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OUR WARFARE
ON



The Spiritual Front

OUR WARFARE ON THE SPIRITUAL FRONT

There never was a time when the salvation of souls did not impose on all the duty of associating their sufferings with the torments of our divine Redeemer. But today that duty is clearer than ever . . . Today imposes on everyone the duty to flee the vices of the world and to renounce the unrestrained pleasures of the body and that worldly frivolity and vanity, which contribute nothing to Christian formation of soul, nothing towards gaining Heaven.

(P. P. XII, Encycl. "Mystici Corporis")

By

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Our Warfare on The Spiritual Front



THE world about us is engaged in a devastating upheaval. Half of the human race regards the other half as deadly enemies, and has been resolved upon their utter destruction. Each side has left no means untried in its grim determination to accomplish its purpose and has remained undaunted by the colossal amount of suffering and misery this entails. But these facts are so familiar to all of us that further details are unnecessary. Not thus, however, with another kind of warfare, which is of daily, dire and personal importance to each of us. Would that we brought to it the same pertinacity of purpose which characterises these worldly combatants! "The children of this world are . . . more prudent than are the children of the light!"*

Both Faith and experience teach us of domestic foes and internal enemies which must be subdued before we can hope to enjoy not only individual and personal

* Luke 16, 8.

peace with God and our neighbor, but likewise that international order and good-will for which mankind is vainly striving. What is the reason for this personal, internal warfare? Man in his actual condition is neither in the state of primitive innocence nor in that of pure nature. He belongs to a fallen race still suffering from the losses sustained by its progenitors. Yet, this gift of Divine Life, rejected by mankind in the person of Adam, has been restored to him through the Bloody Sacrifice of Christ. To fail to live on this supernatural level and attain his supernatural destiny is to *miss the whole purpose of his existence*. Having once received it in Baptism, he is henceforth under the fundamental necessity of protecting it against the assaults of powerful enemies: *the world, the flesh, and the devil*.

Such a spiritual warfare as that in which we are engaged must be unremitting. It begins with the dawn of reason; it ends only after we have closed our eyes in death. Not that we shall always be in the thick of battle, but we must always be prepared to go into it at a moment's notice. We may have periods of steady marching ahead; or we may even make a momentary

halt. At times we may be occupied principally in routing the enemy and even, on rare occasions, in enjoying the laurels of victory for a brief space. Never, however, can we sit back and compose ourselves for inaction. Never can we rest on these laurels with the complacent assurance that our work is finished; that we have reached a certain stage in the spiritual life where there is no need of apprehension or preparation for the future.

Father Faber writes that life is "a struggle, strife, combat, battle, warfare, as you choose to call it. No one doubts it. Reason proves it, authority proves it, experience proves it. Therefore," (he continues) "is my religious life a struggle? Do I feel it to be so? What am I struggling against? Do I see my enemy? Do I feel the weight of his opposition? If my life is not sensibly a fight, can it be a spiritual life at all? Or rather, am I not in one of the common delusions of easy devotion and unmortified effeminacy? If I am not fighting I am conquered; and surely I can hardly be fighting and not know it. These are serious questions to ask ourselves, and we ought to be frightened if at any time we cannot obtain satisfactory answers to them."*

* Growth in Holiness.



Fight Against the Triple Concupiscence

For all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

I. *The concupiscence of the flesh*, or sensuality, is an inordinate love of pleasure and creature comforts. Pleasure of itself is not evil, since God placed it in our nature to facilitate certain acts necessary to the preservation of life. It is, therefore, permissible and even good when directed towards a higher end; it is illicit and evil when sought for itself. Thus, in His wisdom, the Creator has attached a certain enjoyment to the act of eating in order to induce us thereby to preserve our physical strength. But, this satisfaction must not be abused. We should eat in order to live and properly fulfil our duties in life;

we must not eat merely to gratify our appetite.

