, O my Jesus, my God and my All! Permit me never to be separated from thee, but remain with me by Thy grace and permit me to live and die as Thy good priest.

"Holy Mary, lovable protectress and helper of priests, permit me, with thy help, to be and to remain ever more intimately united with the loving, suffering, meek and humble Heart of Thy Son, Jesus. Amen."

3. *Would you become a "homo interior"?* Recite your office in an orderly manner. Say it *digne, attente ac devote*: have conscious intercourse with God. Never — at least *ordinarie* — read your breviary at one sitting, but rather according to the hours of the day; after rising, Lauds; after the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Prime; at the begin-

ning of the day's labors, Tierce; before the noon meal, Sext; before the beginning of the afternoon labors, None; about four o'clock, Vespers; before the evening meal, Compline; and before retiring, Matins. This is to continue the ancient Christian tradition, and to fulfil this important duty in a manner consonant with the characteristics of the hours. Do this, and there is little danger of your becoming exhausted, nor will your reading degenerate into an insult. The seven times that we are called upon to come into the presence of God constitute a worthy school of life in God. The excuses that we love to proffer for disorderly reading of the breviary are, as a matter of fact, just so many excuses for self: I have no relish for frequent and intimate intercourse with God!

Utter it with a heart that consciously rejoices in God, in order again and again to repeat at the beginning: *Domine, in unione illius divinae intentionis* — for higher and deeper it will never go — *has tibi horas persolvo*: these hours of the Office, the hours of labor or recreation that follow. . . . The clock is again regulated according to God. And if this is done seven times in the day, how many priestly days, in the truest sense of that word, there will be; how many days of seeking and finding God; how many *dies pleni!*

Novit recte — in truly priestly fashion —
vivere, qui novit recte orare.

4. *Priest of God, if you desire to become a "homo interior," value the practice of private devotions.* The little prayers that your mother taught you — the practices that you cherished as a college student — the special devotions that attracted you as a seminarian and of which you were so fond in the first few years of your priestly career: hold them close and do not let them escape you!

Do not permit yourself to be counted a disciple of "mass Christianity," praying only what others pray or what the rules make obligatory. In the voluntary offering of private devotions, that naturally go beyond but cannot stand in the way of obligation, lies a rich well-spring of the interior life. If at Christmas time you kneel before the crib of Bethlehem, thus to speak most intimately to the Infant Christ; if during Lent you practise your private mortifications for your crucified Saviour; if you hold a novena before the great feasts of the Blessed Mother or the anniversary of your ordination; if your night prayers are varied to suit the season or the occasion —

then, you may be sure, these are all sources of the interior life. Do not relinquish one jot or tittle of them.

II

What does the cultivation of the interior life imply? Secondly, that we participate in the regular course of training for the interior life. I refer to the spiritual exercises, or retreats.

Each year the call of the Master goes out to us priests: *Venite seorsum* — beyond our daily surroundings, daily labors, daily cares and trials — *in desertum locum* — hid away from the world, alone with God — *et requiescite pusillum* — to enjoy spiritual peace in God and thus store up new energy for our labors in His service (Mark vi, 31). Let us never fail to participate in these yearly retreats. These hours on Tabor deliver us from the treadmill of daily labor and permit us to return to ourselves again. They bring God into the proper light once more and permit us to find the path to our chosen goal: Εἰς Θεόν!

And if we would give the retreat its greatest efficacy, then for several days preceding it we should petition the Father of Light *ut det vobis secundum divitas gloriae suae virtute corroborari*

per Spiritum ejus in interiorem hominem (Eph. III, 16).

III

What does cultivation of the interior life imply? Thirdly, that we retreat to the harbor of the interior spirit.

This is the *Recollectio menstrua*, the exercise that is so much desired by the Church, recommended by the bishops and increasingly employed in our own day. The *Recollectio menstrua* is a monthly renewal of spirit. Of this exercise it is written:

"In the stillness of these hours a new light falls across our priestly lives and activities by means of the imposed exercises, the self-examinations and meditations. Our vision passes from the surface to the depths, from appearances to realities. The plummet of our thoughts plunges to the depths. The Recollection hours are periods of recharging and accumulation of new energy. If we have found ourselves in the Recollection and strengthened ourselves, we step forward renewed in courage and daring to new battles — and victories."

