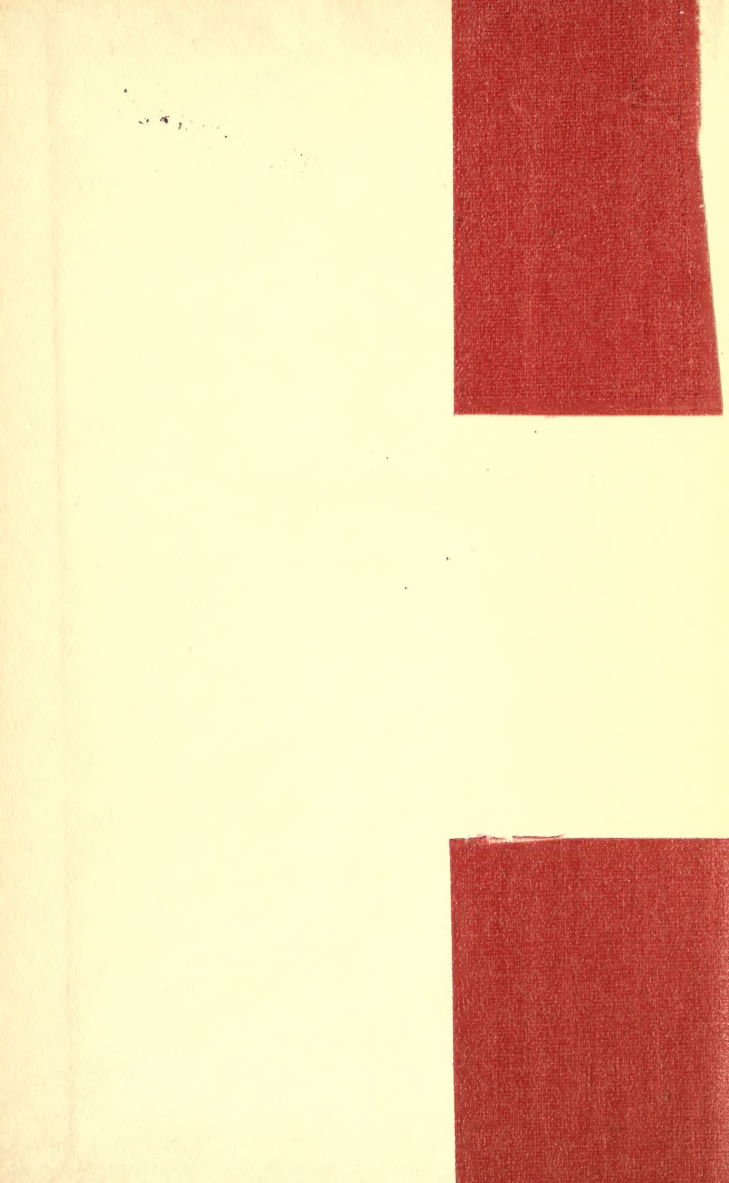


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A DOCTRINE
OF HOPE



BY BISHOP BONOMELLI
ON RELIGIOUS WORSHIP AND
SOME DEFECTS IN POPULAR
DEVOTION. A Pastoral Warning.
Together with a Letter to the English
Translator. Second Edition.

A DOCTRINE OF HOPE

ADAPTED FROM A PASTORAL LETTER OF

BISHOP BONOMELLI

LATE BISHOP OF CREMÓNA

AUTHOR OF "ON RELIGIOUS WORSHIP AND SOME DEFECTS IN
POPULAR DEVOTIONS"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
REV. C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

LONDON

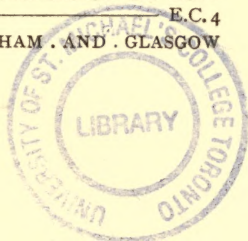
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INTRODUCTION

THOSE whose duty it is to preach the Christian Faith may adopt one of two courses. They may remind themselves that their message is not their own ; it is put, perfect, into their hands and on their lips ; not theirs to adapt or modify it, to render it palatable, smooth, and humanwise acceptable. Not they invented it, and not they shall be responsible for its welcome. They have but to cry aloud ; God will be in their voice, and God in the souls that are chosen to re-echo it. Of these, be their intention only pure, Saints and Apostles are made. Of such was St. Paul ; once only, I think, did he strive to speak a language not his own, such as the Athenians might

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listen to: and was not his failure at Athens a kind of crisis in his career, an immense discouragement and a great stimulus, so that thereafter he would speak more utterly according to the Spirit that was in him and swept him forward, unresisting, on its gale? (For when he spoke rabbinically, and argued with the Jews on their own premises, that was scarcely any adaptation; for the language in which the Message had shaped itself in his own mind was from the first Jewish and, indeed, rabbinic.) But if the temper of such men be not perfect, nor their faith pure, nor their love astonishingly wide, it is they who make the harsh, defiant fanatic, almost glad they are not listened to, almost angry (like Jonas) with God if He be seen to shower His mercies upon men who, in their eyes, do not deserve them.

There are those, on the other hand,

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who strive to speak the language of their hearers, and believe that God, who bade them preach the Message, meant them to use all human devices to lend cogency to their preaching, and not to exact miracles until they had done all that in them lay to achieve this result and exhausted the resources of nature before claiming the divine.

These, perhaps, are they who are the more clearly animated with compassion for the multitudes, and yearn to shepherd the unshepherded ; they, too, who are endowed with a certain psychological sensitiveness which leads them to know immediately not only what a man says or thinks he thinks, but truly thinks and feels. Then, almost without knowing it, they will speak so as to convey their thought to the listener's mind, so that that active, alchemizing mind may assimilate it aright. Otherwise, they know the listener will recast

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what he hears, and end in possession of something quite different. This kind of speaker, too, knows how exhausting is this work of the imagination, and in hours of fatigue and indolence will have, for temptation, just to repeat the correct formulas, to "say the said," and to console himself by the reflection that he has uttered, at any rate, nothing unorthodox. He will, too, have the opposite temptation—to be complaisant, to minimize his doctrine, to play traitor to the truth in order to get what he says accepted and not to shock or offend.

Those who knew, or even had accurate information about, the late Bishop of Cremona will see at once that he belonged precisely to neither of these two classes, but would have been more nearly at home in the second. If ever there were a good shepherd, he assuredly was that. That a man was in

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trouble—and to be unbelieving, or to find one's faith unstable, is the worst of troubles—was but a new challenge to his sympathy. And he was brave; for he knew that, on this side and on that, his sympathy would meet with little enough in return. Yet he was content to go through life helping and seeking to help. Hence in this Pastoral he boldly goes to the assistance of those to whom the doctrine best symbolized by this formula, "No salvation outside the Church," was a stone of offence. "To the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks folly," he might have reminded himself, and loudly have reiterated the offending doctrine. But, albeit not perfectly endowed, perhaps, with that intuitive power of guessing what men *felt* like, he at least knew how to go to assist their minds and to remove unnecessary difficulties. Numbers of men have a sort of knotted web of

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thought, tightly pegged down above their true selves, which are not free accordingly to energize. And these thoughts they take to be themselves, and what really is their prison they take to be their life. Then, when these thoughts are in defiance of the Faith, they believe themselves unbelievers. Bishop Bonomelli applied himself industriously to unknottng these entanglements. In doing this, his work (and he knew it) was still in a sense superficial, yet most valuable. Not of any can it be asked, save of the very greatest Saints, that they should act so directly on the inner, sleeping, paralyzed spirit that it should awake, leap into vitality, and burst the net from within outwards.

Of the mysterious work of grace, of the definitely supernatural, he says here little enough. Perhaps we may regret it. The supernatural scheme of Chris-

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tianity is so transcendently rich and glorious that we may often be impatient of these intellectualisms. And, indeed, we may reasonably believe that to preach at once and fully the supernatural content of our creed is after all the best method and wisest apologetic. Yet, perhaps, not always and at once. Even our Lord began His teaching with simple ethical declarations and the wonted call to repentance. So the Bishop of Cremona decided to begin where the ordinary man begins, and to end, God helping, where God is guiding. Herein he was a Xavier, determined "to enter by their door and come out by his own."

In reading, then, this Pastoral, you must look through the Bishop's eyes over his beautiful city, over his Lombard diocese, full of so much that is modern,—so unattractively and suddenly and immaturely modern (for the contem-

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porary results of an age-old culture are modern, after all, but ripely so)—over many-nationed Italy, over the storm-tossed universal Church, and into the most distant lands, still pagan, lit by dim moons, or arctic lights, or dancing *feux-follets*, and by many a false dawn.

Anguish was in his heart, and love ; and these it was which inspired him to write this. Read, then, no cold argument, but pages whose very sobriety is inspired by a passionate love and a patient faith.

C. C. MARTINDALE, S.J.

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WANDERING often in the depths of the lovely valleys of our Alps, I have raised my eyes to the splendid heights that enclose them, wondering at these proud and lofty peaks, shining with snow under a July sun and piercing into the very heavens. And as I wondered came the thought : Who could attain these summits ? None but the eagles who nest there. And yet, I reflected, scarce one of these highest peaks but has been conquered by our fearless climbers. Looked at from below and afar off, no footpath, no way up is visible ; yet we know that a way has been already found, or at least that we can find it if we will only seek. By several paths I have myself climbed

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these Alps. Unconquerable as they seem from afar, they are within our power if we will but draw near.

This phenomenon, so common in the physical world, is to be found, too, in the world of religion, in the region of faith. The mysteries and doctrine of our creed may be compared to the high summits standing gigantic in the splendid range which makes a crown for our Italy. If we look at them from afar, contenting ourselves with a hasty and superficial view, they appear not only above our reason, as indeed they are, but such as to offend and provoke it to rebellion. Many of these mysteries or dogmas have all the appearance of contradictions, of monstrous absurdities, which you would throw aside without even honouring with an examination and a discussion. But if you draw near and observe in due course their meaning, their content and extension;

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if you ponder on their external proofs and labour to penetrate as deeply as possible into the very intimacy of their inward nature, helping yourself with the double light of reason and of faith, little by little you will be convinced that these mysteries and these dogmas are by no means altogether dark and inscrutable. You will perceive that certain sides of them are luminous; that from their secret heart wonderful rays flash forth; that from their depths, always impenetrable, come such lights as dazzle us and attest their divine origin. In short, the same mysteries, the same hard dogmas which seem hidden in the abyss of the Infinite Wisdom, as the summits of the Alps seem wrapped in the clouds of the sky, are found, under certain aspects at least, to correspond to the very requirements of reason and of science. It is enough to consider them without prejudice, calmly, with a love of

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the truth, and as they are set forth and limited by the Church, not as they are presented by her enemies, or even by certain theologians.

Among these mysteries or dogmas, that which concerns man's eternal salvation doubtless holds a chief place. On the one hand our faith teaches us that God desires to save all, all men without exception. And on the other hand we see that the greater number of human beings were, are, and will remain, outside that Church in which alone, it is affirmed, salvation can be found.

How are we to reconcile the will of God, sincere and active in itself, to save all men of whom He is the Creator, and the manifest fact that by far the larger number of them have not had, nor have, nor will have, the absolutely necessary means of salvation? This formidable difficulty naturally presents

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itself to anyone who thinks at all, and I have heard it repeatedly from persons of every condition.

And here I may be allowed to recall what I myself experienced often enough, when, as a young student, I heard it preached that without the Faith and outside the Catholic Church there is absolutely no hope of salvation. In the depth of my soul I felt a shudder ; I heard, as it were, a cry from outraged reason and conscience which exclaimed, protesting : But how is it the fault of so many millions of souls that they do not know our Faith ? Why should these souls be condemned eternally for a fault they do not and could not know they were committing ? It would have been enough if these good preachers had added to that sure truth one word, one single adverb, and I should have found it perfectly conformable to reason. It would have been enough had they

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said, All those who are *culpably* outside the Church and *wilfully* reject the truth made manifest will be condemned. Those words, *culpably*, *wilfully*, would have dispersed every doubt, thrown clear light on the truth, and calmed the anguish which wounds so many consciences. And never in my recollection was that word pronounced.

In this pastoral letter I intend to treat of this great dogma, and I am prepared to bring it into harmony with human reason and to show how, far from terrifying us, it should greatly comfort us.

The argument, as everyone sees, is wide and not free from difficulty, but I have complete faith in being able to place it on a level with reason and to remove all that seems to clash with it. It is of interest to all ; for in so far as we are men it is of the highest moment for us all to know that which concerns our

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future lot and eternal salvation, and how we may attain it. And which of us can remain indifferent to the fate and eternal safety or loss of our innumerable brothers who live outside our Church? Doubtless, too, what I am about to say will assure the goodness and justice of God which to some seems imperilled, will make His goodness shine forth, and will fill our hearts with sweet hopes and joy.

Here is the order of the treatise.

