
On Developing A Christian Philosophy (II)

One of the gravest practical errors a man can make--an error which too easily waters a Christian, practically speaking, into a pagan--is to think that an impeccable personal morality is of itself the sum and substance of Christianity.

It is necessary to be perfectly clear in order not to be misunderstood.

Great stress should be placed on the excellence of the virtue of chastity. It is a prize. It is a man's way of acknowledging that he is a Temple of the Holy Ghost.

But chastity is not the sum and substance of Christianity. Our Lord used the parable of the ten virgins, for example, of whom only five were saved. All were virgins, yet five were lost! They were imprudent. They lacked oil for their lamps. They were not ready, when the time was up, and their preparations could no longer continue, to receive the bridegroom. In a word, though virgins, their work was unfinished.

Commenting on a verse from the Gospel of Our Lord according to Saint Luke, Saint Gregory says: "Dearly beloved: You have just heard the lesson of the holy evangelist. ('At that time Jesus said to His disciples: Let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands'). . . . The Lord says: Let your loins be girt. For we gird our loins when we refrain the lusts of the flesh through continence. But . . . He added: And lamps burning in your hands. And indeed we hold burning lamps in our hands when, through good works, we give examples of light to our neighbors. Of these works Our Lord said: So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

And Saint Gregory goes on: "Two things are required--to restrain the passions and to hold aloft the lantern (of good example); so that there must be the cleanness of chastity in the body and the light of truth in one's works. Hence the one without the other can in no way be pleasing to our Redeemer: that is to say a person who does good deeds but does not put aside

the wickedness of his lusts, or a person who is preeminent in chastity but does not exercise himself in good works. For neither chastity is great without good works nor is a good work anything without chastity."

Whoever, then, subscribes to the Christian philosophy of life cannot rest in the selfish pursuit of his own interior interests. He cannot even attain to these and to his personal sanctity except by loving his neighbor for the love of God. "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

A careful study of the Sermon on the Mount will inform any doubtful Christian about the kind of good works the Master expects of him. The twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew details numerous ways by which a man, serving his neighbor, serves the God-Man, Our Lord Jesus Christ. And the epistles of John sharply contrast the works of a Christian and the works of a worldly pagan. The Pauline epistles are replete with practical pointers on love of neighbor for the love of God, for the perfection of the one, complete Mystical Body of Christ.

It is because nominal Christians try to serve Christ and the world that they fall down so badly when it comes to loving their neighbors for the love of God. It is no wonder that nominal Christians degenerate, whether wittingly or unwittingly is not the question, into practical pagans. They will gladly do a good turn for their neighbors if they foresee that their neighbors will return the compliment. Our Lord's query is, Do not even the heathens this?

Personal sanctity in a Christian worthy of his Master's name means practical heed to "be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" -- that is, to love all and hate none, not even one's avowed enemies.

A Christian's philosophy of life, then, will not be merely to retain or regain personal purity; merely to be a daily communicant; it will be to give himself up for the social good for the glory of God.