
THE CHURCH AND CHARITY

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The Cross is the hallowed sign of the love of Christ for men. It is a symbol as well of His commandment of charity which is to unite all men, brothers to one another and brothers to Christ, in the love of God. The Cross points upward to God. But its arms are an integral part of the Cross itself. The arms reach out to bring all men into corporate union of brotherhood and submission to God, wherein is the hope of salvation for man and for society.

Apart from the love of God there is no bond to unite all men as brothers. Blood, birth, race, nation, caste, condition, divide from the rest of men those they join together. Nor can there be true love of God without love and service of our neighbor. Under Christ's precept we bear a personal responsibility towards our fellowman. He is our neighbor. He is the brother of Christ, Who will accept our service to one another as done to Himself.

This is the charity of Christ. This is the timeless and universal teaching of His Church. It is not a fanciful aspiration. It is God's mandatory way of living for men. It is the commandment of charity which Christ enjoined at the Last Supper: "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one

another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (*John 13:34-35*).

The charity of Christ has power to remake the world as it remade the first Christians. The love of man for man in God can yet bring the world peace with justice, a surcease of rancor, freedom without abuse, order without despotism.

Inseparably joined to the Christian obligation to love all men in God is the duty to love and care for the poor which the Church has faithfully taught by word and, more forcibly, by her example. The compulsion which is upon the Church to show forth Christ to every age engages her energies and resources in the service of the poor. Christ loved the poor. He chose poverty for Himself. He chose the poor for His friends. He went about among them doing good. He had "compassion on the multitude" (*Mark 8:2*). By inspiring her children to give their personal service to the poor and to support her works of charity, the Church is faithful to her mission which, Pope Leo XIII says, "essentially consists in the sanctifying of souls and the doing of good to humanity" (*Au Milieu*).

The notable distinction of Catholic charity is not found in many centuries of service to the poor, nor in hundreds of properties and buildings dedicated to charity, nor in the rich variety of the Church's provision for the care of the needy. The shining ornaments of the Church's charity are the many who are served in their need and affliction and the spirit of dedication in those who serve them.

The charity of the Church is pre-eminently the work of our religious Sisterhoods. Without our Sisters, who have left all things to follow after Christ, the Church could not begin to perform her great mission of charity. Like Christ, the Catholic religious has deliberately chosen poverty for herself. She serves Christ daily in serving His brethren, the poor. There is nothing spectacular about her quiet, beneficent work. She seems, as Cardinal Newman says, to "have determined, through God's mercy, not to have the praise or popularity that the world can give, but . . . 'to love to be unknown'". She has not chosen an easy life. Long hours of the day and often late into the night, she washes and cooks and sews, welcomes and shelters the homeless and the abandoned, comforts the helpless aged, consoles the incurably sick, protects and guides the children in her charge, gives strength to the weak,

courage to the despairing, sympathy and understanding to the afflicted. She knows weariness and fatigue. Yet hers is a life of deep peace and lasting joy, born of forgetfulness of self and devoted thoughtfulness of others in the service of Christ. In her humility, her diligence, her devotion, and her joy she is the expression of the spirit of Catholic charity.

In our own country and in our time, zeal and ardor for the cause of charity have set in motion one of the most momentous forces within the Church. For more than thirty years bishops, priests, members of religious communities, men and women of every condition, have studied, planned, and worked together to improve, to perfect, and to extend the work of Catholic charity. Their united and cooperative effort merits the title of the Catholic Charity Movement in the United States. The spirit of devotion, the intense vigor, and the solid accomplishment of this movement are as noteworthy as its progressive character, its courageous self-appraisal, and its dissatisfaction with mediocrity in the service of the poor.

The most faithful achievements of the Catholic Charity Movement are the organization throughout the country of diocesan charity offices and the founding and development of the National Conference of

Catholic Charities and of Catholic schools of social work.