First of all we will discuss the fate of those infidels who, from the beginning of the world until to-day, and from to-day until the end of the world, are and will be deprived of the light of revelation and the doctrine of the Gospel.

We will speak, after that, of Christians baptized indeed, but who live and die outside the Catholic Church.

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In the third place we will consider those Christians who, born and brought up in the bosom of the Catholic Church, have unfortunately lost their faith, and live and die in practical, and perhaps also theoretical, unbelief.

Lastly, I propose to conclude with a few observations, practical and commonplace, but perhaps not useless to clergy or laity. I have every hope that the discussion will have a living interest for every class.

IF there is a doctrine clearly set forth in the Holy Scriptures it is without doubt this : that God wills to save all men. “ God,” cries the prophet, “ does not desire the death of the wicked, but that he be converted and live.” The Prince of the Apostles proclaims : “ God wishes that none should perish, but that all should return to penance.” St. Paul’s teaching is famous : that God wishes to save all men, and that all should arrive at the knowledge of the truth. There is no difference of lot : the Greek and Gentile, the Hebrew and Barbarian—all are called to life. And bear in mind that the Church, the faithful interpreter of the divine oracles, understands these beautiful and forcible expressions, not as said in general—as, for example, we are accustomed to say, “ All men are reasonable,” although

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indeed some are deprived of reason—but in the sense that this loving and active will of God reaches out to all and to every single man. On this point no doubt is possible.

If God, then, wishes to save all men, He must provide them with the means necessary and sufficient to ensure in practice this salvation to which He has destined them, else we convict Him of a clear contradiction.

How many, then, and of what kind are these necessary and sufficient means? They are two: a true knowledge of what we should do and leave undone, and the necessary and relative strength to put into action that which we know. The first absolutely necessary means of salvation is the knowledge of the truth, which needs to be in proportion to the wants of human nature and to the end to which each man is called. If this end is natural (and this is necessary for all

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and God Himself could not will otherwise), a natural knowledge proportionate to the capacity of each single man is enough; if the end is supernatural (and this God can desire, and in fact does desire, although He is not obliged to desire it, for every man), then the knowledge, too, must be supernatural and proportioned to the end itself and in correspondence with the conditions in which each man is placed.

I have said that the second means necessary to attain salvation is strength to carry into effect the known truth. Assuming a knowledge of the truth, strength from God to attain it cannot fail, for it would be absurd were God to show what to do or to avoid and not to grant the strength necessary to perfect the work. No reasonable being orders an impossible thing. The light of the truth given by God is always accompanied by *strength* which moves it to

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work, for in making known the truth to the mind He commands us to act or not to act, and with strength or grace He stirs up and moves the will proportionately to execute the command. All this is clear, and natural reason itself understands it without strain. And now let us touch, so to say, the quick of the question and face the really hard problem.

Let us consider in a general view all humanity on the earth before Christ's coming, outside the tiny little Hebrew race; let us consider all who lived at the time of Christ outside the corner of Palestine; let us consider all who from Christ to our day, and after our day, have lived and will live outside the Church, ignorant of all, or nearly all, the doctrines of the Gospel. Here are many, many millions and millions of men created by God, whom God wills to save, as faith teaches and reason itself

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requires, and who had not, have not, and perchance will never have the necessary and sufficient knowledge to attain their end. There are pagans fallen to the depth of a degrading ignorance of the most elementary moral truths. How may we say that even to them God offers a knowledge of the truth necessary and sufficient for them to attain salvation? Yet the Faith teaches it, and it is impossible for the Faith to err. Let us see.

St. Paul went through the countries of Asia Minor preaching the Gospel. When Barnabas joined him at Lystra, and after having rejected with horror the divine honours that the pagans wished to offer them, he preached to them and said, among other things, that God has never left Himself without testimony (Acts xiv. 16)—that is to say, God has made Himself known to man. In what way? In different ways, and especially

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in two ways which are, so to speak, natural, and which everyone can and ought to use, and often, in fact, does use without being explicitly aware of it.

In the first place, God makes Himself known to all and to each one in varying degree by the voice of conscience. I beg of you to follow what I say, for this is a most important matter and needs attention to be understood.

Let us consider any single man, putting aside his senses, by means of which he holds communication with the material world ; putting aside also his imagination, in which the images of sensible things follow one another without intermission ; putting aside for the moment even his intellect, which reasons, discusses, distinguishes, affirms, denies, as a judge of all things. Let us enter into the inmost sanctuary of his

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soul, into his conscience, by means of which, so to say, he sees himself *tête-à-tête* with himself. Tell me, O man, whoever you are : Is it good or bad to lie, to cheat one's brother, to strike or kill him without cause? He answers, "It is bad." Tell me : Are you obliged to respect, obey, help, love your kindred and those who have been good to you? Yes ; he feels obliged to do all this, and if he does not do it he feels he is doing wrong. Is it wrong to take from others the fruit of their labours? "It is wrong." Are you certain, unshakably certain, that these are absolute truths and that it never could come to pass that they should be changed into errors? "Yes, I am." And these truths, and these duties to which you feel impelled—whence do you get them? Are they your own inventions and creations? "Oh no, for if that were so I could change them when I

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liked ; but I see and feel that neither I nor any other could ever change or destroy them ; I find these truths in me, and when they are taught me I see that I already held them and thus had made them mine ; they are laws imposed on me from which I cannot escape." You say well ; but if there are laws, there must be a lawgiver. Who is he ? "He can be none other than He who created me and impressed these laws within me." Yes, He is God, by whatever name He may be called, for the name is of small importance. When you hear that interior voice saying : "You may do this, you may not do that ; this is right, that is wrong ; this is just, that is unjust," you hear the voice of God ; if you obey, you obey Him ; if you disobey, you disobey Him.

Behold, then, the first means whereby God makes known the truth and

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manifests it to every man. Behold that light which enlightens every man that cometh into this world, in which all share, more or less ; behold how God reveals Himself *naturally* to every man, teaches him, guides him, corrects him, approves or condemns him. This is the first law that God has written in the heart of all men, and of which St. Paul writes to the Romans with a certainty and depth of view worthy of himself. " The Gentiles, who have not the law (that is, the written, positive, external law, given by Moses and by Christ), do by nature those things that are of the law ; these, having not the law (the written, revealed, Mosaic law), are a law to themselves. Who shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness to them, and their thoughts between themselves accusing or also defending one another " (Rom. ii. 14-15).

It could not be said more clearly.

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He who has not received the Mosaic or Christian revelation will be judged according to conscience—that is, according to that law which God has imprinted in us, in our conscience. Thus every man without the light of faith has in the mysterious voice of his conscience a certain knowledge of his duties, which will be scarcely a beginning, will be indeed imperfect, like that of seven-year old children or the half-witted, but which is always a norm, a guide, which he can and ought to follow in that measure, however scanty it be, in which he apprehends it. When a man follows this mysterious voice and conforms himself to it, he conforms himself to the law written in his heart, as St. Paul says; without being aware of it he follows God Himself, who stamped it in the depths of his soul. If he acts against it he acts against God Himself, even although he knows

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it not. And for us Catholic Christians also—if we habitually fulfil our duties, if we observe the precepts common to nature and to the Gospel, even without being directly aware of it, there can be no doubt that they come to us imposed upon us by God, and we fulfil this observance in homage to God, and because of it will be granted to us the reward we deserve.

Yes, let us repeat it : these millions upon millions of men, on whom no ray of the Mosaic or the Christian revelation has ever shone, have had and have in the voice of conscience, weak though it be, a reflection, an echo of the divine light, of the eternal law ; when they are docile they acknowledge it, even if its origin be unknown to them ; they acknowledge and follow God Himself. The light of conscience and the light of revelation, whether it be Mosaic or Christian, issue from the

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same fount—God ; they are different only in their method, in their greater or less fulness and clearness.

We are born, if I may so express myself, with a certain instinct of what is good, honest, just, at least in matters of the greatest moment, as we are born with a certain instinct of artistic beauty, of order, and of symmetry. The society in which we are placed develops these instincts, and sometimes directs them rightly and perfects them, and sometimes misdirects them and causes them to deteriorate. It is this instinct of the good, the honest, the just, revealed in conscience, which we all find and feel variously within ourselves ; which uplifts and gently carries even the savage towards One existing above himself, grand, infinite, immense, unseen—in a word towards God, whom he knows not as the philosopher and the believer, but guesses and feels after in a dark

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and inexplicable fashion. He may be likened to one who, lost in a thicket, unable to see anything at a distance of two yards, hears from the midst of the branches a friendly voice which in some way tells him the way out.

I do not hesitate to affirm that in this indestructible instinct which carries us towards a higher Being, whose ineffaceable track we find in our consciences, the *sign* or *image* of His countenance, as the Scriptures call it, is placed the deepest basis of the religious instinct, the first foundation on which all religions, even false, arise. It is proper to us, as our reason is proper to us, and it is therefore folly to believe that one day every religion whatever will come to an end, and that the sole empire of reason will be able to replace all religions. This is like saying that there will be a time when man will cease to be

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reasonable and to go in search of happiness.

We have seen the first means whereby God makes man know or feel the way of truth and of salvation; we might call this means the first *natural revelation* which God freely gives to all. Now let us pass on to a second natural revelation which strengthens and widens the first and gives it a certain reasonable basis.

A savage, living by fishing and hunting, dwells in an impenetrable forest. One summer night, from his seat on the bank of a stream or lake, he climbs to a height whence he casts a glance around him and raises it to the sky. In the forest throbs and palpitates intense life, under all its most varied forms. Thousands upon thousands of insects break the silence of the night with their several cries; those animals which fly from the light come forth on

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all sides, wander about and make their presence felt, each in his own way ; the tree-tops, lightly shaken, cast strange shadows, and the whole immense forest appears like a sea rippling in the breeze. He lifts his eyes to the sky, and his keen glance sees a spray of stars, in their splendour and their beauty differing star from star : they shine out and move silently, no one clashing with another. The moon rises and rains upon the forest its wan mild light, like the white sail of a ship beneath the blue vault of the heavens. The sky lightens and grows roseate, and the sun rises and pours out in streams its light and heat. Like a giant it runs the roads of the sky and puts out the stars with its light. What are the thoughts and words of our poor savage? He gazes at this sight, ever old and ever new, amazed, stupefied, and, as it were, caught up

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in an intoxication pure and sweet, he exclaims :

“ How beautiful it is ! Who made all this ? Who rules and governs all this world and puts order in it ? I made my bow ; I made my arrows and my nets. I know who made my dwelling. But who made these stars ? this moon ? this sun ? all these animals ? Oh, He must be great, wise, and powerful above all men together ! I do not see Him, but neither do I see the wild beast hidden in the thickets of the woods ; I see only the track of his passing in the sand, and I am certain that he is there.”

And the savage feels himself subject to this invisible Being ; he fears Him, adores Him, prays to Him, thanks Him, honours Him after his fashion, and perchance in his dwelling offers Him a part of his prey and recognizes as he can His lordship. We smile at the simplicity of this savage who believes

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that this Being dwells in the mountain-tops, thunders in the clouds when the storm breaks, and clothes Himself in the rays of the sun, as we should smile at the boy who, climbing a mountain, fancies he will be able to touch the moon rising behind its peaks.

That which befalls the savage should happen much more easily to the man living in a social state, even if it be a rude one, and still more to the man who lives in the midst of the splendours of a society, even though it be pagan, such as the Greek, the Egyptian, or the Roman. Looking at the sky, the earth, the sea, the ranges of mountains, the variety and order of all creatures, he cannot but feel himself shaken by the thought that there must be a supreme Author and Disposer of all. If he sees a bridge over a river, and under the bridge a boat, a ship, he realizes that the bridge had its engineer, the boat,

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the ship, their builders ; if he sees a waggon, a palace, an encircling wall, a garden, he never fancies that all these things may have been made by themselves, by chance, but he is certain that all these are the work of men who reason. How, then, should not the whole world, with all that it contains, so beautiful and orderly, be the works of a Being endowed with a supreme mind, an infinite power ? I am my father's son, my father the son of my grandfather ; but did the first man spring up out of the earth like a little tree ? Who created the first man, the first grain of corn, the first horse ? What man but must feel, at least at times in his life, when he reflects, and must to some extent recognize, that there is a Being superior to himself, superior to all men and to all other beings ? He will not be capable of knowing clearly who He is, how or why He exists ; he will form a

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conception for himself, I will not say such as we have, but confused, generic, vague, yet a conception. And for the rest, we ourselves who have the light of faith, who have devoted ourselves to philosophical studies and theological courses—what conception have we of God? How inadequate it is, how imperfect! And what notion have our good people of Him? If we are sincere we ought to say that it is very wretched and to a large extent anthropomorphic, and not much superior to that of more instructed pagans. It is a small thing; nevertheless it is something, and in proportion to this unformed instinctive knowledge will be the honour and worship offered.

