

Moderator's Corner

. . . THE ESSENTIALS OF CHRISTIANITY

"Make charity your aim!" (1 Cor 14, 1).

The Church is not an academy of rhetoricians, much less a museum wherein to file away, amidst liturgical incense, evangelic pictures, victory-palms of martyrs or books of her apostles and savants. No, the Church is a life-giving entity, both divine and human, one and universal, established upon earth by Christ, God and man, so as to grant eternal life to all redeemed mankind. **"What was the ransom that freed you from the vain observance of ancestral tradition? . . . it was paid in the precious blood of Christ!"** (1 Pet 1, 18).

The soul of this life-giving organism, which is the Church, is God Himself. **"God is love; he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him"** (1 John 4, 16). Charity, that is love of God and of neighbor in action, is, therefore, more than the whole law of Christianity. It is her vital essence: the strength and foundation of her unity and the fertile and shining projection of her universality that has its origin in the very centre of Christ's heart. **"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. . . On these two commandments, all the law and the prophets depend"** (Matt. 22, 38-40).

It occurred to no one before the coming of Christ to establish love — in its direct relation to God Himself — on the interpretation of family meaning. **"Time was when you were not a people at all, now you are God's people"** (1 Pet 2, 10). The mythological gods of pagan civilizations were merely stellar numbers who enjoyed themselves in the misty remoteness of Olympus, utterly indifferent to the doleful cries of men. **"Once you were unpitied, and now his pity is yours"** (1 Pet 2, 10).

Christianity, however, holds that God is its Father. **"It is the Spirit of adoption, which makes us cry out, Abba, Father!"** (Rom. 8, 15). Christianity holds all men as brethren and that the whole of mankind is a huge family, without discrimination as to races and castes. **"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people God means to have for Himself"** (1 Pet 2, 9).

In spite of her juridical refinement, Rome had never succeeded either in setting men to their proper places, or to interpret rights and duties in terms of justice and equitableness. Christianity has achieved this. It has achieved this through charity the first duty of which is its discharge of justice towards God and men as well. Yes, Christian charity demands to render each one his due; that each one hold possession of what is his own; that each one occupy the place which hierarchically befits him in this world. **"Give all men their due; to the brethren, your love; to God, your reverence; to the king, due honor"** (1 Pet 2, 17).

But aside from all this and in order to obtain all this, charity doesn't erect partition-walls between men, because **"charity is never perverse, never insolent. . . takes no pleasure in wrongdoing, but rejoices at the victory of truth; sustains, believes, hopes, endures, to the last"** (1 Cor 13, 4-7). Consequently charity sets into motion a vital circulation of affections and smiling expressions in man's conscience which explodes with reverberations of harmony and peace in man's social relations.

Thus Pope Paul VI could verily assert: **"The mission of Christianity is a mission of friendship among peoples of the earth, a mission of understanding, encouragement, promotion, elevation, and, let us say once again, a mission of salvation"** (*Message from Bethlehem, January 6, 1964*).

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