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The World's One Evil: Sin

Fr. Francis E. Fenton

Some 35 years ago Pope Piux XII made the observation that a great tragedy of his day was that the world had lost its sense of venial sin. A great tragedy indeed, that man was no longer sensitive to or even perhaps conscious of his less serious violations of the moral law of God. But the moral climate that prevailed in that era to which Pope Pius XII was referring was of high quality compared to that of our present time. Today multitudes of people have lost their sense of *all* sin, mortal as well as venial. And that is not merely "a great tragedy" but it may well be the *supreme* tragedy of our day.

But why is this so extreme a misfortune, the loss on the part of countless individuals of their sense of sin? Because sin is the ultimate evil and, in the final analysis, the only real evil because it alone offends God and has eternal consequences. This is God's world and, if we are to play our proper part in it, then we must humbly acknowledge His supreme dominion over us and live our lives in accordance with His will. If we do not, if we ignore Him and flout His moral law, if we live as though He did not exist and as though there were no Heaven or hell, if, in a word, God is a more or less nonentity for us and if man is the measure of all things—then it is the height of foolishness on our part to expect that the Almighty will not one day demand retribution for our defiance of Him. God is all-merciful, yes, but He is likewise all-just and, while it is beyond our finite minds fully to reconcile these two concepts, we seriously err in concentrating on God's infinite mercy to the virtual exclusion of His perfect justice, and vice versa.

God created all men for Heaven and Christ died for the salvation of all. Almighty God condemns no one to hell. No one is eternally lost unless it be through his own unrepented grave fault. Such is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. As Saint Augustine put it, "God made us without us but He will not save us without us."

Since the doctrine of the Church on sin is found in detail in any advanced traditional catechism, there is no need to present that material here. However, a few points might well be noted:

1. Every Roman Catholic has the obligation to know his religion and that includes the subject of sin. Regrettably, some do not. One example would be the conditions necessary for the commission of mortal sin. Because mortal sin is a serious offense against God or a grave violation of the law of God, it is essential that we know what those conditions are. There are, objectively speaking, enough mortal sins without our creating our own through ignorance of the moral teaching of the Church. And yet, how many there are who, because they are not rightly informed, think this or that is a grave sin when, in fact, the Church says otherwise—or they suppose a particular matter is a venial or less serious sin which, given the three conditions for such, is actually a mortal sin. While we are obliged to follow the dictates of our conscience, we have a prior obligation to form a correct conscience, that is, one in harmony with the moral doctrine of the Church. If a person does not know that doctrine, then his conscience will be a distorted or erroneous one in its moral judgments. Every Roman Catholic, then, has the serious duty to form and to have a correct conscience on moral matters.

2. While venial sin is a less serious offense against God, it *is* an offense against God, an infraction of His law, a violation of His will. If a person, while concerned about avoiding mortal sin, commits venial sins habitually and with abandon, that individual will eventually fall into mortal sin. If one completely disregards less serious offenses against God in his daily life, his sense or consciousness of the nature of sin is gradually dulled so that, little by little, he is ever more disposed to rationalize and compromise with grave sin. Nor can a person advance in virtue nor make any real progress in the spiritual life who does not have a vivid awareness of the immorality of venial sin which is, after all, the second greatest evil in the world. Surely there is not a saint in Heaven who took venial sin lightly throughout his earthly sojourn. And we are all called to be saints, are we not? In fact, no one is welcomed in Heaven unless and until he becomes one.

3. Sin is an entirely personal and subjective thing in the sense that only an individual can commit or be guilty of it. True enough, numerous matters, apart from any personal involvement, are called sins, that is, objectively sinful. In the strict theological meaning of the term, however, sin involves the mind and the will and

> so an individual is guilty of sin only when, in some fashion, he knowingly and willingly offends God or violates His moral law. One cannot commit a sin by accident. Nor can a person be guilty of sin after the fact, that is, a person is not held accountable before God for sin if, at the time of its occurrence, that person was in total good faith and completely unaware of any immorality. There is, of course, no such thing as society being guilty of sin. Just as lifeless guns don't kill people but rather people kill people; so also abstract society doesn't commit sin but rather people commit sin.