The sacred Scriptures speak repeatedly of this natural knowledge and revelation of God granted to all men. They speak of it when they say that the heavens declare His glory, that from

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the beauty of created things we rise to the beauty of their Author: they speak of it when St. Paul teaches that God has not left Himself without witness, loading us with blessings, giving rain from heaven, fruitful seasons, food, etc., and in a more formal and solemn manner he announces this truth when he says, speaking of the Gentiles:

“Because that which is known of God is manifest in them. For God Himself hath manifested it unto them.”

How?

Listen.

“For the invisible things of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: His eternal power also and divinity.”

What follows, then?

“That they are inexcusable, because that when they knew God they have not glorified Him as God nor given thanks” (Rom. i. 19, 20, 21).



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There are thus two *natural manifestations or revelations* by which God in His goodness makes Himself known to all men—the internal manifestation or revelation of conscience and that external and visible of all created things which shew forth the Creator.

I should have wished to add a third: but this third seems to me to be implied by the first, that of conscience. I will merely touch upon it slightly.

In a passage of his "Confessions," in which one meets with the highest philosophic conceptions, St. Augustine says that our soul has, like our body, its gravity, which draws it towards reality and above all towards God, the great centre of spirits; this gravity is love, a hidden force which ceaselessly draws and drives us towards something unknown, which is indeed in substance God Himself. Sublime truth and sub-

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lime expression ! We cannot deny that we feel within ourselves a force from without, from above, beyond all things visible and finite, which leaves us no peace, which makes us cry : "More, yet more !" and which makes us touch and feel, as it were, the inadequacy of all good things to fill the void in our soul. We are condemned here below never, never to pronounce this word, "enough." We are ever moved, ever driven inexorably forward, ever made athirst for the immense and the infinite. This is not knowledge properly so called, but it is a feeling, an instinct that breaks forth from the soul, that is its force of gravitation, that carries it towards the great centre of which it is a satellite, of which we know not where it be, because it is everywhere. We all have, if the expression be allowed, the instinct of God which precedes any reflection of our own, which makes us

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seek Him, and we should not seek Him had we not a hint, a certain initial knowledge of Him.

This is the place to add an important reflection which throws a beautiful light on our argument and is a proof of how divine Providence always watches over the human family.

When God placed the first man upon the earth, together with the life of nature He gave him also a supernatural life and instructed him directly in such a manner that he should attain his end. God was his Creator and also his Master. The human family grew, multiplied, and was scattered all over the earth. What happened? The sons of the first man going forth from the hands of God carried with them everywhere the teachings which they had received from their common father and handed them down to their descendants. Thus it happened that

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the divine doctrines entrusted to the father of mankind passed, a holy heritage, to all the races dwelling over the whole face of the earth. They were preserved in their purity by the first Patriarchs, they were preserved and gradually explained by Moses and the Prophets until the coming of Christ, who unfolded them fully and brought them to perfection. But these doctrines, although too often distorted, had an echo in the religious and philosophical traditions of all nations and helped certainly in many ways to strengthen, make clear, and develop that natural revelation of conscience and the spectacle of creation, on which I have touched above. Thus to that twofold natural revelation inherent in conscience and in human reason is added a spark of supernatural revelation, a reflection of that primitive revelation made to Adam and then amplified

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by the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the Mosaic law.

The sun, even when hidden beneath our hemisphere, always darting its rays on the moon and the planets, and reflected in the heights of heaven, still makes its benefits felt in all that part of the earth that sees it not. Its rays, although so weak, imperceptible to our eyes, make less thick the darkness of the night, the obscurity of caverns, and there is perhaps not a single creature that is not cheered by its influence, however slight it may be. This is a faint picture of the beneficent influence of the tradition or supernatural revelation granted to our first parents, and by them to their sons and grandsons, and shining forth to all humanity.

You will say that this double natural manifestation of God in the voice of conscience and in the sight of the created world, although in some sort

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strengthened by the primitive supernatural revelation, variously scattered among the whole human race, is an extremely wretched thing and in practice of almost no efficacy. It does not prevent so many of the sons of Adam from being cast into the deepest ignorance, knowing not the most elementary truths concerning God, moral conduct, and the future life: whence there still remains the difficulty that God does not provide enough help for the spiritual needs of men.

God is like the sun, writes the author of "The Divine Names," which always pours forth all its light and heat, and pours them forth equally on all creatures. Do then all receive its light and heat in the same way and to the same degree? Assuredly not: every creature shares in it according to its nature and capacity, and as much as one nature and capacity differs from another, so much does the

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light differ with which it shines and the heat with which it glows. And this diversity is called for by the universal order, which exacts inequality.

Moreover, there is another truth to be borne in mind. God, after He had created all living creatures, let them operate of themselves, and provided for their propagation and preservation by means of themselves, making them like Himself, and uplifting them to the dignity of causes. He created the first pair of human beings, the first germs of animal and vegetable life, and He wills that natural life in all its forms should unfold, from Him indeed as first cause, but always with the *necessary* concurrence of second causes. In what concerns also the intellectual and moral life He invariably adheres to this system. He makes truth and the breath of His divine life reach men by means of other men, by means of the prophets,

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of the Apostles, and above all by means of His Church. If the means, altogether or in part, fail in their mission (I am not inquiring whether culpably or blamelessly), it would be unjust to trace the reason back to God, who determines all things wisely ; it should be attributed to the secondary causes which made God's action defective or null. And how often does it so fall out !

And here another point may be noted which shows how the goodness and justice of God outstrip the goodness and justice of men and of all their codes.

The laws of men are binding on all subjects indifferently a few days after their publication, and this period is always fixed. As soon as the period of grace has expired, whether they know them or not, they must observe these laws, and whoever breaks them, even through ignorance, cannot escape

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the penalty. In vain does a poor man, who lives apart and does not know how to read and to whom no man has spoken of the law, protest, saying : "But I knew nothing of that law." This protest does not help him. Public order requires this should be so ; it is a necessity, and because it is a necessity it is also justice. It is of no use to complain. But such a way of judging is far from God's way. He proclaims His laws, as we have said above, but He judges each one not according to the law itself, such as it was proclaimed, but as it was apprehended by each one in his conscience, in that fashion, and in that degree of clearness or uncertainty in which it is disclosed : no more and no less. Whence we might say that the law, objectively equal for all, is uneven for each one in particular, and in a certain measure is applied by each one as each

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one applies it to himself. In short, between God, who declares the law, and man, to whom He declares it, stands the individual conscience, and it is this which determines the immediate application of it. No one will fail to see the consequence of this truth. How many are judged guilty by men and are not so before God, and how many who are not guilty before men are guilty before God!

This being the state of the case, I find these words of a modern apologist in accord with reason :

“The theistic philosopher, although not agreeing entirely in the idea which he forms of God with the primitive and simple man, although arriving at his notions by other roads than those which are struck out by the man in the street, agrees with him perfectly in his practice—he adores and prays. The adoration will be in the one case much more

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highly intense than in the other, the prayer will be of quite a different purity. There is a gulf between them. But in one way these two souls meet together—they believe in the goodness of the force that guides and rules the Universe" (*Semeria*, p. 134).

In the East I have often seen the Mussulmans kneeling outside and inside the mosques, lifting their eyes and their hands to heaven, and praying with a fervour which I confess I was obliged to admire and almost to envy. There they were motionless, absorbed in prayer, sometimes with outstretched arms as if forgetful of all around and of their very selves. I consoled myself with the thought that that God who reads the heart, our God, the true God, would accept that prayer, because they intended doubtless to address it to the true God Whom they believed to be their own, and therefore it was in truth

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directed to our God. As the heretic who baptizes according to the intention of his Church (which is false and would even positively exclude ours) baptizes validly, and confers grace because his intention always falls back on the true Church, which is ours, so the pagan adores and prays to the true God without knowing it, when his intention is directed to Him Whom he believes the true God.

This is why the Church has condemned the statement that negative unbelief is a sin. Negative unbelief signifies to be outside the Church without knowing it, and therefore without wishing it, and for that reason without fault.

It will not displease the reader if I here confirm this most important point of doctrine by recalling the words of Pope Pius IX., in a memorable Encyclical : "It is well known to you

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that those who through invincible ignorance" (that is to say, through ignorance that they cannot overcome, and that is, therefore, free from fault) "do not know our religion, but observe the *natural* law and its commands graven by God in the hearts of all, and are *ready to obey God* and lead an honest life, these with the help of divine light and grace can attain eternal life. For God, who sees, searches into, and knows the minds of men, the thoughts and intentions of all, by reason of His supreme goodness and mercy *positively could not allow that a man should be punished with eternal torments* who is not guilty of voluntary sin" (Encyclical *Quanto conficiamur*, August 17, 1863, and *Singulari quodam*, December 9, 1854).

The outcome of all that has been said above is to establish the fact that

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God, by means of conscience and the sight of created things, makes known Himself and those basic duties which are laid on us by Him, and which unite us to our brothers.

I will go farther and say that these heathen, in so far as they observe this law of reason written in their hearts, according to St. Paul's phrase, may be called Christians. The expression may seem a bold one, but it is not my own ; it came from the pen of a philosopher and martyr, a disciple of the disciples of the Apostles, St. Justin. When for the first time as a young man my eye fell on this sentence, I experienced so lively a stirring of joy in my heart, that I still remember it now as if it were yesterday. It is well to repeat the words of the holy martyr and philosopher who, after having passed through all the schools of Greece, Pythagorean, Platonic, and

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Stoic, found the peace which he sought in the school of Christ.

The saint makes the objection explained above of the men who lived before Christ, and for whom it was, therefore, impossible to know His doctrine and be saved by it (Apol. I^a, 46), and he answers: "We have learnt that Christ, the first-born of God, is also that same Reason of which the whole human race is a partaker.* . . . And those who have lived according to reason (that human participation created by the divine) are Christians even if they are considered atheists: such among the Greeks were Socrates and

* St. Justin does not mean to say that human reason is an emanation of the Eternal Reason, which is the Word (the Logos) itself, and not merely an immediate reflection thereof. Justin speaks as the Stoics did, who compared that human reason to a germ which God has implanted in us, and in that reason the rational seeds of truth develop themselves.

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Heraclitus ; among the barbarians Abraham, Ananias, etc.”* (Apol. I^a, 46).

And elsewhere, “In Christ, whom Socrates to some extent knew” (for He was and is that Word which pervades all things), “in Christ not only philosophers and learned men believed, but also the *rude* and *unlettered* who

* “Christum, primogenitum Dei esse ac Rationem illam, cuius omne hominum genus particeps est didicimus. . . . Et qui cum ratione vixerunt, *Christiani sunt*, etiamsi athei existimati sint: quales apud græcos fuerunt Socrates et Heraclitus, apud barbaros Abraham, Ananias,” etc. (Apol. I^a, 46).

“Christo quem Socrates aliqua ex parte cognovit (erat et est Verbum illud omnia pervadens :) . . . Christo in quem, non philosophi solum et literati homines crediderunt, sed etiam operarii et omnino imperiti, qui et gloriam et metum et mortem contempserunt,” etc. (Apol. II^a, 10).

“Quæcumque igitur apud alios omnes (gentiles) præclare dicta, *ea nostra sunt Christianorum* . . . omnes enim scriptores per insitum rationis semen potuerunt quidem verum videre, sed subobscure,” etc. (Apol. II^a, 13, 14, *et alibi passim*).

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despised glory and fear and death" (Apol. II^a, 10). And again: "All things excellently said among all those men *are ours, are of the Christians . . .* for all these writers were able to know the Truth, though somewhat darkly, by the seed of *reason* born in them."

Let us try to sum up and epitomize in a simpler and clearer fashion the doctrine of the martyr and philosopher as we find it scattered among the other Fathers, as in St. John Chrysostom (Homily 36) in St. Augustine (in the "City of God," and in many of his other works).

Human reason, which exercises itself in the inward understanding, in the conscience, and in the harmony of the universe, which spreads beneath our eyes the grandeur of the supreme Disposer, is a derivation, a reflected ray of the eternal *Reason*, the Logos, the Son of God. This human reason, making us know God and our duties, even if it be

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in a vague and confused fashion, marks out for us the road to aim at, and following it we follow the Word Himself. This Word making Himself man was called Christ, wherefore those who before Christ followed reason followed Christ also, and may be called Christians. "Those truths which they knew, those good deeds which they did, belong to Christ : they are our truths and our works, ours, we Christians," exclaims Justin with holy pride. Regulus, who kept his word at the cost of life ; Fabricius, who repelled a suggested crime ; Scipio, who would not see Sophonisba for fear of seduction ; Seneca, who uttered stupendous moral truths ; Marcus Aurelius, who set the example of an honest and austere life : in all this they may be called Christians. What a high and splendid doctrine !

With St. Thomas for a guide I will venture another step forward, and his

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authority is my defence. The holy doctor asks whether a man is obliged to believe any of the truths of faith *explicitly*. The question is general, so also is the answer.

