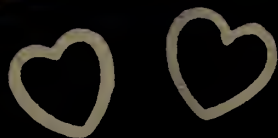


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LAW  
of  
*Charity*

by F. X. McMENAMY, S. J.



*THE QUEEN'S WORK*

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## FOREWORD

Father McMenemy, formerly president of The Creighton University and provincial of the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus, has been for the past years Jesuit tertian master at Cleveland. His is the important responsibility of presiding over that third-year novitiate that Jesuits make after their ordination and prior to their entrance into the active life of the Jesuit priesthood.

Through his wide experience with priests, secular and religious, to whom he has given scores of retreats and through his contact with women religious to whom he has given wide direction and guidance, Father McMenemy is in a position from which he can see closely the spiritual needs of men and women who aspire to the holier life. It was characteristic of him to include in this booklet about those who are aspiring to a deeper and a higher holiness men and women living and working in the world.

“The Law of Charity,” a phrase borrowed from Saint Paul, is the law which Father McMenemy believes is the basis of great spirituality. He feels that if there is a simple explanation of how saints become saints it is to be found in the fact that they have read this law, which is written on the tablets of the human heart, and have lived by the fullness of its meaning.

Now he presents "The Law of Charity" as the working platform for that priest and that religious or that man or woman in the world who wants to come close to the Savior and to grow in the Christlike life.

Quite naturally a booklet on so profound and far-reaching a subject cannot be easy reading; it is meant on the contrary to be read slowly, to be digested and pondered, to be made almost the basis of prayerful meditation.

Yet for all the profundity of the subject Father McMenamy has written with exquisite clarity and a simplicity which is always characteristic of an explanation that is directed to all who have deep faith and real courage of soul. The Law of Charity can of course become as vast as the charity of Christ itself. It can be as profound as Saint Paul's thinking on it. Father McMenamy has made that law seem inevitable not only in those who strive for sanctity but in those who seek that way of peace, that road to happiness which is meant for every Christian.

We know that many a priest, realizing that here is noble wisdom, will read and reread these words of a great director of priests.

We feel that hundreds of men and women religious, who have made the first initial sacrifice of the three vows, will find in "The Law of Charity" a new impetus to the fulfillment of their complete vocation.

We sincerely hope that many a man and woman who are living in the world and are moving straight toward God will study "The Law of Charity" and make it the rule of their lives and the guide to their lasting joy.

DANIEL A. LORD, S. J.

# THE LAW OF CHARITY

By F. X. McMENAMY, S. J.

LIFE, we are assured, is never stationary but ever on the move, onward and upward or backward and downward—the body's life, the mind's life, the soul's life. As a point of individual experience we are aware that body and mind reach after a time a certain perfection in vital power and then begin to decline. Not so the soul; for the soul there is no inevitable law of decay. Unto the very end of its days on earth the soul can hold its course ever onward and upward into richer and fuller conquests of divine living. The divine germ born in a man with baptism confers upon him a new principle of life that is most real and that is designed by God for uninterrupted growth in vigor and beauty and fruitfulness during all the years of his earthly pilgrimage.

Still it is likewise a point of personal experience with some of us that there is such a thing as an unprogressive spiritual life; that God's plan somehow can be frustrated; that, far from advancing, a man can weaken in the exercise of his divine life and thus can, as far as practice goes, slowly decline into a state of spiritual decrepitude.

The explanation?

Father Faber, the reader may recall, has raised this question in his book "Growth in

Holiness." After examining and rejecting several opinions advanced by others, he expresses the conviction that the one and common cause of arrested growth in the spiritual life is a lack of abiding sorrow for sin. Saint Francis de Sales, according to Father Faber, had set this arrested growth down to precipitation or hurry in spiritual duties; De Ravignan attributes it to a lack of perseverance in prayer; others give as the cause a lack of bodily mortification.

It is not the purpose of the writer to question the conclusions of these recognized authorities or to offer a theory of his own that will cover all cases. The writer wishes rather to record the fact that, whatever be the universal and root cause of spiritual decline, in the experience of the average Christian, priest, and religious, the obvious and immediate explanation of his failures and of his trend downward is a lack of instinctive love of Christ. He has substituted another law of life for the Law of Charity, which God has willed should govern his life and which the Holy Ghost has "written" in his heart.