The Bishop in each diocese is responsible for the efficient administration of the charitable activities of the Church. The Bishop is called, "The Father of the Poor." During the last twenty-five years the Bishops of the United States have organized central offices to coordinate and to supervise varied and multiple works of charity, to determine deficiencies, and to develop what was wanting. Their characteristic and now familiar name, The Catholic Charities, points to a common source of inspiration. It is an interesting and arresting thought that this modern and American development, an office for charity through which the Bishop fulfills his grave obligation to care for the poor, is so close a counterpart to the system in the early Church.

The National Conference of Catholic Charities, the first fruit of the Catholic Charity Movement, has grown to be its voice and the instrument of its functioning. In the National Conference there are brought together and shared the traditions, the experience, the anxieties, and the hopes of Catholic Charities. Through the National Conference and in the Catholic schools of social work Catholic thought and ideals of charity find national expression, and study is

fostered of the social sciences and of the modern developments of improved methods in caring for the poor. All that is found good and true in what is new is eagerly and quickly incorporated into the practice of Catholic charity and into the training of those to whom Catholic Charities owes so great a debt, the Catholic laymen and women who have chosen charity for their life work.

Our agencies and institutions of charity are necessary and indispensable in meeting urgent and desperate needs. But it is their place in the field of Catholic charity to supplement and complete, never to replace, that neighborly service of personal, individual charity which in country-side, town, or city is the American way, and in the parish is the Catholic way, of relieving the wants of the poor. Neighborly assistance given from a sense of personal responsibility to the unfortunate is the most fundamental and cherished form of Christian charity. We know best and love easiest what is close to us. In the full flowering of Catholic charity in this country every parish will be a center of charitable activity. It will have a deep Catholic sense of parish responsibility for its own poor and will foster and express the religious life of its people through its own works of charity. On that blessed day not only indi-

vidual members of the parish but organized groups of parishioners will stand ready to serve the poor, gladly giving their time and service, but above all, themselves. This is the ideal of Catholic charity.

The founders of the Catholic Charity Movement were, for the greater part, members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the noble organization of Catholic men who follow Christ into the homes of the poor, which Frederic Ozanam founded in Paris over a century ago and which spread rapidly over the whole Catholic world. The Society has but one aim, to sanctify its members through their personal service to the poor. In the United States more than twenty-five thousand members of the Society are actively serving the poor in their parishes, visiting the sick in hospitals, visiting prisoners in jails and in many other ways giving themselves generously and unobtrusively to the friendless and neglected. Today is Ozanam Sunday. The third Sunday of September has been especially dedicated by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to earnest prayer that in God's wise and holy providence, Frederic Ozanam may be raised to the altars of the Church as a Saint, a model for the Catholic layman, whose personal service of the poor will bring him to holiness of life by the very path which Christ loved to walk.