As to those matters by means of which a man attains beatitude, *explicit* faith is required. "As to other matters of belief it is not necessary that a man should believe them *explicitly* but *implicitly*, or in the disposition of his mind." *

And what are the *necessary chief* things which must be held by explicit faith? He answers that *explicit* faith in the Incarnation—that is to say, in Christ—is *necessary*.

Instantly the difficulty arises, what to say of the heathen who lived before Christ? This is the case we are considering. St. Thomas answers: "If

* "Quantum autem ad alia credibilia, non tenetur homo *explicitè* credere, sed tantum *implicitè* vel in præparatione animi" (*Summa Theologica*, 2, 2^æ, q. 2, a. 5).

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some have been saved to whom this revelation [of the Incarnation] was not made, they were not saved without faith in the Mediator [that is to say, in Christ]; for if they had not *explicit* faith, they had nevertheless *implicit* faith in divine Providence, believing God to be the *Liberator* of mankind, according to the fashion that should please Him.”*

* Si qui salvati fuerunt, quibus revelatio (incarnationis) non fuit facta non fuerunt salvati absque fide mediatoris; quia ipsi non habuerunt fidem *explicitam*, habuerunt tamen fidem *implicitam* in divina Providentia, credentes Deum esse liberatorem hominum secundum modum sibi placitum (*op. cit.*, a. 7, *ad tertium*). St. Thomas supposes a sufficient knowledge of God's supernatural revelation to render possible an act of true explicit faith as regards at least the two truths mentioned in Heb. xi. 16. It is true that he restricts this concession of implicit faith to the times previous to the coming of Christ. But there seems no adequate reason for the restriction, or why it should not be possible for all those who still retain some knowledge of the primitive relation to possess real though implicit faith.

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“Christianity,” writes Mgr. Freppel, “in the strict sense of the word, does not begin only with the Incarnation of the Word : it begins from the beginning of the world. Before shining forth in all its splendour it scattered a few rays across the ages through the primitive revelation and by means of natural reason. And as the dawn borrows its rays from the sun of which it foretells the coming, so the light scattered through the ancient world forms the dawn of that great day which Christ causes to shine forth upon humanity.”

Nothing could be more strictly true. Christ is the Word made man. If, therefore, it is true to say that every light of truth proceeds from the Word, Christ is the Sun of Truth which enlightened men's minds even before He took flesh upon earth. Consequently Christianity—that is, the revelation of Christ—can, in St. Justin's words, claim to itself as

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its own all the fragments of truth laid up in the bosom of the ancient world. In this sense St. Augustine says: "What is called to-day the Christian religion existed among the ancients, and never ceased to exist from the origin of the human race until the Word made man came upon earth, and then the true religion, which existed also before, began to be named" (in Justini, Lect. 16, pp. 323-4).

Farther on he continues to this effect: grace, which cannot be lacking, can incline his spirit to believe those truths to whom it pleases or shall please God to make them known. More: he [the pagan] has a resolute and serious disposition to accept all those truths which Providence shall choose to make known to him with the means that it shall please Him to choose. There is no need to imagine that no one of the revealed truths can be the immediate

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object of a pagan's faith. The dogma of the *Mediator*, or of the redemption which forms the central point of divine revelation of which it is the summing-up, lives in the hearts of all races. This is an historical fact attested even by Voltaire and Volney, and admits of no exception.

Although, then, the formal expression of faith was lacking, *implicit* faith in the future Redeemer was not a thing impossible in the ancient world: and therefore, though *supernatural* in its origin, which is the grace offered to all men, the faith of the pagan could be of a degree strictly sufficient in its motive and in its object. Mgr. Freppel follows the matter up like a true theologian, pointing out that to the *implicit supernatural* faith of the pagan could and should correspond *supernatural* charity, even after repeated faults and repeated repentances. He concludes :

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“These pagans were, then, in the way of salvation: they belonged to the Church—that is to say, to the great society of intelligences, united to God by faith and by charity: they were Christians in heart and in soul, according to the expression of St. Justin” (pp. 127, 128, 129).

And why should we not say this of all pagans living now and after us on earth? For them there are more reasons than for the ancients, because to-day it is easier that in an indirect fashion some echo of the Christian revelation should reach them. In this way we may admit that among pagans is faith in a *supernatural* sense and with faith *charity* and their eternal salvation.

Wherefore should we doubt that God bestows on them this grace—God who gives abundantly to all? God, who has given His Son *for* all, how with Him will He not give to all all that is needful? No, there is no need that God should

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send His angels to instruct these heathens, as St. Thomas somewhere says, and certain preachers like to repeat ; it is enough that God should send a ray of His light to shine before the eyes of their mind, should stir up in their hearts a movement of love for truth, for Him, and they are on the highroad to heaven. St. Thomas and the preachers who speak of angels, whom God would send at need to instruct those who are lying in the darkness of error, are alluding to the angel that appeared to the centurion, Cornelius (Acts x.). But unluckily, in all the Scriptures this is the only example of the kind, the only angel sent, and it should prove that God is not much inclined to send angels to supply these wants. It does not occur to them to mention that the angel did not instruct Cornelius, but ordered him to turn to St. Peter, who then taught him.

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This very consoling doctrine may be a cause of difficulty to some in this way. If even the heathen could and can be saved in the sense explained above, there is no reason to exert oneself so much or to be so anxious to bring them to the Faith ; we can leave them quietly in their superstitions : they will be saved through the great door of ignorance, and perhaps would be saved no more through instruction.

Anyone so reasoning would be wrong, and very wrong.

In the first place, Jesus Christ has given us a definite and formal order to preach His Gospel to all men, and His words could not be clearer. "Preach to all men—go and teach all nations," etc. Christ has commanded it ; we have no right to ask for explanations, but only a duty to obey, and "Woe to me," exclaimed the Apostle, "if I do not preach the Gospel."

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In the second place, every man in his own condition has the duty which he cannot put by of knowing the truths necessary to eternal salvation and of freeing himself as far as he can from the ignorance which is always an evil. If he cannot do this, others are obliged by charity or by justice to help him, and the Catholic Church fulfils this double duty by the work of her ministers. If we were to see a brother covered with rags, or with only a hard and scanty bit of bread, we should feel it a duty to cover him and feed him better. These heathen are deprived of what is necessary to the intellectual and moral life, or have it in so scant a measure that it is pitiful to see them. The duty of helping them constrains us.

In the third place, the heathen abandoned to his own strength alone can do very little to save himself, considering the corrupt and corrupting

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atmosphere in which he lives. Convey him into a Christian atmosphere : what a change for him ! Easy, regular, wide, suitable, secure instruction ; sacraments, prayers, good example, feasts, functions, incitements to good, deterrents from vice, pious associations—so easy the way is made for him to cease from evil and practise virtue. Should we not be cruel if, being able to withdraw our brothers from the midst of such grievous and sad conditions, we did not do so ? Should we not fail in our duty if we did not strive to make them sharers in the good things we possess ? These unbelievers, on entering the Church, know, love, and serve God much better than they could do in their unbelief.

Add to all this the material advantages that are inseparable from the conversion of the heathen to the Gospel : they are summed up by the word *civili-*

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zation, which is its daughter. As men, therefore, as Christians, and as members of the priesthood, and heirs to a share of the Apostolate which Christ has laid upon the Church, we are bound to leave nothing untried for the conversion of the heathen.

The thought that for so many centuries before and since Christ there have been so many millions upon millions of unbelievers who knew not how He was to come, nor how He had come; the thought that even to-day two-thirds of the human race do not belong to Christ, and that perchance many ages are yet to pass before they enter His fold, makes me believe that a short digression on an argument of such great importance will be neither useless nor unwelcome.

In the natural visible order, intellectual and moral, all things move from

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below upwards, from the imperfect to the perfect: it is the great law of regular progressive evolution from which no created thing can escape: from the seed the tree, from the embryo the living thing, from the first dawn of reason the man of science. Let us confine ourselves to man, the noblest of earthly beings: the baby develops, becomes a boy, a youth, a man in the full energy of his powers. The intellect which seemed asleep in the baby awakes, unfolds by degrees, and in the grown man attains the perfection corresponding to his capacity. The moral principle which runs parallel to the intellectual lies under the same law. What happens in the individual man is repeated on a larger scale in man taken collectively—that is to say, in a small society, then in a large one, in nations, in races. It is in conformity with universal laws that the same phenomenon

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is manifested in the religious society also.

From the first man to the Patriarchs, from the Patriarchs to Moses, from Moses to the prophets, to Christ, revelation grows continually : it passes, says Tertullian, from infancy to childhood, to youth : with Christ it touches the fulness of manhood ; it is perfect, and objectively it closes. The real internal evolution of new divine truths, whether theoretical or practical, stops : nothing more is added or can be added, the tree has reached its full development with the divine fruit which crowns it, the Man-God, Christ. In place of this internal evolution succeeds the external evolution of the same truths, theoretical and moral ; they are illustrated, enlarged, applied, and better understood. A continuous and wonderful progress takes place on the part of intellects made more fit to understand them. There is

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an exuberance, a splendid flowering, which will go on growing until the end of time because of new needs and of social progress itself. To this religion which begins with Adam, and reaches its apex in Christ, which is extending and will extend in His Church, all men are called ; and they turn their eyes upon it in different ways. As any truth whatever, although it be always the selfsame, is variously apprehended by men, by one more, by another less, by one early, by another late, according to the capacity of each and the natural outward conditions, so, too, our religion, which traverses and fills all ages. All races at all times have had of it some report, some knowledge, some share : using well those sparks of truth scattered everywhere and at all times, they could unite themselves to Christ and in Him find salvation, since always it is in Him alone that it may be found. Be-

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fore Christ's coming, God showed forth religion little by little ; He showed it by means of symbols, by inspirations internal and external, by signs to the Patriarchs, by the law written and unwritten, definitely setting His seal on it in Christ. Since Christ's coming it is continually shown forth to the peoples by the Church, but always little by little. The order of grace is formed on the order of nature according to a most happy phrase of St. Thomas : *Gratia perficit secundum modum naturæ*. It would be unreasonable to teach a child of seven years old as a boy of twelve, or a boy of twelve as a youth of twenty, to teach the advanced sciences to one who can hardly understand the elements. Each must be treated according to his state and capacity.

This is why God put off the coming of our Saviour until the fulness of time—

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that is to say, until the times were ready and ripe. As one never does violence to nature without its revolting and avenging itself, so God, who is its Author, does not lay upon it what it is not yet fit to carry. Let us never forget this : nature is the base and foundation on which religion is laid, just as the wild tree-trunk is the base and foundation for the graft ; without a suitable woodland tree it is folly to talk of grafting ; without reason and will there can be no question of religion, faith, and laws. The whole human race, progeny of the first man, fallen from the beginning, would not have been capable of receiving the divine graft of Christianity : it had to be slowly prepared by means of the primitive revelation of the Mosaic law—the schoolmaster who had brought it to Christ, as St. Paul expresses it. Natural civilization itself, in all its stages and all its very different forms, helped too in

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this preparation ; it smoothed the path, making the people less rough, raised the intellectual and moral level, put them into communication with each other, in some sense made brothers of them. Do you think that the men of the Stone or Iron Age, the wild fetish-worshippers, brutal idolators, barbarians who dwelt on the earth before and after Moses, would have received the Patriarchal and Mosaic religion, and its basis, spiritual and personal monotheism? I do not believe it: it would have been like teaching our peasants the problems of geometry.

You see that Christianity itself spread and planted its roots only in the Græco-Roman world. Why was this? Because that alone was prepared by Judaism widely spread in the chief centres, by Greek philosophy, by legislation, by literary and artistic culture, by the whole of material progress. Christianity would never have been established in Greece

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or in Rome at the time of the Trojan War or of the Tarquins : the world was not prepared to receive the divine seed. Outside the Græco-Roman world Christianity did not take root, and if the Apostles and their disciples scattered the good seed it did not come up, or coming up it withered away.

The same phenomenon has been seen from the time of Christ and His Apostles down to our own day. Which are the heathen peoples and tribes that may be won over to the Gospel? Those who have some degree of instruction and civilization.

“We ought,” an old missionary once said to me, and he said well, “to make them men, and then we may strive to make them Christians.”

The great principle remains on which I laid stress above—that is, that Nature is the foundation on which can arise the edifice of faith ; if this is not prepared

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by means of natural teaching, and presents no point of contact, no side homogeneous to faith, there is no hope that it will penetrate. We cannot sow or gather in a harvest upon a rock.

And so we Catholic Christians should be overjoyed when bold explorers and travellers open up new ways amid wild and barbarous races, and merchants and manufacturers erect banks and factories, and civil governors plant their flags and set up colonies and schools and create there all the institutions suited to our civilization. These, indeed, are the providential means which, distantly but truly, open the road to our Faith. Men, peoples, governments—to follow the thought of Pope St. Leo—are all unknowingly instruments of which God makes use to spread His kingdom ; so He made use of the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans ; philosophers, conquerors, navigators, legislators, men of letters,

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merchants, through the preaching of the Apostles, and it would be unjust not to recognize their work.