Because, then, it is a serious offense against God, because it is a grave violation of the law of God, because it destroys the life of divine grace in the soul, because a person who dies in unrepented mortal sin is destined to suffer for all eternity both the loss of the Beatific Vision of God (Heaven) and the indescribable torment of hell—for such reasons mortal sin is the greatest evil in the world.

Suffering is one of the consequences of original sin. Because the desire to be happy is a part of human nature, because no one in his right mind seeks unhappiness for its own sake, suffering of one kind or another—that is, the absence of happiness—is described as evil and is so considered by the generality of mankind. Yet suffering, although it may become an occasion of evil or sin (resentment, despair, self-pity, etc.) is not in itself an evil. If it were, would Christ have preached the necessity of suffering for those who would be followers of Him? Would He have endured the excruciating agony of Calvary if suffering were evil? Did not the saints and martyrs seek pain and trials and tribulations and, in fact, actually rejoice in their sufferings? Holy Scripture tells us that the disciples rejoiced "that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus." (Acts 5, 41)

Suffering, then, of whatever kind and however intense and prolonged it may be, is not, in or of itself, an evil. On the contrary, if one has a supernatural, truly Christian, Christ-like attitude toward it, suffering is a positive good for by it we atone for sin, we merit divine grace, we please God. In a word, it is one's attitude towards suffering that makes all the difference. If we look upon it and react to it from the perspective of the spiritual and the supernatural and the eternal, suffering is a blessing. If we view it as an evil (to be avoided, if possible; otherwise, to be reluctantly, perhaps resentfully, endured), then it is a curse.

"God made us to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him in this world and thereby to be happy with Him forever in Heaven." In that one sentence from the Baltimore Catechism there is stated the entire purpose of life. From this it follows that moral evil or sin is the only real evil in the world for sin alone is offensive to God and sin alone can prevent us from attaining the end for which God created us: the eternal and perfect happiness of Heaven where "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him." (I Cor. 2, 9)

("...the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come..."—Rom 8, 18; "But if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."—I Pet. 4, 13)†

A STRANGE SITUATION

The conspiracy of Freemasonry poses a danger to Church and State every bit as grave as does the conspiracy of Communism, the difference being that the threat of Masonry is a subtle and less visible one. While it is certainly true that multitudes of the American people, even at this late date, still do not know the satanic nature of Communism, yet far, far more of them are ignorant of the equally satanic nature and influence and goals of Masonry. Nor is there, to my knowledge, any traditional or conservative Catholic publication on the American scene today putting out the articles exposing Masonry that are being printed in the pages of *The Athanasian*.

"The USA, Past and Present—Christian or Masonic?", the most recent of these articles, appeared as a supplement to the previous issue (October 15, 1985) of *The Athanasian*. While I was well aware for many years that Masonry was an evil of massive proportions, much of the material in the article to which I refer was a revelation and an education to me. Surely, I took for granted, once our newsletter subscribers read this piece, they will—traditional Roman Catholics and patriotic Americans that they are—they will be anxious to get the supplement as widely circulated as possible and will therefore order as many copies from our TCA as they reasonably can. And we, in turn, will do our part to achieve a wide distribution of the article by making it available as cheaply as our funds permit. In fact, we will do so at less than it cost us to produce it. And this we have done.

Well, thus far the response to the supplement in terms of bulk orders for extra copies has hardly been a stampede. As of this writing (November 13, 1985), some four weeks have passed since the article first appeared. During that period, of the 850 newsletter subscribers who received the supplement with the October 15 issue of *The Athanasian*, a total of 30 subscribers have ordered additional copies. Isn't that pathetic? A less than 4 percent response.