## **MEANING OF THE LAW OF CHARITY**

I borrow the words from Saint Ignatius Loyola. In the introduction to his "Constitutions" he states that "the interior Law of Charity and love, which the Holy Ghost is wont to write and imprint in the hearts of men," will avail more for the preservation and advance of his order and of the

individual members in God's service than will any external legislation. By Charity he understands of course the love of God or the love of Jesus Christ. The Law of Charity involves two things: Charity as *motive* and Charity as *norm*. As *motive* it is the familiar rule of life proposed by Saint Paul: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God" (*I Cor. x, 31*). As *norm* it is the universal directive given by the Holy Spirit for the soul's deliberate preferences, desires, and choices. That is ever to be preferred, desired, and embraced which, all things considered, more perfectly accords with the love of Jesus Christ or, as some would state it, which is more worthy of the Christ-life within us.

The Holy Ghost writes this Law of Charity in the soul, for it is the Law of divine adoption, the Law of grace. God Our Father by His Holy Spirit gives it to His children as the supreme motive and directive in all the ways of that holiness which makes men like to Jesus Christ. Hence it is not a Law reserved for the priest and the religious only, but it is intended for every man who in baptism is "born of God" and "predestined to be made conformable to the image of His Son" (*Rom. viii, 29*). In practice this Law of Charity is devotion to God or devotedness to Jesus Christ, devotion to be understood as Saint Francis de Sales understands it: the activity of love—not however of any quality of love, but of a love that has be-



come instinctive in its activity, frequent, facile, and masterful in self-giving.

In time of prayer and particularly in time of retreat does the average priest, religious, and layman realize with a certain sense of shame that whatever may be the remote cause of his lack of spiritual growth the immediate explanation is a lack of divine Charity in his soul. All his failures along the way, he painfully notes, were just failures in love, failures in the instinctiveness of his devotedness to Jesus Christ. And of this realization there is born in his mind an abiding conviction that the Law of Charity is an essential requirement for him if he is to live a priestly life, or a religious life, or even a Christian life in the world with deep sincerity and worthiness.

To collect and to state briefly the reasons for this conviction is the purpose of the present booklet. However in doing so, it is not the writer's aim to convince others, since he rather supposes that others are already convinced from personal experience. But he proposes these reasons as motivation for sincere and efficacious desires to advance in Christian, religious, priestly holiness. Prayerful consideration of these desires during times of meditation and at other times will almost certainly beget desires of this quality and will lift one's life to a higher level of supernatural living. In the sequence the motives follow more or less the order of importance and cogency.

1. TO MY FATHER IN HEAVEN I owe a devoted life according to the LAW OF CHARITY, for it is the fulfillment of His first and greatest commandment. A devoted life, but surely not a tepid life, is to 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*). In divine adoption my Father in heaven reveals a father's love of me and a father's solicitude for me. Can I forget God's sensitiveness to the affection of His children and to their coldness? His delight is in their holiness, which is their likeness to Him. Will He not then expect me to fulfill my days on earth and enter His eternal home with the record of a devoted and filial love of Him? The sovereign reason for my existence is that I may glorify Him in this world and throughout the eternal years of heaven by my filial Charity.

2. TO JESUS CHRIST I owe this same Law of devotion. Gratitude for His costly devotedness to me as well as the appeal of His own personal goodness and beauty and greatness have always inspired me to love Him with a whole heart and not with a half heart. Ever is He asking me for all I have to give. Then too so closely have His grace and love identified me with Himself that what I am is a matter of greatest concern to Him. My virtues are not mine alone, nor are my faults hurtful to me alone. Every advance of mine is an honor and a joy to Him, more than a temple of marble

and gold, and every fault of mine is an imposition on Him and an ugly deformity in His Mystical Body. This soul of mine is to be my eternal gift to Him. Will He recognize eternally there, not feebly, but fully expressed, His own divinely beautiful features formed progressively during my years on earth by the daily devotedness of my heart to Him?