False religions themselves if looked at closely are seen to help without knowing it towards this end. The passing of certain races from the grossest fetish-worship to polytheism, deifying the forces of nature, and from polytheism rising to monotheism marks a step forward and brings them nearer to Christianity, to Catholicism. I will say something still bolder, which to some will appear frankly false, but it is not so. The rationalism and scepticism, which are eating at the bases of faith in our society, will in their time do a precious service among those races who seem altogether hostile to the Gospel, like the Mohammedans, the Brahmins, Buddhists, and disciples of Confucius. In what way? This is the way. These peoples are steadfast, and as if nailed to

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their traditional beliefs. They hold on to them blindly, above all the Mohammedans. Discussion with them is not possible ; it annoys and irritates them and makes them more obstinate. While this state of mind continues, their conversion is impossible, as it would be impossible to cure a man with cancer without cutting out the cancer itself, or to make a nail go into a hole without driving out another nail that stops it up. Let the teaching, the breath of science enter these countries ; even if it be false it matters not. Discussion will become possible and with discussion conversion will be possible. Yes, all that is progress, material, intellectual, moral, or religious, outside Catholicism, cannot hurt it : nay, on the contrary, sooner or later it must help it. The more men become intelligent, cultivated, of elevated mind, the more fit they are, if not to-day, to-

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morrow, or at least presently, to know the truth of our religion ; to think otherwise is to do dishonour to our Faith. It is only small, narrow, sordid minds, weak enough in faith, who think that progress, taken in its entirety and in its true meaning, can be fatal to Catholic principles.

Geologists teach that the glacial period was necessary to form the soils that are to-day our riches. Those immense icebergs that, like an enormous cap, covered our mountains and filled our valleys, slowly pounding the rocks and rushing headlong into the sea, were preparing then our valleys, our hills, our plains, so rich to-day in vines, olives, and crops. So too errors, the confusions of peoples, invasions, wars, superstitions, false religions, which give way to others less false—all this indirectly served, and always will serve, the true religion, which is the Catholic. In the

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hands of God all things work together for the triumph of truth, and he who takes a large view of the development of history should marvel at God's providence, which, by new and seemingly untoward paths, disposes all for the accomplishment of His designs.

We who live but a day are in too great haste to see events unfold and to behold the great design of which God holds the threads in His hand ; but God who is eternal, who follows the same plan in the moral, intellectual, and religious order that He followed in the physical formation of the world, can wait and let forces develop of themselves under the tranquil care of His providence. So, too, the Church copying God can await without disquiet the natural course of events, sure of seeing the last day of all the centuries and of being a spectator of the final triumph of truth, brought about by means of free

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secondary causes, such as are men, and even the very co-operation of error and evil themselves made instruments of good.

II

ACCORDING to the more probable geographical estimates of experts, the population living to-day on the earth may amount to 1,500 millions. Of these 1,500 millions, 1,000 millions are not Christians. The other 500 millions, a third part of the human race, are Christians. Of these 500 million Christians, half, or a little less, belong to the Catholic Church ; the other half is divided among heretical and schismatic Greeks of the different Churches : Russian, Serbian, Roumanian, Bulgarian, Nestorian, Eutychian ; and the Armenians, Chaldeans, etc., also heretics and schismatics ; and above all into the numberless sects differing among themselves of Protestants : Lutherans, Calvinists, Zwinglians, etc. What ought we to think about these 250 million Christians, separated to-day from the Catholic

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Church to which they were for some centuries united? Will they all be lost? What will become of them according to Catholic doctrine? The answer is not hard to give, but it must be given distinctly, so that the matter may be placed in a fuller light.

All these heretical and schismatic Churches accept and make use of baptism, although, perhaps, in some it is administered so as to admit a reasonable doubt of its validity. All their babies, duly baptized, if they die before attaining the full use of reason, are saved as Catholics, for it is of faith that baptism given by heretics and infidels is valid and produces its effect. And everyone will see how great must be the number of these babies and children who reach salvation in the Churches separated from our own.

What will happen to those who, validly baptized in heresy and schism,

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continue in it and die in it? To what extent will they be responsible for the error in which they were born and in which they die? No man can possibly say; it is known to God alone. Nevertheless, it is helpful to discuss the matter, starting from the sources themselves of faith and of reason.

No one can exactly decide the time, the year, the month, the day, on which a man acquires the perfect use of reason, and with it full responsibility of conscience before God. The date varies according to country, climate, occupations, the atmosphere in which the child grows up, his instruction, his individual capacity, physical health itself, and a hundred other causes impossible for us to know. Until that day, which God alone knows, those who are born and grow up in schism or heresy are not sinning; they are in good faith; they follow, as St. Thomas

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says, *majores*—the elders, who direct them by word, example, and authority ; and if there be a fault it is theirs, never that of those they direct.

These grow up in error. They reach twenty, thirty, fifty years, old age ; what can be said of the state of their conscience ?

St. Thomas, examining in general the powers of the human reason as to the knowledge of the natural, religious, and moral truths themselves, with that practical good sense that shines in all his discussions, affirms that man is powerless to know them fully, and that therefore divine revelation is necessary. What arguments does he adduce ? Be pleased to hear and ponder them.

(1) Without divine revelation the religious and moral truths themselves would have been known to few.

(2) They would only have been known after a long time.

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(3) And not without an admixture of many errors and grievous doubts.

Men, says the saint, are for the most part weak in understanding, and busy as they are with a thousand other things, fly from a long and tiring study concerning suprasensible and abstract truths ("Cont. Gent.," lib. i., c. 4; "Summ.," pt. 1, q. 1, a. 2, 2; q. 2, a. 4, and elsewhere). These very reasons, so simple and so evident, show the difficulty and powerlessness (not *absolute*, no, but *moral* and *relative*) of heretics and schismatics to leave their errors and their Church and to enter ours. What studies can they make of historical and theological questions, intricate in themselves and made worse by the works of men? What books should they consult? Their historical and instructive books are composed to prop up error, falsified in a thousand ways. To what men can they have recourse? To their ministers

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and teachers? They all stand against truth and for the defence of error. Everything in front of them, around them, above them, confirms error: how are we to hope that they can break the very subtle net in which they are involved? They are attending to their commerce, to their industries, to their fields and their business, and they have to provide for their domestic needs. To exact that they should devote themselves to a daily accurate study, weaned from prejudices, concerning the heretical Church of which they are members and the Catholic Church itself, in such a way that they may attain the certain conviction that the former is false, the latter true, is to desire, it must be admitted, the impossible. You may gain a small number of lofty spirits, endowed with marked ability, with sufficient material means, gifted with an energetic will, an ardent and almost

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heroic love of truth, unique rather than rare ; but the immense majority will find it impossible to know the true Church and must of necessity remain in that in which they were born.

Lét us consider the enormous difficulties which those heretics and schismatics, born and brought up in error (for of them only I am speaking), have to overcome, and we shall be naturally induced to believe them in good faith. Error to their eyes seems like a sacred heritage received from their fathers, sanctioned by time, often surrounded by the respect which it owes to the laws and to the civil and religious authorities who profess and defend it. Sometimes the wonderful lustre of letters, of the sciences and the arts, of the civil, financial, and military power, seem to be mixed with their religion, and the fatherland itself to be one with the heretical and schismatic Church to

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which they belong, and which is impersonated in the King, Emperor, or Governor who represents it. This is the state of things in Russia, in Germany, in England, and to some extent also in North America. It is not easy to persuade the masses of a nation that their religion is false when they see it shining in glory in the person of their Head, and too often they see Catholicism humbled, dishonoured, dejected in those who represent it.

The greater part of our faithful Catholics stand fast in the Faith from the strength of tradition, because they are the children of Catholic parents, because their ancestors were Catholics, because they were born in a Catholic atmosphere. For them the Catholic Faith is fortunately a holy heritage with which their dearest and most vivid memories of home are bound up : to imagine that they hold it from know-

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ledge of the motives for belief and by a personal study—even an imperfect one—would be a childish illusion. We ourselves, if we thoroughly study the roots of our convictions and of our faith, will find something of that which is at the root of the faith of the people. This argument, then, which holds nearly all our Catholics firm in the Faith, unfortunately holds firm also the heretics and schismatics in their Churches, and that fortunate aversion that prevents ours from falling into heresy prevents heretics and schismatics from coming to us. The people live above all, it cannot be doubted, on customs, traditions, memories, authority: they may be good or bad, legitimate or illegitimate. And herein is seen the supreme necessity (which the clergy should seriously consider) of preventing error from becoming hereditary in a family, a town, a race; the

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stamp of truth is exchanged for the stamp of falsehood, and a return to the truth becomes ever more difficult. It is like a man going down a steep descent ; each step that he takes makes the reascent more perilous. Is it not true, O my brethren, that if we had been born among the Hindus of India, the Mohammedans of Morocco, or the schismatics of Russia, we should in all probability be to-day Hindus, Mohammedans, or Orthodox schismatics ? He who says that the knowledge of Catholic truth is also a question of geography is not altogether in error. If to these brothers of ours, who are wanderers outside Christ's fold and live quietly in their own Churches, a doubt were to present itself, that they might be in error, and that the truth lies in our Church alone, I believe that probably they, far from examining the doubt and consulting those who might enlighten

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them, would reject it as a temptation of the devil, exactly as our good Catholics would do.

When, then, we consider the cloud of prejudice and calumny against the Catholic Church which, with time, has grown dense above those countries that have fallen into heresy—prejudices and calumnies repeated in their books, their catechisms, their sermons, their newspapers—we shall understand that almost a miracle of grace is needed to rescue the victims of error. Anyone who has travelled in the countries of Greeks and Protestants, and has here and there collected the popular judgments on the Catholic Church and the absurd legends that even at the present day find credence, will confess that I do not exaggerate. I speak of the multitudes, but I cannot altogether except a good number of the very people who, by intelligence, culture, and social conditions,

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are placed in a favourable and almost exceptional atmosphere.

We know that the celebrated Dr. Palmer did not leave the Anglican Church to enter ours without a great effort, after having studied both for more than nineteen years. Faber, a man of rarest intelligence, rich in general culture, an upright and pious mind if ever there was one—what struggles with himself he had to endure before turning his back on Protestantism and embracing our Faith ! It is enough to read his life. Still more might be said of those two men of highest distinction, Newman and Manning, who, after long years of patient and profound study and after long oscillations arrived at knowledge of the truth, went forth from Protestantism, became Catholics, and were both raised to the dignity of the purple. These men lived a long time in error, and lived therein in good faith,

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as is clear from their books, and as they repeatedly protested. Well, if these men, so acute, so scholarly, so upright, remained the greater part of their lives in Protestantism and always in good faith, and could not get out of it without the greatest difficulty, what shall we say of the multitudes, poor in intelligence and poor in power of study, and who follow the path traced for them by their ancestors and by their ministers ?

It is vain to say : The truth of the Catholic Church shines out with such a light that it is easy to recognize ; it is like a lamp burning in the midst of darkness, a city on a hill. These are expressions, true expressions indeed ; but the people with their shortsighted minds cannot so easily recognize them ; doubtless they are truths in themselves, but they are not so relatively to the masses. And the facts are there to prove it.

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For the rest, those evident proofs of the truths of our Church are not *physical* nor *mathematical*, but *moral*, and to co-ordinate them, unite them, and feel their force is the work of a few privileged minds, and in the midst even of the keenest light are always points of darkness which may make learned and very learned men uncertain and wavering. He who resolutely affirms that all is plain and clear in the demonstration of the divine origin of the Catholic Church, and that for everybody, has not studied the subject, and may be a rhetorician, but is not a serious reasoner.

If the proofs of the Catholic Church are so clear, so evident, so decisive for all, how are we to explain the fact that a great number of instructed, honest lovers of truth do not see them and are not convinced by them ?

Another question asked is this : If

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heretics and schismatics after baptism fall into mortal sin, how can they rise up again and be saved? If we Catholics fall, with so many means that the Church offers us to prevent our falling, how will it be with heretics and schismatics?

The answer is very easy. Many of these heretics and schismatics have happily preserved the hierarchy in their Churches, and with it the valid administration of all the Sacraments, and in this respect they are nearly in the same condition as Catholics. By the use of the Sacraments they have the means of swiftly and securely regaining the grace they have lost. The Greek Church, with all its ramifications, the Nestorian and the Eutychian, have this immense advantage over the Protestant Churches.