(continued on page 8)

America's Origin Manifests Unmistakable Catholic Presence

Jill Wiesner

Most Americans, accepting the arrival of the Mayflower in 1620 as the opening chapter in our national history, assume that ours was a Protestant nation from its beginning. But our history began long before the first Pilgrim set foot on Plymouth Rock. Though most history books promote the Protestant version, the land itself bears witness to the true history of America. The names borne by rivers, mountains, lakes and cities in every state of the Union are a continual reminder of America's beginning, a beginning that bears the marks of a distinctly Catholic presence. The historian, John Gilmary Shea, writes:

> The entrance of the Catholic Church was not the erratic work of a few. It was part of her work begun at the fiery Pentecost, carried on from age to age with unswerving course, while all human institutions were changing and modifying around her.

In 1492, Columbus planted the standard of Spain on American soil and the territory he claimed became a part of the Catholic See of Seville. To this day, in the Cathedral of Seville in Spain is preserved the chalice made from the first gold brought from America by Columbus.

The three nations who laid claim to most of our territory differed greatly from one another. Spain, under the system begun by Philip II, controlled every aspect of colonial government. Churches, convents, universities and schools were funded entirely by the king. France, on the other hand, had little participation in the Catholic missions and colonies which depended instead on the help of private citizens. In England, the Church was proscribed in the sixteenth century, and priests came to America only under the greatest difficulties.

Yet through these varied sources was woven the continuous thread of the Catholic Faith, exercising its holy influence everywhere. Catholic explorers and missionary priests dedicated the lands they found to God, imploring the protection of the angels and the saints. The first name given to United States territory was that of Pascua Florida (Easter), claimed by Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513. In 1565, the settlement dedicated to and named for Saint Augustine was founded, the first and oldest city in the United States. The Franciscan Fathers, sent out from St. Augustine, invoked the protection of the saints over Florida's rivers and islands, as well as the missions they founded. Today, the St. John's and St. Mary's Rivers still bear their original names, as do St. George and Santa Rosa Islands. The names of a number of Florida cities also remind Americans of the missions established by priests who faced brutal torture, enslavement and murder at the hands of those they came to convert, as well as slow death by malaria on land and imprisonment or death at the hands of French Calvinist pirates by sea.

Though the British eventually took Florida from Spain and proscribed the Catholic Faith, renaming many of the settlements, a glance at a map of that state gives proof of our American Catholic heritage.

In 1581, from the See of Mexico, two young Franciscans, Father Francis Lopez and Father John de Santa Maria, traveled north to the country of the Pueblo Indians, naming it New Mexico. On January 25, 1605, possession of the New Mexico territory was taken in the name of the King of Spain and, in honor of the Roman Catholic feast observed on that day, the Conversion of Saint Paul was chosen as the patronal feast of New Mexico. Soon after, Santa Fe (Holy Faith) was founded and became the seat of Spanish power.

To Florida, the priests had brought lemons and oranges from Spain. To New Mexico, the missionaries introduced horses, cattle and sheep, and showed the Indians how to raise and care for them. They also improved the machinery for weaving and spinning and aided cultivation by introducing acequias or irrigating trenches. In addition, the young were taught to read and write.

The conversion was so general that, as the Fathers went through the towns, they were greeted on all sides by "Praised be Jesus Christ" or "Praised be the Most Holy Sacrament." For over two hundred years, the Franciscan habit was the only recognized garb of the Catholic priesthood in New Mexico.

The missionaries also ventured among the Asinais or Cenis, called Texas by the Spaniards because, as the natives met the whites, they cried "Texas, Texas!", meaning "We are friends!", but which the Castilians thought was their tribal name. Thus, their territory became the State of Texas.

When the Spaniards reached Texas in January of 1689, they found among the Asinais "a little chapel of boughs with an altar on which a crucifix and a rosary were honorably kept." The Indians were so friendly that the Spanish authorities soon planned missions for the territory. These Indians were the remnant of those converted by the French missionaries accompanying La Salle on his ill-fated expedition to the Gulf of Mexico

(called Bahia del Espiritu Santo by the Spaniards).