3. TO THE HOLY SPIRIT I owe this same Law of Charity. This is His Law, written in my heart. By it He is ever laboring to bring me to the perfection of Charity by filling my heart with Christ's own filial love of God. Such love is transforming and will fashion the likeness of Christ in my soul. Here is the aim of all the activity and the mission of the Holy Spirit within me. My cooperation is essential for His success. By making operative the gifts of the same Holy Spirit, now my divine guest, the Law of Charity renders my cooperation instinctive, generous, uniform, and courageous. An inferior law will mean half-hearted cooperation and a "saddening" of the Holy Ghost.

4. I owe this Law of Charity TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN. God has placed in her heart a mother's love and solicitude for me. With divine Charity reigning in my life, I shall be rightly conditioned to receive every grace from Mary and to hold it securely and to give back to her a mother's joy in seeing in my soul some of her own likeness and loveliness wrought there by the generosity of my response to her maternal care and love.

5. TO THE CHURCH I owe this Law of Charity, for I am a member of her family. She does not ask of me learning or eloquence, or any other purely human attainment—although she recognizes the value of these; but she does expect me to contribute to her holiness, for it is this which makes her beautiful and dear to her God and efficient in extending His kingdom. Every spiritual gain of mine therefore is a joy and a gain for her, and every blemish of mine is an infliction upon her and an element of decay in her life and of failure in her work.

6. TO MY BRETHERN I owe this Law of Charity. The most significant work of any man or woman in this world is the silent influence of his or her personal life on those with whom he or she lives and toils. Nothing else is more inspiring and heartening to the members of a Catholic parish or a religious community than the presence of priest, lay person, or religious whose life is transparently dominated by devotion to Our Lord and to His ideals of holiness. On the other hand nothing else is more damaging to the spiritual life of that same parish or community than the careless disregard of the unobservant member.

Then as to works of charity and my whole attitude toward my neighbor it is the spirit of this very Law that disposes me for a generous and self-sacrificing fulfillment of the second part of God's greatest commandment: to love my neighbor as myself. For devotion to God clears my

vision and warms my heart to recognize and treat my neighbor as Christ Himself in need.

7. THE GOSPEL requires of me this spirit of love. As followers of Christ all members of the Church are called to progressive holiness. This is the summation of the Gospel as Our Lord delivers it in teaching and in example. Study prayerfully the Sermon on the Mount and in particular the eight Beatitudes, which portray Our Lord's concept of the true Christian.

Of His explicit charge, "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect," Pius XI has written thus: "Let no one think that this is directed to a few select souls and that all others are permitted to remain in an inferior degree of virtue. No; all without exception, as is evident, are bound by this law." Just before these words in the same apostolic document, the Pontiff had written: "Since Christ has made the Church the mother of sanctity, all who accept her lead and teaching by the will of God must strive for holiness of life" (*Rerum Omnium*, 1923, *On the Third Centenary of the Death of Saint Francis de Sales*).

How often when reading the Gospel, we come upon high engagements which are demanded by Christ of His followers but which only a lover of God will fulfill consistently? To those who try to reconcile a certain measure of worldliness with the practice of Catholicism, these engagements

will seem repressive and just too hard. For such Christ's yoke is not sweet or His burden light. The fulfillment of the Gospel in whose soul the Law of Charity rules, and its "delight" are reserved for the man

8. MY OPPORTUNITIES require that Law of Charity. Devotedness to Christ conditions my soul to make the most of my spiritual opportunities. All of us have much the same experience in life—success and failure, praise and blame, sickness and health, pain and pleasure, treatment that is indulgent, treatment that is harsh, optimistic moods and periods of depression. These are the vicissitudes of life that come and go with the earthly days of every man and woman. They will come and go in my life. What will matter is the kind of person I am, the spirit that habitually rules my soul. If that spirit be the Law of Charity, all these vicissitudes become so many opportunities of self-surrender to Christ and of love of Him, opportunities rich in supernatural gain for the Church, for the neighbor, and for my own eternity. With another law conditioning my life, these very same vicissitudes easily become occasions of flight from Christ, of resentment, of disedification to the neighbor, and of sin against God. "And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good" (*Rom. viii, 28*).