Those heretics who have lost the hierarchy and keep only Baptism, such

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as are the Protestants of various communions, forestalled and helped by grace which (it must never be forgotten) never fails anyone who does his part, can repent of their sins and obtain their forgiveness. "There are men," says St. Augustine, "lying in heresy or in the superstitions of the Gentiles ; but even there God knows who are His own. For in the ineffable prescience of God many who seem without are within the Church, and many who seem within are without. Of those souls who in a hidden manner and in the depths of their hearts are in the Church is formed the garden enclosed, the sealed fountain, the spring of living water, the paradise full of fruit of which the Holy Scriptures speak."*

* "Sunt etiam qui in hæresibus vel in gentilium superstitionibus jacent : etiam illic novit Dominus qui sunt ejus. Namque in illa ineffabili præscientia Dei, multi qui foris videntur intus sunt ; et multi qui intus videntur foris

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Sometimes the Church casts forth from her bosom sons who sadden and dishonour her with their sayings and behaviour, and strikes them even with her greater censures. She acts like the father of a family who sends away from the domestic hearth those sons who disturb its peace, and her right to do so cannot be denied. But it may be that these sons rejected by the Church are not blameworthy in conscience and before God, since the Church judges things only externally, as they appear, and does not read hearts. How will it be with these men who certainly are outside the Church?

They may do penance, and the Church will at once take them back into

sunt. Ex illis ergo omnibus, qui, ut ita dicam, intrinsecus et in occulto intus sunt, constat illis hortus conclusus, fons signatus, puteus aquæ vivæ, paradus cum fructu pomorum" ("De Baptis.," contr. Donatistas, lib. v. 38).

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her arms like an ever-loving mother, and they will find in her that indulgence and kindness that those do not always find whom civil society strikes with the rigour of her laws.

And if the censure or excommunication was inflicted mistakenly, and he who undergoes it is conscious of not having deserved it, the answer is obvious. Let him bear with patience and with a generous soul the unmerited chastisement ; let him place his cause in God's hands ; let him keep the treasure of grace in an afflicted and humble heart, and know that he ever remains a member not of the body, but of the soul of the Church, which is always much more spacious than the body ; let him be silent, pray, obey, wait, and sigh before God, to Whom all things are clear, and Who renders to every man according to his works.

Many times I have happened to come

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in contact with Protestants and Greek orthodox born in Churches separated from our own, and I have had friendly relations with them. Almost always I have admired in them a singular uprightness and sincerity of soul, a frank and open character, correct external moral behaviour, and a deep and living religious feeling: insomuch that I have said to myself: *Utinam cum tales sitis nostri essetis!* I have found them full of interest and respect for our Church, fairly well instructed in religious matters, observing their duties, and free from that slavery of human respect that is so common among Catholics. I know, indeed, that among them men will be found who do no honour to their Church, and condemn by their works what they profess with their tongues. And are there not such, unfortunately, among us Catholics too? I confess it: it hurts me to read certain books and news-

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papers that vaunt their Catholicity, to hear certain preachers who inveigh against these separated brethren of ours, and suppose them certainly guilty of voluntary rebellion against truth, and represent them as guilty of everything evil simply because they are heretics and schismatics. This is a manifest injustice and a means of irritating them ; and, far from disposing them to return to the Catholic Church, it is likely to drive them much farther away from it and to increase their prejudices against us. If they made use of the same measure with us in certain cases, we should be much perplexed to defend ourselves. This behaviour is unwise, and does not help us Catholics at all ; it hurts us ; it puts us in a bad light among serious and cultivated people who have travelled in Protestant countries ; it gets us the reputation of being intolerant and little educated and instructed.

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Compassion towards all sorts of wanderers is natural to us and is laid upon us by the Gospel, and we should have it with all, but in a quite special manner towards all those heretics and schismatics who are born and brought up in heresy and schism ; for they, let us remind ourselves, are more deserving of it than we might be if Providence had placed us in their circumstances. We ought to remember that Jesus was called a Samaritan because He showed Himself so indulgent to the separated Samaritans as to propose one for a model of charity in a memorable parable.

It is a thought that consoles and does good to the soul to be able to believe reasonably that our Church has many, and very many, children among those who seem outwardly rebels to her and fierce enemies ; that a great number of these unconscious exiles from the Church are our brothers, and one day

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we shall find them by our side in heaven, sharers of the same happiness. Let us always keep before us the precious saying of St. Augustine, quoted above : " Many seem outside the Church and are within, and many who seem within are without."

III

WE said above that of the 1,500 millions of men who inhabit the earth, 1,000 millions are heathen ; the other 500 millions profess themselves Christians and are members of different Churches. The most numerous of all these Churches, taken singly, and, indeed, taking all the others together, is ours, the Catholic, to which this glorious title alone belongs, not only by right but in fact.

But let us be sincere, and not deceive others and ourselves by an uncomprehending self-love. The Catholic Church numbers 250 million sons spread over all the continents—that is, it need not be said, an approximate figure. But are they really all her sons, all believing the same Creed, *in the same mind* and *in the same sense*, as St. Paul has it? We will not

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say all keeping the same Ten Commandments.

Alas, how sad and bitter is the truth that must be recognized! Certainly, indeed, these millions who figure as Catholics are baptized; asked one by one to what religion they belong almost all would answer: We are Catholics. But too many are not so in the true sense of the word. They call themselves Catholics because their ancestors were so, because it would raise a laugh if they said: We are Protestants, Greeks, or Mohammedans. They are nominally Catholics from not knowing to what religion to ascribe themselves, and because for convenience' sake they must say they belong to one. If you examine their behaviour and question them skilfully you will soon perceive that they are indifferent, sceptical, and perhaps even openly hostile to the Catholic Faith. Of

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the Creed they acknowledge those articles that they fancy ; about the Commandments they worry very little ; they live as they can and as they like. In practice they are rationalists, because if they accept any truths they accept them not because they are revealed by God, and as such proposed by the Church to be believed, but because in their judgment these things are suited to their way of living, or oftener because they give them no trouble. The number of these unbelievers—some in *theory*, but the greater number in *practice*, systematically through negligence—is big enough already, and is increasing enormously.

Of the men who have gone through their secondary studies, the schools of art, the technical institutes, the lyceums, the polytechnics, the universities, those who wear the gown of magistrate or lawyer, who hold offices of some im-

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portance in private or public administrations, who are given up to the great movements of industry and commerce, and so forth, nine-tenths (and I think I speak well within the mark) have in reality no faith in the strict sense of the word. They are baptized, they pass as Christians, but they are not Catholics. It is in practice a quiet, immense mass of unbelief—chiefly in the great centres, but spreading like a devouring cancer. This is the disease characteristic of our times, almost unknown in former ages, the result of many causes which this is not the place to point out. It is a sad fact enough, but it does not help matters to deny it or hide it from ourselves.

Our society, looked at from the standpoint of religion, is not Catholic but mixed—and how much mixed!—not of Catholics, Protestants, Mohammedans, Brahmins, etc., but of Catholics and

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unbelievers, at least in practice. The degrees of this unbelief are undefined because each one creates it for himself, and it ranges from peaceful Epicureanism to the most rabid free-thinking. For these men there is no Church, no religious authority, no religious society properly speaking : it is their reason or natural inclination that marks the degrees of their unbelief and varies it according to their convenience.

What can we say or think of this very numerous class, which, from capacity, education, and wealth, hold in their hands the fate of the country, and by the very nature of things will always hold it ? Can that " good faith " be held to include them also which we so gladly extended wide to embrace those born in heresy and schism, infidelity and paganism ? May we cherish a reasonable hope of salvation for this multitude of indifferents, of free-

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thinkers, of practical unbelievers, who live in our midst, and many of whom are estimable in so many respects? It is a formidable question, and not without anxiety do I set myself to answer it. But whatever the answer may be, one is constrained to give it.

The difference between this class of our brethren and the infidels, heretics, or schismatics is great, and at once apparent to everyone. For these last, error is an unhappy heritage rather than a sin; the most venerable traditions, reverence for their ancestors, the power of atmosphere, laws, and many other things throw over this error a very thick veil, which prevents them from seeing its manifest blackness; but for the former it is hard to find an excuse. They are themselves, to a large extent at any rate, the direct authors of their own irreligion: they themselves voluntarily, step by step,

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went down the slope of unbelief, or pulled down one by one the stones of the beautiful and solid edifice, once so dear to them, of the faith they received as a heritage from their parents. These sceptics of ours, or unbelievers, or free-thinkers—for one cannot really distinguish widely between them—once upon a time, at least in their youth, and perhaps also in their manhood, moved by the example and entreaties of a holy mother, a sister or wife, respected, loved, and even practised their religion. They made their first confession and communion, were confirmed, assisted at Mass, listened to the word of God, and for some years showed themselves believers. Then little by little they gave up the Faith; and to-day they smile over it, and perhaps deride it and consider it a weakness, excusable in women; and, perhaps, they even make it a mark for

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their jests, and fiercely combat it. How has so great a change come about? What is the first origin of this apostasy? How have they been able to throw away that faith that they sucked in with their mother's milk, which made the peaceful years of childhood and youth happy, and which they saw professed and venerated by their grandparents, and perhaps also by their parents? Can we believe that they left the Church after long and profound study, from solid arguments; from intimate conviction; from pure love of truth alone? Can they be in good faith, and able to say to themselves and to God: We went forth from the Church because we were obliged to do so by that light of reason which ought to be our guide, which comes to us from Thyself, Who hast created us, and which it is Thy desire we should follow in all we do? If not impossible, it would seem cer-

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tainly very difficult to suppose this. With so much light of truth, with such abundant means of dispelling the shadows of doubt, of conquering objections, and of knowing the proofs of the Church's divine origin, it is too difficult to suppose that the rejection of their ancestral faith can be a lesson learnt from science and imposed by the moral duty of leaving unmasked error and following truth. In this hidden work of the destruction of faith the passions bear a principal part, and they alone, perhaps, explain the sad phenomenon that develops in this formal and silent divorce from the Faith. If the difficulty for men in abandoning a false religion in which they were born and brought up is great, as we have said above, and excuses them before God, how much greater should be the difficulty in separating themselves from the true religion! This true faith

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fostered and brought them up from babyhood ; to it for very many years they were bound by the most sacred chains ; and to it the power of divine grace itself holds them !

We should have, then, to make a great effort to suppose in our unbelieving brethren full and perfect good faith, a true and deep conviction that the Catholic religion is false and that it is their duty to leave it. For this reason I have sometimes made my own the words of an able apologist and orator who wrote on this very delicate and obscure subject as follows :

“ There may be among unbelievers honest men of good faith and of whose conduct there can be no doubt ; victims of an unfortunate education and of the sad conditions in which they found themselves ; men enchained to falsehood by involuntary ignorance, tormented by the desire for truth ; men who seek it

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loyally without being able to find it, who sincerely lament the uselessness of their powers and the uncertainty in which they live, who go thus to the threshold of the tomb, who at the last minute receive the desired grace and die converted and sanctified by it, who enter mysteriously the Church from which they believed themselves separated ; all this is possible. I have never found these hidden pearls, and I think they are rare, but reliable men declare they have come into close contact with them, and I respect their witness" (Monsabré, "Confessions," 51).

I might subscribe to these words of the very learned lecturer and take my stand on his authority ; but I feel the obligation and the right of making a confession and of softening somewhat his judgment, which seems to me too narrow and limited and almost disdainful. The older one grows, and the

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more one studies this poor nature of ours, and knows it weak and infirm, the more indulgent and kindly one becomes and, somewhat strange to say, the less the fear of being in error rises in one's mind.

When I was a young man I judged men more from books and *a priori*, as the metaphysicians call it, than in themselves. I, too, like many others, was unable to understand how, in the midst of a Christian and Catholic society, with so many strong defences to preserve the Faith and to protect it against the wiles and assaults of falsehood, there could be unbelievers in good faith ; it seemed to me to wrong their intelligence and their instruction to suppose them so, and almost to be an offence against good sense. But when, as years passed, I had the opportunity of coming in closer contact with our society and of studying it, not in books and in the

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abstract (as certain theologians and moralists seem too much to do who, in their convents and in the peace of their cells, compose mighty volumes on the subject, creating for themselves an ideal world), I was forced to moderate my judgments and often to change them. I learned then that not only is the phenomenon of a certain good faith in a great number of unbelievers possible, as Monsabré admits, but I handled it and found it *real* and far more frequent than some theologians and rigid, too rigid, moralists believe. These hidden pearls I too have found, and I doubt not that others who live more than I in the midst of society have found them in greater numbers.