In 1690, the first mission in Texas was established by the Franciscan Father Casanas. Smallpox swept through Texas in 1691 and the victims were cared for by the Franciscans in the missions. On February 5, their Superior died from the disease. Hidalgo County bears the name of his successor, Father Francis Hidalgo.

The town of Nacogdoches was begun around 1720 by Spaniards who gathered around the local garrison. In Nacogdoches is a spring of pure water which was named the "Fountain of Father Margil." The descendents of the original Spanish settlers assert that the spring is a result of the prayers of that holy priest during a season when all the springs had gone dry.

Guadalupe City received its name from Our Lady of Guadalupe mission whose Superior was Father Margil.

On March 5, 1731, the mission of "La Purisima Concepcion" (Immaculate Conception) was founded among the Asinai. Today, it is the town of Concepcion.

In 1759, the Bishop of Guadalajara issued an edict making December 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a holy day of obligation. Pope Benedict XIV, at the petition of the Archbishop of Mexico and the Bishop of Michoacan, made the Blessed Virgin Mary, under that title, Patroness of all the provinces of Mexico. Included in those provinces were the southwestern states of our nation. Today, of course, Our Lady of Guadalupe is Patroness of the Americas.

Many of the Spanish Fathers lost their lives to hardship, disease and hostile Indian attacks (the Apaches were the most vicious, so much so that fewer missions were established in their stronghold—Arizona—than in any of our other southwestern states). But the tenacity of the missionaries was rewarded. New missions were founded and countless souls won to the Faith. Today, the towns of San Cristobal, San Ildefonso, San Felipe, Santo Domingo, San Augustine and San Antonio are among those which grew up around the missions in New Mexico and Texas. The city of San Francisco de Albuquerque, though its name has been shortened, stands as a reminder of the Seraphic Saint and those of his order who brought the one true Faith to our land. In Colorado, the town of Santa Maria, the counties of San Juan and San Miguel, and the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range bear witness to their presence there. In California, Father Serra's chain of missions is remembered through the cities which still bear their names.

As the Spanish Fathers left evidence of their mission in America's West, the French missionaries were doing the same in the North. Though many of the names they gave our rivers and lakes were changed by the British, the land still bears unmistakable evidence of their heroic efforts. In New York, Father Carheil, miraculously cured of an incurable nervous disorder after visits to the Shrines of Lady of Foye and Saint Anne de Beaupre, dispersed so many medals of Saint Anne that some of these medals are still unearthed from time to time in the soil of that state.

In spite of subsequent British domination, New York still has rivers, cities and counties dedicated to the saints and Our Lord. Examples are St. Johnsville, the St. Lawrence River and St. Regis Falls.

In Michigan, a county is named for Father Peter Francis Xavier de Charlevoix, S.J., the eighteenth-century historian of New France. Another county bears the name of Father James Marquette, S.J., as do a town and the river which flows near his original burial site. St. Ignace and Sault Sainte Marie still have the names of the Jesuit missions founded there.

In Wisconsin, La Pointe was named La Pointe du Saint Esprit (Holy Spirit) by Father Claude Allouez as he erected his bark chapel and opened a mission among the Ottawas, Sacs, Foxes and Illinois. Father Allouez and Father Andre established a mission at the Rapides de Peres (today called De Pere) for the tribes on Green Bay. Names of the Jesuit missions and missionaries are still found throughout the State of Wisconsin. Examples are La Crosse, St. Croix Falls, Marytown and Allouez.

Though the greed and jealousy of some government officials in Spain, the cruel suppression of the French Jesuits, and the takeover by English Protestants all hampered efforts toward the conversion of America, the seeds were planted. The Catholic priests were the "first to thread the great arteries of the continent, to plod over the Indian trails, to study the grandeur, the vegetable and mineral wealth of the land, to learn and perpetuate in scientific form the unwritten languages of our countless Indian tribes, to discharge unflinchingly the ministry of the altar and the Word, and to die, as a full hundred did, by savage hands, while heroically discharging their duty."