Such a disorder (i.e., pleasure for its own sake) leads to further evil, because soon it becomes the only motive of acting. There is only one more step to that excessive love of pleasure and immoderate use of it, the danger of which lurks in every human heart. Let us remark here that such a state as this really degrades a human being below the level of the beast. For animals are guided by the deep inherent laws of nature and instinct, placed there by God; whereas man, once he has thrown off the yoke of reason, becomes the slave of his passions, and ceases to be human.

Besides, the entire body and all its senses are so inclined to their own inordinate gratification that even innocent enjoyments may lead, easily and quickly, to guilty pleasures. This is what makes the vice of sensuality so dangerous. The body loves comfort and ease; it craves for rest, relaxation and indulgence; it shuns and shrinks from labor, fatigue, hardship and privation.

REMEDY—The only remedy for this inherent evil is the mortification of the senses and repression of inordinate desires. To

this, we are obliged by virtue of Baptism, in which we died to sin and its concupiscence. To live the life of Christ, this state of "death" must be maintained by continual self-denial. Thus, the mortification of sensual gratification cannot be limited to what is strictly forbidden, but we must take the initiative; we must get on the offensive and subdue our foes before they wound us mortally.

The most effective weapon against this vice is fidelity to duty, obedience to the laws of God and Church, submission to the trials sent by Providence. These constitute sources of mortification most efficacious, universal and secure.

APPLICATION—We need not be persuaded of the existence of this internal enemy; are we equally convinced of its danger and determined to conquer it? Can we dispense ourselves from corporal penance because we are innocent of grosser sins? No! Our Saviour laid the law of Christian self-denial on all without exception. Or are we so cowardly and effeminate as to consider penance and renunciation superfluous? Some, indeed, find its necessity too great a shock to their comfort-seeking lives. But, let us beware of anything that seeks to draw us away from the Cross of

Jesus Christ! The Apostle warns us: "They who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires."*

II. The second internal foe to be conquered is the *concupiscence of the eyes*, or curiosity and avarice. This unwholesome curiosity is an excessive desire to know all that goes on in the world,—its gossip, scandals, news. Such an inclination, not proceeding from a desire of spiritual profit, begets "a morbid disposition of soul, the shrivelling up of the heart, a miserable bondage allowing us no leisure to turn our thoughts upon ourselves." (Bossuet) It also leads to indiscriminate reading of profane literature, uncharitable and dangerous conversations.

Those who are engaged in intellectual or scientific pursuits need to be on their guard. While doing their utmost to prepare for teaching or other serviceable work, they must be convinced of its secondary importance compared to their soul's salvation.

To avoid being led into error by excessive craving for knowledge, let them regard it not as an end, but another means of glorifying God and helping others, and pursue it with moderation. By excluding

* Gal. 5:24.

what is not useful, by working from supernatural motives, their pursuit of higher learning should not prove harmful to their spiritual life.

Under another form the vice of curiosity causes some persons to meddle in the affairs of others; they are always alert to know everything. It is impossible to enumerate all the abuses and sins this tendency engenders, the troubles and discords it provokes.

REMEDY—We must become convinced that only *what is eternal* is worthy of captivating our thoughts, holding our attention. Reflect often how quickly “the fashion of this world passeth away,” and one thing only remains—God and the possession of Him in heaven. We should devote our time to the knowledge, love and service of God. Even in swiftly-changing world events, seek God’s glory and the welfare of souls. “Thou art the God of my heart and the God that is my portion forever!”

APPLICATION—Have we an inquisitive mind which is always looking for material to feed its morbid curiosity? Are we easily attracted and concerned with all we see and hear? Do we waste time in reading which, if not wrong, has no better re-

sults than to dissipate minds, furnish distractions in our prayers, feed future temptations and inordinately engross us? Do we engage in unprofitable, harmful conversations? Do we allow these external occupations so to engage us—to fill our minds and captivate our hearts—as to entice us into a thousand human attachments, a veritable slavery?