And, truly, how could matters be otherwise in a society such as ours, if we judge it with a fair and unprejudiced mind? The young men who especially pursue higher studies, sons of rich

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families and destined for the liberal professions, either receive no religious instruction at home or receive it superficial, maimed, absolutely elementary. And how often from their father, or other members of their family, they receive an irreligious education ! How words of doubt, of mockery or contempt confound and destroy those poor religious ideas which they have barely received from their mother's lips or from the priest in church. In the public schools, from the lowest to the highest stages, from the gymnasiums and lyceums (and I might almost say in many elementary schools) up to the universities, there is no shadow of religious teaching, and there the need is greatest of all for elevated scientific instruction, suited to minds that are unfolding in the midst of a thousand dangers. In these schools, too, of higher education, materialism, positivism, and

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scepticism have their professors, who boldly preach them and offer them as the proved outcome of science. Almost everywhere in upper schools the men who hold the first rank in the intellectual world are usually without faith, and the splendour of their name and the rich treasure of science which they actually possess confuse the young men's minds, and they insensibly persuade them that science and faith are mutually exclusive, that science is the inheritance of great men, and faith the endowment of the poor-spirited, the friend and companion of ignorance.

On leaving the public schools and universities, see these young men of ours flung into the social whirlpool, scattered about in thousands of offices of public and private business. A continual fever forces them on to know, to work, to enrich themselves, to "get on," to enjoy life. What do they re-

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member of the Catechism learnt in childhood, even if they did learn it? It will be much if they remember their prayers as Christians.

They give their names to all sorts of societies, go daily to restaurants and social gatherings, continually read the papers, books, and novels, attend literary and scientific discussions and conferences, in which it is great good luck if nothing is said of religion either good or bad. Prayer is little by little laid aside, the practices of piety almost forgotten ; they no longer hear the word of God, or if sometimes they just hear it, it makes no impression, it is nothing but an empty sound. The definite ideas of the Catholic Creed in the midst of this clashing of contrary ideas are eclipsed and disappear, and the upheaval of the passions completes the shipwreck of faith.

I cannot forget the ruin of souls that

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political passions have wrought in our Italy. No country of Europe has ever found itself in such a strange and difficult situation as our country. Through an ill-starred course of events, going back several centuries, our religious sentiment finds itself face to face, and in most cruel contest, with the patriotic and national sentiment : religion seems the enemy of national liberty, independence, unity, and greatness : after 1848 the struggle burnt terrible and widespread, and in the midst of the conflagration breathed too often a spirit implacable, treacherous, and slanderous. Who can say how many men, and specially how many ardent youths, generous and full of intelligence, were confused in mind and turned their backs on a religion which seemed to them leagued with their enemies to the hurt of their country? If in our Italy after so many bitter religious and

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political contests, the Faith is still preserved, and, thanks be to God, to a distinctly greater degree than in many other nations, it is a singular proof that Providence watches over her in an especial manner, and that our people are gifted with a practical good sense and religious feeling which it would be hard to find equalled.

And now, dearest brothers, let me ask: Considering the whole matter calmly, does it not seem to you natural that a good number of these brothers of ours may have unhappily fallen into the unbelief and irreligion in which they now lie, transported by the violence of passion, and especially political passion, almost without realizing it? that they are victims of weakness of character and of the whirling confusion of the age, of the lack of religious instruction, and the fascination of profane science, while they are deprived of the counter-

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weight of sacred science? I love to believe it, and it is a sweet comfort in face of so great misfortune to cultivate this thought. All these men before their own conscience, and, therefore, before God—are they *culpable, altogether culpable* of this indefinite and almost indefinable unbelief? In the beginning they are, if you will, culpable: for many reasons they are culpable. I do not deny this. But to what extent are they guilty? Are there not for them *extenuating circumstances*, many, and of such a kind as to make them objects of pity in our eyes, and much more in the eyes of God? Taking into account all the factors that go to lessen their knowledge of the sin and to increase the strength of their passions and of the trials to which they are subjected, may not the *extenuating circumstances* be such as to save them from mortal sin? God alone can judge.

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In the beginning they are *culpable*.

But can we judge a man severely for a state of things, deplorable doubtless, in which he finds himself because he began a series of acts and causes of which he then either did not foresee all the results or foresaw them only in a confused manner? Assuredly not: no man would like to be considered culpable of an attack or murder committed in a state of drunkenness, because many years before he had begun to drink to excess. A man is responsible for all the consequences that he actually sees will arise from his actions, never for those that he cannot foresee, and in fact does not foresee. The causes of this unbelief among so many of our brethren who live with us in our cities and our villages, in part, certainly, may be laid at their own doors; but a share, and perhaps a larger share, should be attributed to the state of society, to the

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conditions of public and of private life, which no one can fully know. Let us imitate the Church, which never pronounces judgment on the eternal lot of anyone ; let us incline to a gentler judgment, and let us rest on the sweet thought that good faith, even if the ignorance be only partial, may transform a fault grave in itself into a less grave or even a light one.

You will say : But these unbelievers are in our midst ; it should be easy for them to know the truth which surrounds them with its light.

This is true, but we must consider things as they are in practice, not as they appear in theory. Paul, a few years after the death and resurrection of Christ, was in Jerusalem : a man of such great intellect, so just, so ardent for the truth, could and ought in that place to have inquired and learnt the truth : he could have turned to the Apostles, to the living

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witnesses. He did no such thing. He was blind in the midst of so much light, all hatred and fury against Christ and His disciples. He writes, however, "Ignorans feci"—he was in ignorance, and he repeats it several times. Further, he does not hesitate to say, that if the princes of this world (Pilate and the rest) had known Christ, they would not have crucified Him. St. Peter declares that the princes of the synagogue crucified Christ through ignorance, and Christ Himself said from the Cross: "They know not what they do." I do not for a moment say that such ignorance excused them altogether; no, there was doubtless sin. How much? We know that there was ignorance, too, and the ignorance at least lessens the sin. Well, if there was this ignorance in Paul and in the heads of the synagogue, why should we not admit that it exists in our unbelievers; I do not say in all, but

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in many, even in very many, and in a degree that, known to God only, must always make the sin less. I love to hope that many of these brothers of ours are more unhappy than guilty.

I will not keep back a thought which seems to me good and reasonable, and which I desire to make known even at the cost of displeasing some people.

All we Churchmen loudly deplore this unbelief in its many forms, of which we are witness, and which tears away from the Catholic Faith so many minds, above all of the governing classes ; we often lift up our voices against the very varied causes that produce and continually increase it : we point them out to the people, making use of strong and resolute language, and we do so rightly : it is our duty to do it. But when we point out to the people those real causes, and do not spare words, sometimes bitter and cruel, on modern society, on

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the direction of its studies, on the spirit of its laws and so forth, do we never think that among these causes of unbelief not the least are those that arise from ourselves? Do we never consider that our inertia, the lack of knowledge, zeal, charity, prudence—in short, of virtue—on our side increases the fatal strength of the causes that arise in lay society?

There was a time when the clergy had power to influence the ways of society, above all by public instruction, and in some countries this was wholly in their hands : how comes it that they have allowed this power to be taken away? How comes it that we did not know how to keep that position which we had? May it not be thought that we slept while the enemy was sowing? Should we not think that if we, ministers of Jesus Christ and of the Church, had always been what we ought and what

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the Gospel wishes us to be, more learned, more disinterested, more generous, more active, more temperate, more prudent, more pure, more evangelical—in one word, holier—irreligion would have been less widespread, and a good number of wanderers would quickly return to the ancient Faith? I believe it, and surely it is the truth. This might be a useful and practical thought. We make haste to cry out in sermons and conferences, in books and newspapers, against the unbelief of the laity, and to lay the blame on their shoulders as though it were entirely theirs : but let us be more candid, and confess too that we have a share, and no small one, both by doing what we ought not to do and leaving undone what we ought to do. There is a remedy that begins from ourselves, and it is one with which no one can interfere : all would applaud

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the use of it ; it is in our power and is therefore our duty. Less lamentations and complaints, more compassion towards wanderers, and more strictness of conduct, more zeal, more knowledge, more disinterestedness, and more charity to all : this is our remedy. I admire and reverence that holy Pontiff, Adrian VI., who bravely acknowledged all the causes of the evils that then afflicted the Church, and among them those also that proceeded from the clergy. Each one may imitate him as concerns his own share, and how much we shall gain thereby, my brethren ! We reproach the world with the loss of the faith that should direct its life and bear fruit in good works ; but could not the world with equal right reproach some of us for having the faith and not the works, and for denying by our deeds that faith of which we are the messengers ? The world, unbelievers,

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are won over far more by good example, by a life of sacrifice, rich in virtues, especially the social virtues, than by power of speech, the splendour of learning itself, or by reproaches, however well deserved. Let us bravely confess our own wrongdoings before reproving others for theirs, and let us set ourselves to the work of winning back the lost ground by a life that is a speaking proof of the truth of our religion. Behold the surest of remedies for the onrush of unfaith, and this is wholly in our power.

IV

THE most necessary and sustaining foods on which we daily support ourselves are not the rarest and most exquisite, but the most common and generally the easiest for everyone to get. The same may be said of the truths from which our mind gets its support and life : they are not secret truths hard to know, but clear and close at hand for all, and on them our minds should be fixed. Some few of these truths it seems to me suitable to touch on and set forth here in a few simple, or I would almost say commonplace, observations. I place these observations here because they confirm indirectly what was proved above, set right any inaccurate ideas, and are of practical help to all. They are as follows :

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It is a truth of faith, known to every Christian, that only grave sin, which is called "mortal," takes away from us God's grace and makes us deserve eternal punishment.* This is a thing which schoolchildren know from their Catechism.

In order to commit a grave or mortal sin, these children tell us three things are absolutely required: that the thing or matter should be grave, that the knowledge of what is being done or left undone should be perfect, and that the consent of the will should be full and perfect; if one or other of these three things is lacking, there is no mortal sin: it becomes venial.

* Original sin does not arise from man's free will, but from the nature that he receives. Since, then, original sin is not the child of our will, and is incurred without our knowledge, it requires to cancel it no repentance of the will, and it can be remitted by baptism also without our knowledge.

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It is, then, required that the matter or the thing about which the sin is committed should be really grave ; as, for instance, to blaspheme God, to murder a man without great provocation, to set fire to another's house, etc. In judging of the gravity of the matter, the act, or the thing itself that is done, there may be, and there often is, reasonable disagreement between even the highest theologians, because it is a moral question ; but as to very many matters, there is a general consensus. Besides the material, or act, or matter, being seriously wicked, in order that the sin should be *mortal*, is needed *full* knowledge of what we are doing. This knowledge must be clear and full, because it is a question of incurring the gravest, greatest, everlasting punishment—the loss of the soul. If every code of laws enacts that to deserve imprisonment for life the

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crimes committed must be most serious and horrible in every way, consider whether all this must not be necessary to incur the punishment of everlasting death under the divine code! Well, this full and clear, and, as I should call it, actual knowledge—can it be supposed to exist as easily as some, even some theologians, seem to allow? I should like to think not. Look at this multitude of countrymen, workmen, youths, old men, poorly instructed or not instructed at all, occupied in ceaseless toil. What difference of capacity, of civil and religious instruction—and, not uncommonly, from no fault of theirs! How much ignorance there is, even on important truths! How many uncertainties! How many doubts! How little reflection! What haste in thinking, acting, speaking! How often over these slow and poor intellects is spread more or less closely

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a veil of ignorance, which they do not feel the duty of dispersing.

Anyone who has drawn near to the people, has mixed with them, has received their intimate confidence (in cases where he has the right to believe he is not being deceived), anyone who has attentively observed them in their business and in the different conditions of their lives, knows by experience that their acts fully and perfectly decided upon with knowledge are not many. A little want of thought or foolishness almost always slips in, such is their weakness of nature.

There is no need to say that the will depends on knowledge, acts, so to say, under its pressure ; if the mind and knowledge are weak, uncertain, confused, clouded, the acts of the will must, of necessity, feel the effect, and will be weak, uncertain, confused, incomplete, and therefore not such as to constitute

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a mortal sin. Doubtless there will be disorder ; materially (if you will) there will be disorder, and even great disorder ; but the defect of knowledge and therefore of will or consent will eliminate mortal sin, and with it eternal punishment. Ancient and modern theologians have investigated and ascertained the causes which lessen, or even take away, knowledge and freedom of consent, and among these causes ignorance, fear, and the passions naturally hold the first place. These causes they seasonably unfold ; but without wronging these teachers of ours, it may be lawfully said that in this matter their knowledge is very limited and superficial. Students of philosophy, psychology, morality and social conditions have, with the experience of the ages, added to the knowledge of the theologians a new inheritance that cannot be passed over : thus there is progress in moral

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theology as in all the sciences. The principles are immutable as axioms, but the application of them and their explication is progressive.

We know to-day, confusedly indeed, but with certainty, how great is the influence of heredity in the physical, intellectual, and moral worlds : we cannot determine its laws, its extension, its force, the way in which it spreads, but its existence and influence are undoubted. How many men, without knowing it, carry in themselves the results of the conduct of their fathers, of their grandfathers, of far-back ancestors ! How explain certain inclinations, certain natures, that seem born to evil ? Heredity unfolds mysteries hitherto impenetrable, which have an effect on human responsibility, the amount of which it is not possible for us to determine : God alone can know it. But reason bids us stop judging,

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and be slow to assert: This man is guilty of mortal sin; this man has sinned or has not sinned.