As can be seen by the consistent nature of the names given to the land by the missionaries, the presence of the Catholic Church upon the American scene was a very visible one long before this nation formally came into being. Catholic Americans have a noble and heroic history. May the glorious example set for us by our predecessors in the Faith be an inspiration to us in our efforts to bring our fellow Americans to the one true Church and to make America a Catholic nation! It was at the Sixth Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1846

Continued on page 8

Catholic Self-Knowledge

John Kenneth Weiskittel

Know thyself. So read the inscription of the Delphic Oracle in ancient Greece. Similar admonitions can be found in every age and culture. Like other sound advice, this goes unheeded far too often or is implemented imperfectly. Over five hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Greek philosopher Thales observed: "The most difficult thing in life is to know yourself." And according to a German proverb, "Man recognizes his faults as dimly as an owl staring into a mirror."

People today ought to have a better approximation of themselves, one might suppose, because of the self-absorption so prevalent throughout society. This is, after all, the "me" generation. We read of the promises of various groups—from aerobics classes to pop psychology seminars to fringe religions—promises of "self-fulfillment," "self-improvement," "self-realization" and "self-actualization." Bookstores are stocked with publications like *Self* magazine and with best-sellers having such titles as *I'm OK—You're OK, Looking Out for Number One, The Psychology of Self-Esteem* and *I Ain't Much, Baby—But I'm All I've Got. Psychology Today* has carried such advertising as:

> I LOVE ME. I am not conceited. I'm just a good friend to myself. And I like to do whatever makes me feel good...
>
> ...We live by a certain philosophy: We try to make our dreams come true today, instead of waiting for tomorrow. But before you can do good things for yourself, you have to know yourself...You need self-knowledge before you can have self-satisfaction. Think about it.

Yet the "self-knowledge" extolled here is that of secular humanism; it is what New York university Associate Professor Paul Vitz calls selfism in his book, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship.*

For Catholics, however, self-knowledge is something more—not only more than the ill-disguised hedonism of much that passes as self-help in our time, but more than the noble, genuine aspirations of seekers of truth, past and present, as well. For Catholic self-knowledge takes into account the natural and the supernatural: we are seen as creatures, yes, but creatures *with souls*; creatures made in the image of God, but tarnished with sin; creatures who are saved from our sins by a Redeemer, but saved with the understanding that we must flee from those sins. True, most of us learned this growing up, but how deeply does it penetrate our day-to-day lives? It is one thing to recognize a fact and quite another to use it in practice. This self-knowledge is nothing if it is not *applied.*

Self-knowledge—The Road To Sanctity

Are there any among us who have not at one time or another asked themselves, "Why am I not a saint?" Why, indeed! We who have the True Mass and the other valid sacraments; who have dedicated and self-sacrificing priests to instruct us by morally and doctrinally sound sermons; who have, in a word, the Roman Catholic Faith intact and unadulterated. While ours is the obligation, by word and example, to bear the light of Christ in our communities, far too often we cover this light with a bushel or, at least, obscure it through a less than fervent commitment. (Observe with what great zeal this generation pursues the things of this world; how much more zealous ought we to be for the things that are God's!)

Part of the answer as to why we are not saints lies in our inability to examine our souls with the keen detachment of the saints, and then to take action on the symptoms of sin we find there. Another element is our tendency to excuse our sins rather than to face up to them as would the saints. Still another is the habit of trying to overcome our sins by our own strength—the saints turn to God. Added together, the difference amounts to the saint's self-knowledge and our relative lack of this trait.