AVARICE, or the inordinate love of worldly possessions, is a prolific source of fraud and injustice. Wealth is bestowed only as a means to an end, and God exacts a strict account of its use. Scripture calls money “the root of all evil.” It has caused the ruin of individuals, families, and even of entire nations.

REMEDY—Christians must keep their hearts detached; they must “seek first the kingdom of God”, i.e., their salvation. Besides, poverty is a precious treasure, with which to purchase eternal riches. Imitate that *interior detachment* which impelled Christ to be born in a stable, to live as a poor workman and die on a Cross. Baptism makes us heirs to a heavenly Kingdom, members of a thorn-crowned Head. So, we should not betray *excessive hankering* after the goods and comforts of this

world. Instead, "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" by your alms to the Church, missions and poor. Remember always Christ's warning: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."*

APPLICATION—Is our heart avaricious for material possessions? Are we over-anxious about earning a big salary? Are we discontented with food, clothing, lodging, occupation, etc.? Do we accept and perform our work in the spirit of the Holy Family? Are we dishonest or unjust in business? selfish or miserly to others? Do we live up to our obligations as employer or employee? How consoling is our Lord's divine promise: "Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they pour into your lap."†

III. The last of our internal enemies is also the most perfidious: *pride*. "*Self*", says Father Grou, "is the origin and fount of pride and consequently of all sin. It is the enemy of God, whom it attacks in His universal and absolute dominion. It is the enemy of man, whom it turns one

* Matt. 19:24 † Luke 6:38.

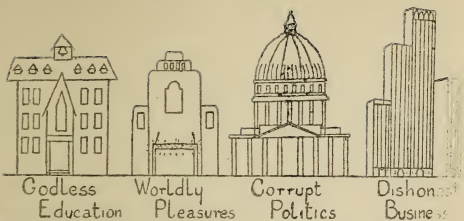
against the other, on account of their conflicting interests. It is the enemy of every man, because it estranges him from his true good, because it draws him towards evil, and robs him of peace and rest.”

This pride of life, cause of all sin, is a *worship of self*, man becoming his own god. Because of it, he shows a spirit of independence and self-sufficiency which makes him rebel against God or His representatives. It inclines him to egotism, referring all things to himself as his last end; to complacency in his merits and virtues, as if he were their source; to conceit in his good works, ignoring that God alone gives success. This sin also manifests itself by vanity, an inordinate desire for esteem and praise; or vain-glory, the pleasure taken in such applause. It leads to boasting of one's achievements, to singularity and ostentation, to hypocrisy, to discouragement at defects and failures and the abandonment of virtue. It makes one jealous, obstinate, domineering; it causes final impenitence through presumption or despair.

REMEDY—(1) *Self-knowledge*: this is necessary to conquer all our enemies, but especially the insidious vice of pride.

Study it from every angle so as to learn its many manifestations and how to uproot them. Implore this grace from God by earnest and persevering prayer. (2) *Humility*: which makes God the beginning and end of our activity, eliminating self-will and self-seeking. We become convinced of our own sinfulness, and tendency to every evil. Consequently we accept patiently trials and reverses. (3) *Obedience*: most powerful antidote to this poison of pride is submission to God's will manifested in His Commandments and in daily events. Obedience and humility go hand in hand; the death of self-will is the extinction of pride.

APPLICATION—Do we use unlawful means to promote our own advantage or advancement? Are we content with the work and place assigned us by a loving Providence? Are we conceited about our ability, boastful of our achievements, worried about our failures, tenacious of our own way and judgments? Are we unwilling to take criticism and advice? or rebellious toward authority, resentful or vindictive? If we knew ourselves as God does, we would long ago have acquired a holy hatred of self, the foundation of sanctity.