Furthermore it is the spirit of this law of love that disposes me to receive the greatest divine enrichment of grace and merit from the fulfillment of Christian, religious,

or priestly duties and good works. Devotedness opens wide the receptive powers of the soul to receive in fullest measure the inflow of divine life that comes from prayer, from the Divine Office, and above all from the Holy Mass, Holy Communion, confession, and the other sacraments.

9. THE SUCCESS OF MY APOSTOLATE requires the interior Law of Love of Christ, for it alone clothes me with Christ's efficiency and enables me to work *with* Christ as well as *for* Him. To labor for Christ is not a difficult thing, but to labor *with* Christ requires the instinctive self-renouncement of the devoted man whose aim is to forget himself and to place all his powers at the disposal of Christ for His ends. Herein is the whole secret of true apostolic success.

10. MY FREEDOM requires the interior Law of Love of Christ. Love is the great liberator—the love of God. “The lover is free,” says à Kempis, “and can not be restrained.” Love liberates from all those tyrannies of self that enslave and enfeeble the ungenerous man and constrain him to serve God poorly.

11. MY HAPPINESS REQUIRES this Law of Love. There is always zest and joy in a forward life, whether it be life of the body, life of the mind, or life of the spirit. “A delightful life” is the phrase of Saint Francis de Sales for devotion to God. On the other hand an unprogressive and backward life becomes dull and dispiriting.

We take mind and heart away and bestow them on other things. This explains why in periods of tepidity we instinctively become naturalistic and turn to interests and pleasures that are purely human. The joy of living always postulates a certain perfection or fullness of life, whether it be animal, rational, or the divine living of a soul in grace. The joy in our divine living is called by Saint Paul "the fruit of the Spirit" (*Gal. v, 22*). Every supernatural virtue, when it has reached a fine perfection in its exercise, yields to its possessor a divine delight that is a taste of God; "Fruits of the Holy Ghost," they are called. Now it is from the fullness of Charity, above every other virtue, that the soul experiences the sweetness of God. My religion should make me very happy. I must have joy in it if I am to go far in its practice. This means that I must love it and all its ways, which further means that I must love God "with my whole heart" and in all the ways of His loving providence over me.

12. MY GOOD SENSE requires this Law of Love. It is always good sense to save a costly investment. Our Blessed Lord, the Church, and I with others have made a great expenditure—Christ in divine grace and the Church and I with others in labor, time, solicitude, and money—to form me into a devoted Catholic, or into a devoted priest, or into a devoted religious. Surely it would be bad sense and stupid waste as well as cold ingratitude to allow



all this expenditure to eventuate in a dull and ineffective spiritual mediocrity.

## THE DECISIVE HABIT

DAILY MENTAL PRAYER is essential in order to establish one's life on the Law of Charity and to maintain it there. This habit decides whether or not one's desire of a devoted life is deeply sincere and therefore efficacious. The average priest and religious have learned this from personal experience, an experience confirmed by ascetical tradition as well as by the present mind of the Church in that she requires daily mental prayer of all priests and religious. The Holy Pontiff Pius X, whose authority is paramount, in his exhortation to the clergy of the world on the occasion of his Sacerdotal Golden Jubilee assures us that "it is of capital importance that a certain time should be set aside every day to meditate on things eternal. No priest can omit this without being guilty of grave carelessness and without grave loss to his soul," for "it is not only most salutary but is very necessary." (*Haerent Animo*, 1908)

The fundamental reason that the habit of daily mental prayer is decisively important lies in the fact that for the average person it is the normal way to keep motivation alive and dynamic. It thus provides the soul with the stimulating supernatural atmosphere essential to sustain uniform and devoted love of Christ. The average person, I say; because no doubt there are some who

can secure spiritual atmosphere for their days from vocal prayer, especially if it be united with suffering. Still I fear that among priests and religious such persons are rare. The average priest or religious soon learns that his vocal prayer becomes vital and sustaining as a matter of habit only when it grows out of good habits of mental prayer. The Church does not prescribe mental prayer for her lay members as a necessary means for their sanctification. However it is claimed that lay persons in growing numbers are practicing mental prayer, since they find it most helpful to this end. The form of mental prayer used should be adapted to the state of life and other conditions of the individual. It may be very simple, perhaps mostly affective, but in every case such that it keeps alive motivation and desires.