The great Spanish Carmelite reformer, Saint Teresa of Avila, emphasizes this virtue in her *Interior Castle* (the title refers to the soul), when she writes:

> It is no small pity, and should cause us no little shame that, through our own fault, we do not understand ourselves or know who we are. Would it not be a sign of great ignorance, my daughters, if a person were asked who he was, and could not say, and had no idea who his father or his mother was, or from what country he came? Though that is great stupidity, our own is incomparably greater if we make no attempt to discover what we are, and only know that we are living in these bodies, and have a vague idea, because we have heard it and because our Faith tells us so, that we possess souls. As to what good qualities there may be in our souls, or Who dwells within them, or how precious they are—those are things which we sel-

> dom consider and so we trouble little about carefully preserving the soul's beauty. All our interest is centered in the rough setting of the diamond, and in the outer wall of the castle—that is to say, in these bodies of ours.

When we consider that these words were primarily directed to cloistered nuns of sixteenth-century Catholic Spain, then how much more significant are they when addressed to Catholics living in a post-Christian world.

Consider that Saint Teresa says it is "through our own fault" that we lack knowledge of ourselves. In this context she is referring to how such culpable ignorance not only prevents us from making spiritual progress but is also the cause of sin. When the pious Pharisee Nicodemus came to learn from Christ, he was told by Our Lord that "men loved darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved." (John 3:19-20) This *light*, of course, is Christ, and Saint John writes: "But as many as received him, he gave them the power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name." (John 1:12) So, sinners don't want to know what it is God requires of them; they don't want to make that radical confrontation with themselves that leads to holiness; they don't want to discard the corrupt self and put on the *new man* who, says Saint Paul, "is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of him that created him." (Col. 3:10)

True Catholic self-knowledge, then, involves the desire and commitment to change our lives in conformity to God, and thus to save our souls. It is not something we are to do by halves. The God-man has set the standard for us to follow and He expects us to do just that: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:48)

Taking A Spiritual Inventory

During their earthly lives the saints were honest about their shortcomings. "For the good which I will, I do not," confesses Saint Paul, "but the evil which I will not, that I do." (Rom. 7:19) The Scriptures and lives of the saints offer many examples of this trait. When a Samaritan city would not receive Christ, His Apostles James and John suggested to Him that perhaps they should call down fire from heaven to destroy the thankless place, but He rebuked them, saying, "You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save." (Luke 9:55-56) James and John took His rebuke to heart, learned from it and gloriously refashioned their lives. Saint Peter *thought* he knew himself when he assured Our Lord that he would never deny Him, only to do so a few short hours later—but he went on to reign steadfastly as our first pope, even unto martyrdom. Saint Teresa, of all people, was addicted to romantic novels, but overcame this to write spiritual classics. Saint Francis of Assisi as a youth had a penchant for vain amusements but, heeding the call of Christ within him, renounced it for a life of mortification. Saint Therese of Lisieux in her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, admitted that as a teen, "I made myself almost unbearable by being far too sensitive and nothing that was said to me seemed to help me overcome this tiresome fault." But after entering the convent she had mastered herself to the extent that she handled even harsh treatment from the prioress with unshakable control. Indeed, the saints won crowns of glory precisely because they were all excellent students of self.

Since we seek the same rewards, we too must take the same measures. Do we? To be sure, we live in difficult times. With the current state of the Church, few of us are fortunate enough to have the sacraments available on a weekly basis; parish life, which ought to be more tightly-knit than ever, is relatively weak; and retreats and spiritual conferences are infrequent. Still, this doesn't excuse us from our duties. Many saints excelled although they had far greater hardships than any of us are likely to face. So it all falls back on us. If we are ever to know ourselves as we should, we must first determine to know the will of God in our lives and strive to follow that will *no matter what*. Father Albert J. Nimeth, O.F.M., in his book, *There is More to Life than Living It*, observes:

> God does not expect us to act without understanding. He wants us to use our intelligence to know His law. He as much as says: "I gave you an intellect. Use it. Study the heavens, and they will tell you of My beauty. Study your origin, and your intellect will tell you that you owe your existence to Me. Study yourself, and you will find My moral law written all over your body and soul."