Fight Against the World

In the world you shall have affliction; but have courage, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

In alliance with the enemies which we harbor within us are powerful external foes: *the world and the devil*. By the world is not meant the material universe around us, the work of the Creator: nor the general mass of human beings, among whom are many true servants of God. The "world" is the kingdom of wickedness and malice; the sum-total of those who *oppose Jesus Christ and His Doctrine*, and have become the slaves of the triple concupiscence, the dupes and allies of Satan. They are *unbelievers and infidels, hardened sinners, the indifferent and worldly-minded*, even among Catholics.

This world which, through dances and theatres, through the perusal of worldly literature and bad examples, worms its way into the heart of our Christian families, constitutes a serious obstacle to the attainment of salvation and perfection. It stirs up and feeds within us the fire of concupiscence; it seduces and terrorizes us. The radio, also, may easily become a channel of worldliness, plainly harmful to the soul-life of children, for which parents are held responsible. The world attracts us by its vanities and amusements and entices into evil by its bad examples. It is so tolerant of human weaknesses as actually to encourage them. When it fails to beguile by these means, it resorts to mockery and ridicule, to threats and persecution.

“To be of the world is to accept its ideals, desires and methods; it is to be satisfied with the rewards of the world, to defend and partake of its follies, to subscribe to its temporal code of life, and to play its rules and game. The code of the world amounts to nothing but a pleasure-some pragmatism which scoffs at the control of authority as intolerance when it irks or does not profit, which calls piety weak-headedness, which brands humility and

obedience as unmanliness, which scorns chastity and celibacy as abnormalities or hypocrisies.”*

REMEDY—To have nothing to do with the dangerous occasions of the world; always regard it as a foe. When confronted with the standards and maxims of the world, repeat with St. Bernard: “Either Christ blunders, or the world is astray; but it is impossible for divine Wisdom to blunder.” To become so *detached* from the world as to remain uninfluenced by its methods, standards and example, and unsullied by its pleasures. To restrict our actual intercourse with the world to that required by necessity, utility, politeness, zeal for souls. *Never* on any occasion to *compromise* with the world or sacrifice for its empty applause the ideals and principles of our divine Master.

APPLICATION—Do we love the world, i.e., do we take pleasure in thinking and speaking of it; do we try to imitate its manners and methods? its fashions in dress, often immodest and indecent? Are we faithful to the grace of our Confirmation? This sacrament makes us defenders of our faith and of the Church, Christ’s Mystical Body, against attacks from the

* Unto the End by Wm. McGarry, S.J.

worldly-minded and irreligious. Do we prefer to associate with the rich and powerful instead of with the virtuous? Do we try to conquer the worldly spirit by the "good odor of Christ"?

* * * *

HUMAN RESPECT is the child of *pride and worldliness*, "a veiled worship of self, transferred to the world, because self is even to us so small an object." It is not limited to one particular fault, but includes a world of faults into which it drags its victims. It begets immoderate fear of the judgments and censure of men, and excessive desire for their favor and approval, to the point of being willing to violate God's law, oppose His Will and neglect duty. Human respect destroys the value of all good acts by introducing a directly wrong motive into them. By drawing souls away from God to creatures, it makes perfection impossible; it breeds numerous sins of omission, caused by shame and ridicule; and many sins of commission, caused by the desire to please.

REMEDY—To conquer this enemy, have recourse to practice of the presence of God, to purity of intention and simplicity.

Try even in indifferent things to adopt that line of conduct which most opposes this failing. Make it the object of your Examen of conscience and implore grace to conquer it by fervent prayer. Finally, in imitation of Holy Church, ignore the judgments of the world and consider its friendship as the enemy of God.

APPLICATION—Religious persons, rather than votaries of the world, are most susceptible to this defect. Have we examined how far this power has brought us into subjection? Do we not experience sadness at the false judgments of others, seek to escape their contempt and win their esteem? Does not the question, "What will they think or say," often determine our conduct? But, why care whether we please others, provided we justly hope for God's approval? Having become disciples of Christ and committed ourselves to a spiritual life, our conduct is a reflection on the world. We must expect to be at variance with it, and even with our own flesh and blood. Hence, the logical conclusion: for us, human respect must be either an impossibility, an inconsistency or a sin! "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."*

* Gal. 1:10.