IV

What does the cultivation of the interior life imply? Fourthly, that we seek out the pastures that feed this life.

This means spiritual reading. Quite generally in clerical circles there is all too little of such reading — let us admit it before God. And yet the spirit of God speaks from such pages — indeed, the spirit of God comes out from such pages. Hence they are the pastures in which the soul of the priest can find nourishment and sustenance for the interior life.

Let us, therefore, devote more time to spiritual reading, particularly in the quiet of the evening. Let us take up the Holy Scriptures, the Book of the priest. Reviews, publications and ecclesiastical magazines that serve various fields must also be given their place in our reading program; but true spiritual reading should serve first of all to deepen the stream of the interior life. Secular writings should have second choice, and the ordinary run of literature should be despised to the end that more time will be available for a diet worthy of a priestly soul. And we will grow interiorly, far more than we suspect. *Bonus est Dominus animae quaerenti illum.*

What more? Something extremely important; deserving our entire attention.

It is not at all unlikely that in the reading of these pages the following objection has formulated itself in our minds: "That is all very well, but what of my labors? I am lucky to come through at all. How can I add to this meditation, ordered reading of the breviary, spiritual reading and so on? It is simply impossible!"

I take it for granted, dear confrere, that this statement actually represents your situation, and that furthermore you are not among those who add job upon job for themselves, forgetful of the admonition of the Lord: *Nolite transire de domo in domum* (Luke x, 7). Permit me then to call your attention to the words of the saintly Abbot of Clairvaux: "If you devote all your time and energy to labor only, and nothing to meditation, shall I praise you? *In hoc non laudo*. . . . If you desire to follow in the footsteps of him who became all things to all men, I praise your love, *sed si plena sit* — but only if it is all-embracing. But how can it be all-embracing if you exclude yourself? Alas, you are human! Of what avail, the Lord asks, if you gain all but perish yourself? It is not the better part of wisdom to exclude yourself. *Sapiens sibi sapiens erit et bibet de fonte putei sui*

primus — it is a characteristic of the truly wise to be wise in his own behalf and to be the first to drink deep of his own well-spring."

Entirely apart from the fact that priestly labors unsupported by a strong spirit of the interior life are barren of fruit, we must unqualifiedly refuse to be a slave to our labors, particularly under the hypocritical pretense that we are forsaking God for God's sake. A priest's life-plan, to be worthy of the name, worthy of a man of God, can only be: Never be a slave of your work! If then times and occasions arise when, even with the best will, it is impossible to devote yourself to your customary exercises of the interior life, you can well follow the wise counsel of Saint Bonaventure, that then the priest *saltem interdum, cum opportune valet, quasi furtim et raptim, ad orationis studium se conferat* — why? Above all, *ne Deo alienus efficiatur* ("De sex alis Seraphim," VII, XI). Obviously this master of the spiritual life has in mind ejaculatory prayers, the *piae aspirationes*, frequent renewal of the good intention that, though harassed and hurried, we raise our hearts and minds to God with the fleeting thought: All for God! All for Jesus!

Note the expression, *ne Deo alienus efficiatur*. We must cultivate the life of prayer in order not

to be separated from God, or, what comes to the same thing, not to have the interior life endangered. Alban Stolz develops this important thought further in his own original manner:

"The many admonitions to prayer and even the consequent reward of fulfilment, as contained in the Sacred Scriptures, appear to me to rest finally on the abiding presence of and intercourse with God. It pleases God to see Himself mirrored in our consciousness, if only because He loves us and in turn wishes to be loved by us. Even the promised answers to our prayers should serve only as an inspiration and a reward for prayer. The highest aspect of all is the practice of prayer itself, and it is therefore the highest reward, even if no answer is forthcoming. It is the life of the soul in God, the entrance and the expansion of the soul in God's presence." A justification for a life of prayer as the most certain method of attaining to the interior life.

