

THE STUDENT'S CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

PART I — FAITH

"He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned (Mark xvi. 16).

CHAPTER I

THE END FOR WHICH MAN WAS CREATED

The end of Man

"For Thyself, O God, Thou hast made us," says St. Augustine ; "therefore our heart will be restless until it rests in Thee." Every man, then sent by God into this world is sent for one end, and for one end only—viz., that, by knowing, loving, and serving God, he may save his soul and gain heaven. Hence arises that all-important question, "What must I do to save my soul?" The only satisfactory answer to this is to be found in the words of the Catechism: "To save my soul I must worship God by Faith, Hope, and Charity; that is, I must believe in Him, I must hope in Him, and I must love Him with my whole heart."

Pleasure not true happiness

To show how empty are all earthly pleasures, and how wanting they are in true happiness, we have Solomon, the wisest of kings, crying out in the bitterness of his heart:

"I said, I will go and abound with delights, and enjoy good things. I heaped together for myself silver and gold and the wealth of kings and provinces. And whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not; and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure, and delighting itself in the things which I had prepared. And when I turned myself to all the things which my hands had wrought, and to the labours wherein I had laboured in vain, I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun" (Eccles. ii. 1-11).

And yet the very things of this world, if only we make a right use of them, may serve as stepping-stones to the attainment of that happiness which alone can satisfy the human heart: *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all for the glory of God "* (1 Cor. x. Si).

It is of supreme importance, then, for each one of us to know in what way we are to worship God by Faith, Hope, and Charity, since it is in this that the whole religious life of man consists. Speaking of the Spiritual House of the Soul,

St. Augustine calls Faith its foundation, Hope its walls, and Charity its roof or covering.

We worship God by Faith

By Faith we worship God in firmly believing all that He has revealed to His Church. It is by Faith that we honour the veracity of God, get a right knowledge of Him, and submit our reason to His sovereign truth; for when we accept the truths which God has revealed because He, the very Truth, has revealed them, and accept them whether our finite minds can grasp them or not, we honour the Divine veracity by giving to God the homage of our reason.

By Hope

We worship God by Hope when we expect with confidence that He will give us salvation and all the means necessary to obtain it, resting our assurance on the power, goodness, and mercy of God, His fidelity to His promises, and the infinite merits of our Saviour. It is in this way that we pay Him the homage of our confidence and trust.

By Charity

We worship God by Charity when we love Him above all things because He is infinitely good, infinitely perfect, and infinitely worthy of our love. It is by this virtue of Charity that we conform our own will in all things to the most holy will of God, and honour him by offering Him the homage of our affections.

Necessity of serving God

And because God is the sovereign Lord of all things, He requires this service of us, and will cast from Him for ever, not only the rapacious, the unjust, and evil-doers generally, but all such as refuse to pay Him this triple worship which is His due: "*The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt. xxv. 30). How necessary, too, is this service for each one of us if we wish to attain eternal happiness! "*For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?*" (Matt. xvi. 26).

God the object of the Theological Virtues

The three virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity are called Theological Virtues, because they relate directly to God, and have God as their immediate end or object. We believe in God, we hope in God, we love God. There are, besides, Moral Virtues, so called because they regulate our conduct in regard to ourselves and to our neighbour; and, although they are exercised with reference to the will of God, yet they have God as their object only indirectly;

for example, almsgiving has as its immediate object the relief of want. But the immediate object of Faith is God Himself and all the truths which He has revealed; the immediate object of Hope is God, who has promised to give Himself to us for all eternity in Heaven; the immediate object of Charity is God Himself as the perfection of all that is good and holy.

God the motive of the Theological Virtues

God is also the cause or *motive* of the Theological Virtues. The proper motive of Faith is the Divine veracity: we believe the truths of Revelation because God, who is the very Truth and who can neither deceive nor be deceived, has revealed them to us through the infallible teaching of His Church. All possibility of error is therefore excluded. But the decisions of the Church, although they are infallible, are not the motive of our Faith; they are only the sure means of knowing the truths of Faith, which is founded on the Word of God.

The proper motive of Hope is the infinite goodness and power of God, and His fidelity to His promises. In view of the merits of His Divine Son He has promised us eternal life, and all the means necessary to obtain it, if on our part we faithfully observe what He requires of us.

The proper motive of Charity is the infinite goodness of God in Himself, and His infinite goodness to us: for His Divine perfections, too, He is infinitely deserving of our love. Nay, God even commands us to love Him: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength*" (Mark xii. 30). The love of God, moreover, is the great end for which we were created, as on it depends our happiness or misery for all eternity: "*The Lord keepeth all them that love Him; but all the wicked He will destroy*" (Ps. cxliv. 20).