In 1546, a Spanish duke, having entered the Jesuits, wrote several small works based on conferences given by the priest who had drawn him into the Order, Blessed Peter Faber. One of these, of particular interest to the topic at hand, is entitled *An Exercise on the Knowledge of Ourselves*, which is comprised of daily meditations prefaced by a line of Scripture for each day, and begun by a confession of our own insufficiency and a humble petition for divine grace. A short summary of these meditations is given in Father Alban Butler's *Lives of the Saints:*

> For the heads (that is, topics) of meditation on Monday, he proposes that we are originally nothing; having received from God a noble

being, but by sin have fallen from our dignity; He stamped upon us his own image, but this we have disfigured; He further desires to bestow Himself upon us; yet we fly from Him, etc. On Tuesday, he suggests our weakness and universal poverty. On Wednesday, how we have abused and depraved all our faculties, blinded our understanding, depraved our will, etc. On Thursday, how we have defiled and perverted all our senses. On Friday, how ungrateful we have been to all God's mercies and graces, especially that of our redemption. On Saturday, how often we have deserved to be abandoned by God, and plunged into hell. On Sunday, on God's benefits, and our base return. He begins every consideration with what God is to us; then proceeds to what we have been towards God, that the two-fold knowledge of God and ourselves may be improved, and keep pace with one another.

Safe to say, this isn't the sort of subject matter, with its clarion call for frank self-assessment, around which typical Conciliar sermons are composed. The Conciliar Church priest would likely accuse the duke of exhibiting the traits of "medievalism" such as belief in hell, and encouraging a "negative" view of self and a "morbid" fear of God. But the author, Saint Francis Borgia (the Spanish duke), in the same work, puts such distortions to rest when he writes: "As he who goes to the fire, grows warm, so he who by prayer and pious affections applies his heart continually to the flame of divine love, will feel it kindled in him. Go then, devout soul; stir up thy affections, and raise them to God; thou art invited to that happy employment which is the uninterrupted function of the holy seraphim, that is, to love without intermission."

What Catholic self-knowledge really amounts to is finding ourselves again. In the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, our souls receive an indelible seal or *character* by which God gives us, according to Donald Attwater's *Catholic Dictionary*, "a spiritual or supernatural power to receive or produce something sacred." Sins cast shadows upon the heart, obscuring this, and so in self-examination we cast light in order to see again the saving work that the Almighty has wrought upon our souls. Since we are not satisfied with being "Sunday Catholics" who use chameleon-like "protective coloring" to avoid being recognized as Catholics at work or school, shopping, etc., such self-examination will be helpful in securing for us the strength and fortitude we need to be counted as soldiers of Christ. For unless, by our words, our actions, our comportment, we are willing to be clearly identifiable as Catholics, then we must accept the fact that something is lacking in our degree of self-knowledge and be prepared to make the needed correction in ourselves.

Self-knowledge And Catholic Action

"The less a monk thinks about converting the world and the more he thinks about converting himself, the more likely the world is to be converted." Well, we aren't monks, but these words of Bishop Hedley, a great Benedictine, surely can be seen to have application here, since they serve to remind us that our foremost concern is with the salvation of our souls and that only from this may we pursue the sanctification of others.

A modern error that developed from the turning away from this sound principle is *theological* Americanism, condemned by Pope Leo XIII in 1899. (We say "is" rather than "was" because, like its counterpart in dogmatic theology, Modernism, it has never been eradicated, but lives on in new guise.) The exponents of this heresy—called the "phantom heresy" by Liberals who in truth are its key practitioners today—taught that active, natural virtues are to be held superior to passive, supernatural ones. It is consistent with what Cardinal Merillod called the "heresy of good works." Pope Piux XII once expressed concern over those who "have become so engulfed in the vortex of external activity that they neglect their chief duty, their own sanctification." Yet Americanism (the term, as used here, is not to be confused with genuine patriotism) has become the guiding force behind Conciliar "Catholicism." How else do we explain the "activist" priests, the religious reduced to the status of glorified social workers, the loss of vocations, etc.? Sound Catholic teaching is unmistakably clear about this: Catholic action and the interior life are inseparable. (All those interested should obtain Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard's *The Soul of the Apostolate*, a book that covers the theme so well that Pope Saint Pius X had it for bedside reading.)