Seeking only God!

V

JOY IN THE INTERIOR LIFE

DISCE *exteriora contemnere, et ad interiora te dare, et videbis regnum Dei in te venire. Regnum Dei intra vos est, dicit Dominus.*

Converte te ex toto corde ad Dominum: et relinque hunc miserum mundum, et inveniet anima tua requiem. Would that a joyless and restless world took courage in these words!

Est enim regnum Dei pax et gaudium in Spiritu Sancto, quod non datur impiis. Peace and joy — thrice blessed gifts from heaven for the interior life!

Veniet ad te Christus, ostendens tibi consolationem suam: si dignam illi ab intus paraveris mansionem. And what is superior to Christ's consolation?

Omnis gloria ejus et decor ab intra est et ibi complacet sibi.

Frequens illi visitatio cum homine interno, dulcis sermocinatio, grata consolatio, multa pax, familiaritas stupenda nimis. Enough, enough, O God,

of beauty, of greatness and of love that you give to the souls devoted to the interior life.

Da ergo Christo locum, et ceteris omnibus nega introitum. Is this invitation necessary?

. . . Verus internus potest se ad Deum libere convertere et elevare supra se ipsum in spiritu ac fruitive quiescere.

These words of the "Imitation of Christ" (II, 1), which in their lapidary brevity are doubly effective, should inspire each of us to consecrate himself with a joyful heart, fully and wholly, to the spiritual life. And the joy and peace that flows from the spiritual life is the most powerful means to achieve this objective. *Trahit sua quemque voluptas!*

We could in all truth be satisfied with the glorious prospects that Thomas a Kempis opens up for us. And yet may I be permitted to examine more closely the reasons for joy in the interior life and to add to those already presented?

Religious Grounds.

Flavius Josephus expresses his opinion of his people when he writes: "All of our transactions and conversations are associated with God." This was only natural in view of the fact that the Jew-

ish ceremonial law, with its innumerable regulations, made the life of the Israelites a continual service in honor of God. What a challenge lies in this fact for us who are the standard-bearers of the New Covenant! They knew God only *in umbra et figura*, only in His severity and His solemnity, only as the thunderous Lawgiver and the awful Avenger of the law. We, on the contrary, know the God of love, of grace, of human friendship, the God of the crib, of the cross and of the altar. . . .

A Mohammedan, speaking of the daily routine of the Moslems, gives us something for humble consideration when he remarks that their customs call for a visible recognition of God before each activity of the day: eating, going out, returning, writing a document. Even the taking off of a father's shoes at night has a religious significance; the floors are covered with beautiful carpets in honor of Allah, and hence the shoes are removed lest Allah be dishonored. The Moslems are convinced that God's blessing is necessary for success, and that for His blessing, prayer is required. "Thus we fill the day and its work with the name and memory of Allah."

Shall we, the priests of the All-Highest, the anointed of God, in the face of such customs, fail to fill our days with the joy, the memory and the

Presence, not of an Allah, but of the Triune God? Or shall we await the bitter reproach of the Saviour: *Et venient ab oriente et occidente et aquilone et austro, et accumbent in regno Dei. . . . Et ecce sunt novissimi qui erunt primi, et sunt primi, qui erunt novissimi* (Luke XIII, 29, 30)?

Reasons of Utility.

Here, as a matter of fact, a holy egoism is proper. The advantages and benefits of the interior life are so obvious that it is scarcely necessary to utter another word. Blessed peace in God, blessed sufficiency in God, blessed joy in God, blessed rest in God — these, in very truth, are the precious fruits with which the tree of the interior life is richly laden. The souls devoted to the interior life are aware of these benefits: *Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus!* They realize full well the truth of the Psalmist's words: *Mihi autem adhaerere Deo bonum est.*

Interior souls always live a truly fascinating life, as is patent from their diaries and writings. They act on the motto, "Leave all, and you will find all," and they become rich and free, ever rejoicing in God Who permits some of the joys of paradise to descend upon their souls. They ap-

preciate the wisdom of the words: *Philosophia quaerit veritatem, Theologia invenit, Religio possidet, Mystica sapit*. They never fear the tasks and burdens of the day, or even its sorrows and anguishes. For in these very sorrows they find God, and with nearness to God, His riches of consolation: *Secundum multitudinem dolorum meorum in corde meo consolationes tuae laetificaverunt animam meam*. So the singer of the Old Testament assures us in the Ninety-third Psalm; and the heart of Paul inseparably united to his God cries out: *Superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione nostra* (2 Cor. vii, 4).