Fight Against the Devil

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high.

Personal experience and Holy Scripture both assure us that some of our temptations are doubtless caused by evil spirits. Why does God permit them to tempt us? For several reasons: 1. Because He wills to govern the world by indirect, as well as direct means; 2. because by our victories over them, we make great progress in virtue and add to our eternal glory; 3. these victories are occasions, of defeat and humiliation to the bad spirits, overcome by creatures weaker and inferior to themselves.

The devil can tempt us only by express permission from God, Who first prescribes

the exact conditions, forewarns us by His inspirations and strengthens us with grace to resist. Only God can act upon the soul itself and directly influence the higher faculties of intellect and will. The devil must confine his action to our bodies, exterior and interior senses, especially the imagination and memory, as well as the passions, which reside in the sensible appetite. On this battle-ground Satan may encounter us, so to say, hand to hand, but he can overthrow us only with *consent of our will*. This we are absolutely free to give or to refuse.

The power of this enemy should neither be *underrated* nor *exaggerated*, for our own concupiscence is a fertile source of many temptations, aided by past habits of sin and present imprudences. Some are inclined to magnify the influence of the devil, regarding him almost as a rival of God, omnipotent in evil. Others take the equally erroneous view that he is harmless, just a myth or fairy tale. It is generally difficult to decide whence temptations do arise, but if they are sudden, violent and protracted beyond measure, if they inspire singularity and mistrust for authority the devil is probably responsible.

A certain author writes: "God has joined happiness and holiness together, so that His graces not only sanctify the soul, but console it and fill it with peace and sweetness. The suggestions of the devil have just the opposite effect—if not at first, at any rate in the end. We may recognize the serpent by his tail, i.e., by the results of his operations and the goal to which he leads us."*

REMEDY—1. Humble and confident *prayer* to obtain assistance of God, Mary and the angels. Nothing is so powerful against this spirit of pride as *humility*. 2. *Firm confidence* in God's willingness and power to help us. If the devil sees our faith weaken, our trust waver, our courage wane, he redoubles his violence and is often triumphant. 3. Fervent and frequent *reception of the sacraments* and the *use of sacramentals*, especially holy water.

"Our enemy is a loud barker, but do not disturb yourself at all, for I know that he cannot bite. Laugh at him, and let him do his worst. Do not fight with him. Give him the cold shoulder; it is all beneath your notice . . . Moreover, why get sad? Remember this, so long as the temptation

* Sandrean—The Degrees of the Spiritual Life.

is grievous to you, there is nothing to fear. For why does it distress you save because it is against your will?"

(St. Francis de Sales)

APPLICATION—Do we protect ourselves against the power of the evil one by using ejaculatory prayers? When under attack, do we preserve a calm humility? Do we permit him to disquiet or discourage us or plunge us into a state of general irritability? After victory, are we watchful lest he tempt us to pride or vain-glory? Does temptation leave us more humble and self-diffident, more trustful in God, more faithful in His service? If so, then the devil will be caught in his own snares and will only aid our spiritual progress instead of sending us to perdition.

Conclusion:

Spiritual Warfare in Modern Life

May this little discussion about the enemies of our spiritual life prove enlightening, encouraging and stimulating to all souls eager to contribute their part towards the work of *spiritual reconstruction* which is the only guarantee of a true and lasting peace.

The world of science is intent as never before in combating and conquering the forces which undermine and destroy our physical life. This is right and good. But, everywhere we see such total apathy and ignorance concerning those powers which are blighting and devastating the supernatural life of millions of souls. Would that we might awaken men from this spiritual lethargy! Let us, at least, be determined with the grace of God to conquer the forces of evil in our own lives, and we can use the powerful weapons of prayer, penance and good example to weaken and check them in the lives of others.