Critical circumstances in the Church place an increased burden on us the laity to defend her and to see that her saving message is heard above the din of the world. Regular readers will recall that on more than one occasion in these pages they have been reminded of their obligation to support the Church (traditional Catholicism, that is). She needs *our* help now more than ever, through prayers, apostolic activities within the parish and in the community, and financial aid. Traditional Catholics of America is one of the precious few groups formed for the sole purpose of preserving and promoting our Catholic Faith. It does so without the benefit of the multimillion-dollar budgets of the televangelists. It has, humanly speaking, only the generosity of its followers—*you and I*—to see that it continues to fight the good fight.

And make no mistake, the question of self-knowledge comes very much into play. Let us search ourselves and ask what contributions of whatever kind we've made for the Church. Chances are, many will be forced to admit

shortcomings and hopefully will realize a duty to greater responsibility. Others can point to many concrete examples of Catholic action. But whatever the case, let none be deceived into believing that they've done "enough" and that now it's "someone else's turn." The saints, our models, were saints because they spent their lives for Christ; they gave their *all* for Him and, when called upon, gladly gave it *again*. We cannot expect a crown from Him with any less an effort.

As a starting point for a greater spiritual life in the coming year, let us reflect on Saint Augustine's prayer of self-surrender:

> Lord Jesus, let me know myself and know Thee. Let me desire nothing save only Thee. Let me hate myself and love Thee. Let me humble myself and exalt Thee. Let me do everything for the sake of Thee. Let me think nothing except Thee. Let me die to myself and live in Thee. Let me accept whatever happens as from Thee. Let me foresake self and follow Thee, and ever desire to follow Thee. Let me fly from myself and take refuge in Thee, that I may deserve to be defended by Thee. Let me fear for myself, let me fear Thee, and let me be among those who are chosen by Thee. Let me distrust myself and confide in Thee. Let me will always to obey for Thy sake. Let me cling to nothing save only Thee, and let me be poor because of Thee. Look upon me that I may love Thee. Call me that I may see Thee, and eternally enjoy Thee. Amen. (500 days indulgence.) †

"America's Origin..." Continued from page 4
that the Blessed Virgin Mary was chosen as the Patroness of the United States under the title of her Immaculate Conception. Through our devotion to her, the Mother of God, may our efforts meet with success by the grace of God! †

"Strange Situation" continued from page 2
So what can I say? It would appear as though the conspiracy of Freemasonry has little to fear by way of any significant exposure from the traditional Roman Catholic Church (the prime target of Masonry). Apparently, too, the highly commendable fervor and zeal and dedication which characterize many traditional Roman Catholics in the fight against Communism do not carry over to the fight against the equally treacherous enemy of Freemasonry. Such is the conclusion I am inclined to draw from the meager results to date of our efforts to expose the Masonic evil. And surely the question must have arisen in the minds of a number of those who have read the excellent articles on the subject which have appeared in *The Athanasian:* How come this horrendous evil of Freemasonry is not even mentioned—let alone unmasked and exposed—in the various publications which are devoted to informing and alerting their readership on the dangers which threaten our nation? Why the cover-up of Masonry? Is not this "a strange situation" indeed?

We will continue our efforts to get the truth about Freemasonry to as many as we can. At least we will be able honestly to say that we tried our best. Repeated below are the prices for bulk orders of the supplement.

— Fr. F. Fenton

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the Rosary
Daily

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