Such peace of spirit in the midst of suffering as fruit of the interior life should alone suffice to make us devote ourselves to it wholeheartedly and cheerfully, to pronounce the pledge: *Quid enim mihi est in coelo et a te quid volui super terram? . . . Deus cordis mei et pars mea, Deus in aeternum* (Ps. LXXII, 25, 26).

And one more thing remains to be considered. The most precious gift of the Lord to His loved ones is that daily growing confidence in His goodness and mercy. From the interior life in God there grows the already referred to *familiaritas stupenda nimis* with Him and a kind of childlike candor toward Him. Though others may cling to

their rigoristic views and verdicts, the interior man knows how, if necessary, to utter with the divinely inspired singer: *Quoniam in aeternum misericordia ejus* — "For His mercy is everlasting" (Ps. cxxxv). Though others see sin everywhere, and everywhere the Judge and the Avenger, those of the interior spirit praise the God of mercy and the God of all consolation, *qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem* came from heaven; Who mingled with sinners and even ate with them. From a heart rejoicing in God wells forth their song: *Quam bonus Israel Deus!* Though others, among them unfortunately priests from whom the world should learn confidence in God, find a tragic satisfaction in surrendering a wretched mankind to hell, these find in their trust and faith a thousand and more ways by means of which souls can be snatched from the embrace of Satan and delivered to a loving God in heaven. This tender reliance upon the goodness of God accompanies them to the very portals of death, which they greet, like Francis of Assisi, as a brother to accompany them, or rejoice to encounter, like Thomas of Celano: *Mortem cantando susceperit.*

And now the excerpt snatched by Bardo from the oblivion of an ancient manuscript will be intelligible and acceptable: "The highest perfection

of a pure and sincere life depends upon this: Man must out of true love for God, willingly and fully commit himself to His Providence, and without exception subject his own will to the Divine, frequently and often. Also, with a deep and burning desire he must constantly elevate his heart to God and repeat the words: 'My loving God and Father, when will I love Thee with all my heart and all my soul and all my mind as Thou hast commanded me? When will I, being wretchedly dependent, fulfil Thy divine will, be wholly subject to it, and think, speak and desire nothing but what pleases Thy divine Majesty? May Thy holy Name be honored and Thy glory be sung now and in all eternity.'

"What grace and true interior joy and peace will be the portion of him who is filled with such desires and who practises such complete subjection of spirit to God, no one can know, much less declare, except him who has experienced it."

Surely we priests, more than any others, can attempt to dip from the well of the interior life a full measure of such joy and peace and divine grace.

Funes ceciderunt mihi in praeclaris. . . . Sicut laetantium omnium habitatio est in te. . . .

Seeking only God!

IN CONCLUSION

“THE interior life,” in the words of that renowned ascetical writer, Father Meschler, S. J., “is so important, so sublime and withal of such value, that every step forward in it must be counted as a great gain, even if it is a late harvest fruit in our lives. We must labor without ceasing and without wearying, even if the fruit of our efforts is slow in maturing. Nature and grace operate almost imperceptibly, quietly, slowly, and constantly. In the final analysis, the result depends upon the grace of God and our co-operation.”

It is for us to be serious about this matter of co-operating with God's grace, not only for the sake of ourselves but for the times in which we live as well.