To this natural mystery of good or bad heredity, of atavism, add the innumerable causes that may profoundly modify a man's moral responsibility. These causes, external and internal, known and unknown, that exert their influence on the man, on his intellect, his will, his whole being, increase or diminish his responsibility. Put together the impressions first received at home and outside it, the companions, the reading, the professions followed, the surroundings of a man's life, his food itself, the climate and other innumerable matters that may escape the most acute observer, and to the influence of which he is nevertheless subjected—and then tell me where is the man who could with certainty put the sins in the scales and say: This is *mortal*; this is

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not mortal. He could indeed say: Here is materially a grave offence against the laws of God, for I see and touch it, but it is not granted to me to enter into the sanctuary of the conscience and to weigh and measure the intellect and will of this man; these escape my researches. He should repeat St. Augustine's judgment that says: *Pecata non humano, sed divino iudicio pensanda sunt.* God alone is judge of them.

Weighing all these considerations and others that might be added in my own mind, it seems to me that the judgment I once heard from the mouth of a holy man was full of wisdom, and the fruit of deep learning and practical knowledge of human nature. "I hope," he said, "that mortal sins are far fewer than certain theologians think and say." And then he added: "It is we priests who may commit mortal sins, we who have

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full knowledge and are surrounded by so many helps and have at hand so many effective means of avoiding them. These people," he said, "are hardly capable of mortal sin, and will find mercy because of their ignorance and the strength of the passions that afflict them. Not so we priests."

These solemn words, that still ring in my ears, bring to my mind another consideration that may be helpful, and should make us priests tender towards wanderers of all sorts.

We priests were brought up as children in Christian families, and grew up under the shadow of the sanctuary ; placed in seminaries, we were educated with most loving care, dedicated to holy studies. Taken from the midst of so many perils, fed by the word of God, so largely and liberally given to us, we daily meditate on eternal truths ; we pray, we celebrate Holy Mass ; several

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times every month we are washed from our sins in the sacrament of penance. If we, then, from the very necessities of our ministry, know not so many perils to which laymen are exposed, and abound and superabound with so many means of holy living—if we nevertheless feel our passions and fight against them, and often yield, and desire to be pitied, how can we be severe with the lay world, which has not a tenth part of the spiritual helps that we have and is put to so many hard tests that do not exist for us? Let us, then, be more inclined to pity, and without forgetting the great evils with which lay society is afflicted, the unbelief and corruption that inundate it, let us set to work to cure it, increasing our zeal, and above all, charity in all its forms. When you are succouring a patient, you treat him with the utmost gentleness; if you are dressing a wound that torments him, you do

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not handle it roughly or harshly drag off the bandages that cover it, in case you should increase his pain; you dress and bind up the wound with the greatest delicacy of touch and you make use of the mildest and most affectionate ways with the patient. Thus, and not otherwise, should we act with this lay society, so seriously diseased in mind and heart; the mind crowded with errors, the heart cruelly beaten and corrupted by the passions. The Holy Father, in his first Encyclical, which is like a plan that he sets before us to work out, has pointed this out and deeply impressed it. Let us persuade ourselves that by high-sounding phrases, by bitter reproaches, by invective, by recriminations, by lamentations over offences we have received, by hard and rude ways, we shall not draw to us, but shall drive away still farther, this society, which has many times shown

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itself eager and even hungry for the truth.

Let it not weary you, my dearest brothers, rectors and priests, for me to bring before you another observation which is allied to the above and is a consequence of it.

In our days a sad event not infrequently happens, especially in the towns and among the upper classes. People distinguished by talent, learning, wealth, the offices they have held, or other qualities, die suddenly, without the help of religion ; others fall ill and slowly sink ; the priest cannot get to them, but is politely sent away or dismissed with the wonted formula : when he is needed he will be sent for. But either he is not sent for or he is sent for when the sick man is in his agony, insensible or absolutely dead. He knows that these people habitually lived alienated from the Church ; on

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certain occasions they publicly showed themselves unbelievers ; perhaps they belonged to secret societies notoriously hostile to religion. What can we say ? What can we think about these brothers of ours ? These events are not infrequent, and they wring our hearts : to see men who were baptized and at Baptism entered the Church, were confirmed, made their first communion—to see them leave the world as if deserters from the Church, without her sacraments, without the blessing of this loving Mother ! Must we despair of their salvation ? Shall we allow certain expressions of despair, unmitigated by hope, to leave our lips, as some are wont incautiously to do ? No, never. The death of these people inspires sadness and fear, it brings deep grief, but it does not take from us all hope.

No one of us, whoever he may be,

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has the right to put himself between this dying man's conscience and God, who alone has the right of judging him. I have said, and I repeat it, no human eye has the power or the right to penetrate into the depths of man's conscience; there the eye of God alone penetrates, and we do not desire to claim for ourselves a right that is not ours, and to usurp, as it were, the very place of God. In those recesses of the conscience, inscrutable by us, may be illusions, prejudices, errors, which perhaps do not justify the refusal of the sacred ministry, but may at least lessen the sin in such a way as not to destroy all hope.

Who can tell that that unbeliever, that obstinate sinner, that unhappy suicide, when his eyes were already closed to the sun's light, his ears deaf to cries of affection, his tongue powerless to speak a word, did not then hear

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the voice of conscience saying to him : "God is near, entreat His mercy"? Who can tell that in those supreme moments when his soul has broken almost all the chains that bind it to the earth he does not feel the need of clinging to something, of flinging himself into the arms of God, of that God who made his childhood happy, and whose picture, perhaps, wakes again more dear and kind in his memory? Who can tell that in the terrible distress of approaching death, of the silence of all things, of the calm of the almost extinct passions, a clear light does not shine into his mind and a mighty shock arouse his heart, so that in anguish of mind he says: "My God, forgive me"? What cannot be doubted is that the grace of God never falls short throughout life, and should especially abound at the hour of death, because the need is then greater, and God gives in

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proportion to the need ; and because then the attraction of the world fades and the passions are almost dead with the body. If a man struggling in death's hands fills us with so much pity, and we would do everything to comfort and help him, what would not God do for him who is his most loving Father, and the Father of mercy ? And so when, perhaps, some of these brothers of ours seem to end their lives in sin, and to leave the world in enmity with God and with His Church, there yet remains a thread of hope, and may it never be severed by us : let us support ourselves by it for our comfort, and for the comfort of his relations and friends and of all.

But some will say, Does not the Church with its ritual and with its laws seem to teach quite the contrary of what you are saying ? She refuses her suffrages to these unbelievers,

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obstinate sinners, and suicides ; she denies them burial in consecrated ground, and she denies them her prayers and last blessing. Is not this as much as to say these are irrevocably lost ? This is not the thought of the Church ; it is a misinterpretation of the meaning of her laws ; she judges things from the outside, and she does not, and could not, mean to pronounce sentence on their eternal lot ; if she did so she would pass the limits which God has set to her authority : she does not do it, and she will never do it.

In refusing her suffrages and ecclesiastical burial, her aim is only to put her children on their guard, that they may not be scandalized : she wishes to make them understand that these sons of hers, in refusing her offices, have done evil in her eyes, have dishonoured and offended her, and this is true ; but she does not judge their conscience.

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Rejected by them she draws back, and because she respects their last will, made manifest by the facts, she abstains from doing anything whatever in their regard. Her behaviour in so acting is just and full of dignity: You did not wish for me at your bedside. You repelled my services. So be it, I respect your will and retire. Who can complain of her?

It may be seen how true it is that the Church, even when she refuses to these men funeral honours and suffrages, does not mean to take away all hope as to their eternal salvation, from the fact that she permits private prayers for them to all, even to her priests.

One point is most worthy of consideration. There have been, and there are, in the Church, men who have shone forth by their heroic and extraordinary virtues, sometimes ratified by supernatural signs. The Church examines

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their lives, scrutinizes their acts and their virtues and the signs of these virtues ; if they withstand the most severe examination, after a long time, in the most solemn form, she proclaims them saints ; she places them on her altars, and proposes them to her sons as models to be imitated and intercessors near God to be invoked : and this is what is called *canonization*. Now, the Church, which, with her authority, proclaims some of her sons not saved only but saints, has never “ canonized ” any sinner whatever as a reprobate and proclaimed him eternally lost.

One last remark, venerable and beloved brothers. Misfortunes and calamities, even of an extraordinary nature, are frequent. Now there is an unforeseen death, now a financial disaster, now a tragic deed of blood, now a sad illness, and so on, and so on. What happens ? If one of these disasters strikes a

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person who has the name of being irreligious or dissolute in his conduct, the common people, and sometimes some good Catholic, and perhaps also some priest, say : “ See, God has overtaken him, the hand of God has fallen on him ! See the finger of God.” “ An accident that is no accident,” cries out some newspaper.

Such a way of speaking and judging is not that of prudent and religiously enlightened people, and we ought to guard against it. Certainly all is subject to God and nothing happens that He does not will or does not permit ; this is a truth of faith and called for by reason itself : but to see in this or that accident, in this or that misfortune that has smitten a man or a family, or village, or city, the chastisement of God, His punishing hand, is levity or temerity. Who has read the mind of God ? Who can affirm that God has

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directly chosen this calamity to chastise that fault, that crime? It may be as you say, but you cannot prove it. For the rest, we ought to take for granted that God works always and in everything by means of the ordinary laws of nature: to suppose a suspension, an exception, is to suppose a miracle, and it is a very audacious thing to do this: a miracle should be something made manifest, not asserted. Judgments of this sort may be forgiven among the people, but not among persons of instruction.

And then when, perhaps, some heavy misfortune, a series of evils, overtakes a virtuous believer, a most religious family, a believing nation, what will you say? Will you say again: "See the finger of God. See an accident that is no accident"? Perhaps in that case this will be what is said: "This person was so good! This family was

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so pious! God wished to try them! One knows that crosses are kept for the good." This is a way of reasoning that lays religion open to ridicule, when people explain things as they choose, to make them minister to their own ignorance or whim. Let us remember that in the Christian economy, in contrast to the Hebrew, the reward of virtue and the punishment of sin do not take place here upon earth, but in the future life, and that it is the will of God that we should put ourselves in His hands and should live by faith. *Justus ex fide vivit.*

Here it seems well to me to sum up in a few clear and definite sentences what I have said above.

God wishes to save all men, without exception, and must supply them with the necessary means of working out their own salvation.

With the light of reason, such as it is, He offers to the heathen a *natural*

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means of knowing in some measure their *natural* duties.

We may also believe that these heathen or unbelievers may be capable of an implicit faith, and hence of *supernatural* grace ; and in such a case they can attain in the exact *supernatural* sense of the term, like ourselves, to eternal life.

All babies and adult-baptized heretics and schismatics may be saved if they are in good faith, which it is easy to suppose the vast majority to be.

As to unbelievers living in the midst of Catholics, it is indeed difficult to suppose them to be in complete good faith ; it is not impossible, and in certain times, in certain places, in certain circumstances, a certain good faith may be admitted in them ; let us leave the judgment to God, who, if He is just, is also merciful, and His mercy surpasses His justice.

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The consequence of all that has been established above is that the way of salvation is open to all in some way ; that those alone are lost who with perfect freedom of will fall into mortal sin, and having fallen will not repent.

The result seems such that we may reasonably hope* that the greater part, the far greater part, of mankind should in various ways reach salvation. It is repulsive to me to think and to say, as some think and say, that the elect are few, the saved few, falsely interpreting the saying of our Lord, " Many are called and few are chosen," a saying that has nothing to do with our case : to be persuaded of this it is enough to read and understand the meaning of this saying, taking into consideration

* The Bishop must be understood here to express a purely personal conviction. Catholic theologians are generally of opinion that God has not provided us with the means of arriving at any conclusion regarding this subject.

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what led up to it. It repels me, I say, to think and say that the greater part of the human race will be miserably lost, because it is a repulsive thought that God, the Creator, could see His work *par excellence*, as it were, undone, and that design broken which is His external glory. It repels me to believe that the greater part of those men, destined to reflect His image and to sing His glories, will destroy and lose this Image and blaspheme it eternally. It repels me, because God, to win man back, took his very nature, and He could not do more to save him; the thought repels me that error should have more disciples than truth, that evil should have almost the advantage of good; it repels me to imagine that in the great struggle between Christ the Man-God and the Prince of darkness, the Tempter, Christ should appear vanquished, Satan victor; it repels me

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that the plentiful redemption of Christ should be confined to the lesser number, and I will never believe that the *Evil One*, the rebel who fell from above, *is satisfied below*, and with a triumphant air can say to his conqueror :
“The greater number of those who ought to be Thy conquest and Thy glory are my prey and make my triumph.”

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