But is not successful daily mental prayer just too difficult for men and women of today with their distracting activities and the pressure of contemporary life? Certainly not if a man sincerely desires success. His desire must possess however that quality of sincerity which always guarantees success in every endeavor for the advance of his soul. Such sincerity takes out of a person's life the enemies that impede or destroy success.

THE ENEMIES OF MENTAL PRAYER are for the most part reduced to two, and they are, not activity and distraction, but rather some habit of pride or some habit of self-indulgence. Activity,

absorption in work, distraction may divert attention from God for periods of time; they do not bar the approach to Him. But any form of pride that is a *habit*, as well as any form of self-indulgence that is a *habit* quite effectually bar the way to God in time of prayer. The form of pride which is perhaps most common in a Catholic's life is that which manifests itself in habits of deliberate disobedience to the requirements of his religious, priestly, or lay Catholic code of observance: habits against obligations great or small that are prescribed by the Church for one's state of life. Self-indulgence on the other hand in habits of sense pleasure, even when those habits are not sinful in themselves, tends to give the body dominion over the spirit and quite easily destroys relish for the things of God and true sincerity of desire to be intimate with Him in prayer. Other and lesser enemies, such as preoccupation in work, physical weakness, discouragement, bad example, human respect, lack of leadership on the part of elders, are not greatly to be feared unless some habit of pride or sense gratification has weakened sincerity of desire.

## HELPS

HELPS TO THE LAW OF CHARITY are the devotions of the Church, especially these four: devotion to THE PASSION, to THE HOLY EUCHARIST, to THE SACRED HEART, and to THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

THE SACRED PASSION of Our Lord and the two great gifts that have come to us from the Passion, the Holy Eucharist and the Sacred Heart, have beyond question done most and are doing most today to establish and perfect the reign of divine Charity in the hearts of God's children on earth. The Passion itself is the most impressive revelation of devotedness that God has ever given to mankind, the devotedness of Jesus Christ unto death. Then on the night before He died, that same devotedness of Christ's, human and divine and omnipotent, bequeathed to us the Holy Eucharist as the memorial and perpetuation of the devotedness of Calvary. Then again long years afterward when because of worldliness and the influence of Jansenism men forgot the revelation of Calvary and the Eucharist and began to talk and act as though God had no heart, Christ revealed His own great Sacred Heart in order to convince a doubting world that God *has* a heart and in order to bring the world's memory back to the devotedness of Calvary and the Eucharist. Today perhaps nothing else is doing more to engender devotion to God and to promote the Law of Charity in the souls of men and women than is the appeal of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ—the symbol of His love of men, a love human and divine revealed in the Passion and in the Holy Eucharist, a love that asks of men reparation for the injuries done Him in these the two greatest works of His devotedness.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN, "Singular Vessel of Devotion," possesses a unique power to draw mind and heart to Our Blessed Lord. She is the Mother of Divine Grace, and history has demonstrated what devotion to her has meant for devotion to Jesus Christ in the hearts of her children. No other grace is she so eager to obtain for every one of them as the grace of a deep and devoted love of Him. Such love is transforming, as we have seen, and in her eyes glorifies every child of hers into the likeness of Jesus.

FORTUNATE is the Catholic, fortunate the priest, fortunate the religious, whose sincerity of life and living faith permits him to realize the significance and splendor of his call and to surrender his soul to the grace of that call. His surrender, the blessed master lets him know, will be like His own surrender to His heavenly Father —by way of obedience, by an instinctive and wholehearted obedience to the detailed obligations of his state of life, obligations great and small and many but unified and exalted by the self-giving in every one of them. And according to the generosity of his self-giving will the Blessed Mother of God pour into his soul a purer and ever-growing love of Jesus Christ, a love that is devotion to Him, a love that is the solution of his difficulties, the secret of his power, the joy and peace of his life, and the fulfillment of his call to toil with Christ for the glory of God and the perfecting of His Mystical Body, which is the Church.

God calls me, as He calls all His children, to a life of progressive holiness. The way to that holiness is by the **LAW OF CHARITY**, which the Holy Spirit wrote in my heart at the moment of my baptism.



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