Dearly beloved co-workers in Christ! You are well aware of the fact that today we strive and hope for a spiritual rebirth of our sorely pressed people. It is for us, the pathfinders, their salt

and their light, to make a beginning with ourselves. Nor should this consist in a great variety of externals, no matter how attractive, nor of organizations, of whatever import and necessity, but rather in a descent into the depths. To quote the words of the Apostle, *Renovamini spiritu mentis vestrae*. Deeply interior and spiritually zealous priests will rear a truly pious generation of people.

And one thing more: does not the present demand a full measure of priestly labors and combats? We are at a great turning point in history. Whatever comes, may we be found fully prepared! If the tree's marrow is sound, then storms will attack it in vain. If we priests are anchored in God and permeated with His spirit, we need not fear the future, no matter what it brings. We are then, in very truth, the leaven of which the Gospels speak, and the axiom, *Sicut sacerdos ita populus*, will inevitably find its application in us — to the blessing of Church, State and people, but above all of ourselves.

* * * * *

THESE poor words are addressed to you, *qui spirituales estis* (Gal. vi, 1). May the Holy Spirit, at the behest of His Immaculate Spouse, as well as that of Saint Joseph, raise us up to be men of the interior life. May the spirit of the interior life permeate our entire being. We have taken a mighty step forward if, conscious of the duty to strive for a life in God, we storm heaven with our prayers for this most precious gift. Let us never cease striving until our lives revolve about Him as about a center, and we can truthfully say, in the fullest meaning of the words: *In ipso vivimus, movemur et sumus*. Then there will be no place for *opera carnis*, but only for *fructus Spiritus* (Gal. v, 19, 22).

No — let us not rest until our heart belongs wholly and entirely to God, until it is motivated by God as its informing principle. Let us not cease striving until our spirit, purified and transformed, rests wholly in His, according to the Apostle's words: *Qui autem adhaeret Domino, unus spiritus est* (1 Cor. vi, 17). Let us not cease until we, the *ministri Christi*, living a life of the interior spirit in, with and for God, can cry out: *Nos autem sensum Christi habemus* (1 Cor. ii, 16).

○ MY God, would that I could do as I desire! In Thee I would submerge myself; in thought and word I would dedicate myself and others to Thee; in Thee, my God and my All, I would center all my activities and my sufferings, in Thee I would reside. Thee I would set on the throne of my heart. As Thy priest I am drawn with a sweet compulsion to Thee, to come closer to Thee, to live wholly in and through Thee. My God and my Father, one halting step toward Thee, and Thou wilt come to me in sweet friendship to scatter the rich fruits of an ineffable sweetness in my soul. Grant that I may ever know myself better, and constantly direct my thoughts and anxieties to find Thee, O God of my heart and my portion forever! Grant that all the love and mercy Thou hast lavished upon me through Thy holy priesthood may become active within me, and rising up, overflow upon those entrusted to my care. Be Thou my sun, and I Thy moon; thus, through me, may Thy light be reflected to the dark places of this world. Live ever in me, my God and my All, and grant that my poor life may be a life of love for Thee and Thy people, seeking nothing but Thee, in joy and sorrow, in life and death, in time and eternity.

Sacerdotis Definitio

O sacerdos, quis es tu?

Non es a te, quia de nihilo;
Non es ad te, quia mediator ad Deum;
Non es tibi, quia sponsus Ecclesiae;
Non es tui, quia servus omnium;
Non es tu, quia Deus es!

Quid ergo es?

N I H I L E T O M N I A

O sacerdos!

Speculum Pastorum

Pastor

Sit vir probatus, non probandus,
Sanctus sancta sancte tractans;
Actu sit severus, vultu serenus, verbo gravis.

Pascat gregem

Exemplo aedificationis, verbo praedicationis,
fructu orationis;
Habeat eruditionem, sed multo magis un-
ctionem.
In omni re plus fidat orationi, quam suo labori.

Caveat

Ne alios iuvando se deserat,
Ne alios elevando cadat.

UNO VERBO SIT

C l a m o r e — Joannes Baptista
L a b o r e — Paulus
A m o r e — Petrus
M o r e — Elias
O r e — Nathan
R e — Carolus Borromaeus