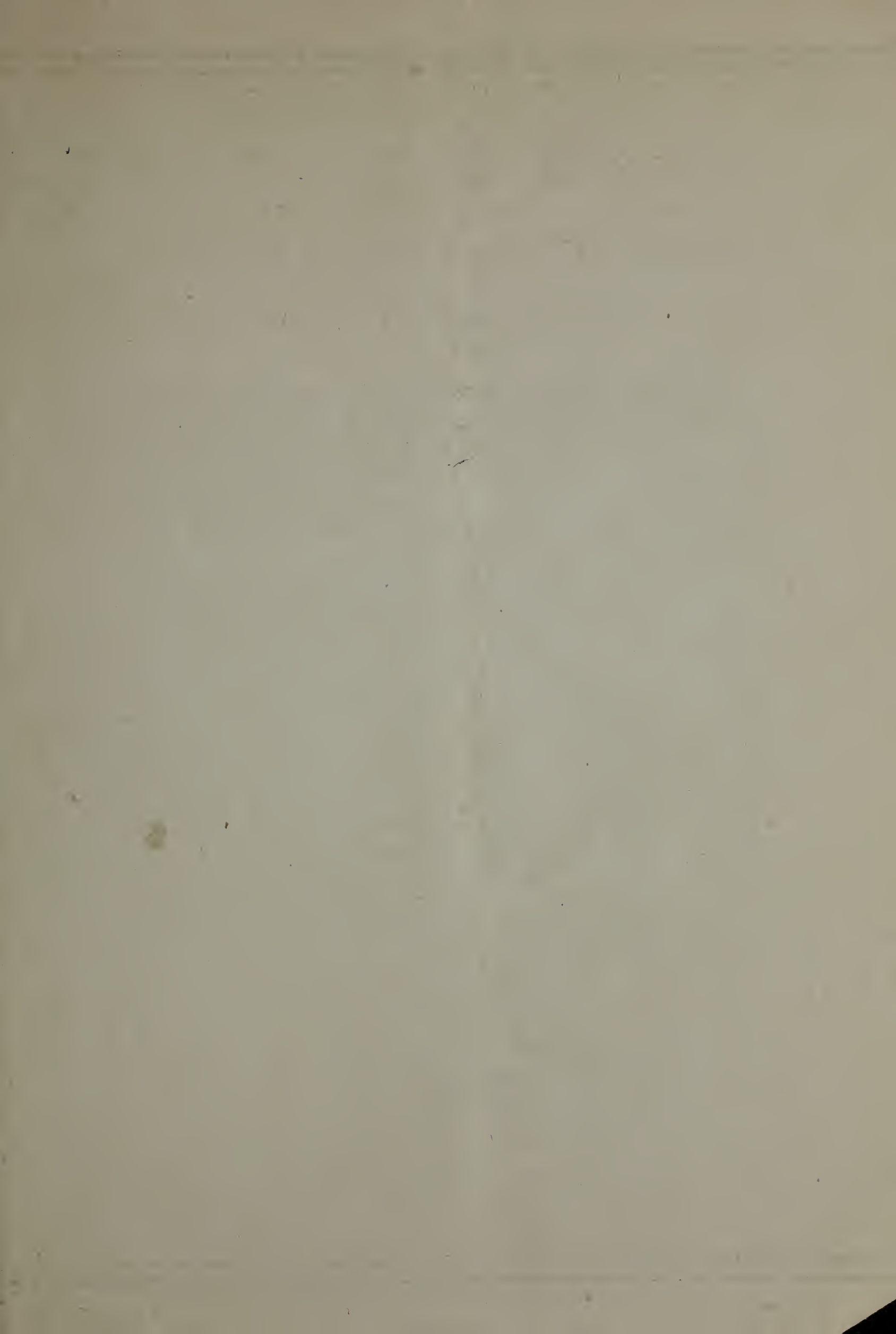
Thoughtful men and women are seriously concerned that private charity and welfare associations of a voluntary character may not continue to enjoy in our beloved country that sympathetic welcome, generous support, and position of honor which they have received in the past. A growing tendency of the State to exercise an exclusive monopoly as it enters into every field of welfare is fraught with danger to the best interests of our country and to the free exercise of religion. Our American and democratic tradition favors and supports a benevolent and sympathetic partnership of private and public care for the poor. Unquestionably there is an obligation on the State to promote the welfare of its citizens and especially of the poor. But the State exercises this important function of government in fullest and most harmonious accord with American tradition when it encourages self help and the assistance of private citizens and voluntary associations before acting directly to bring public aid. Public welfare programs should supplement, not compete with or submerge, private charity in its traditional fields of work.

Welfare is not the exclusive concern of government. He is surely as good a citizen who helps the poor personally or through private agencies as he who pays taxes collected

for the same purpose. It is unseemly that in caring for the poor rivalry and struggle for place should develop after so many years of understanding and cooperation. Yet a very grave and critical issue is beginning to emerge which must be faced.

The dignity and destiny of each individual person and his relation-

ship as a brother of Christ are religious concepts fundamental to the practice of charity. The free exercise of religion includes the freedom to practice charity. The defense against every force of the right and duty of private charity to serve the poor is a defense of our American heritage as well as of the charity of Jesus Christ.



THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Thirteenth Year—1943

The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 41,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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