

THE THIRD ORDER AND SOCIAL REFORM

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3. INFLUENCE OF THE THIRD ORDER ON SOCIAL LIFE

THE Tertiary who devotes himself exclusively to his own sanctification, and is unmindful of the spiritual or corporal needs of his neighbor, deserves neither the honorable name of Christian nor that of Tertiary. "It is a tradition of the Order," writes Father Timothy, O.M.Cap., "to devote oneself to the service of the poor, the sick, the suffering. That is the most beautiful and precious legacy bequeathed to us by our ancestors, the most brilliant gem in our possession." There is hardly a page in the annals of the Third Order that does not speak of the poor, the lepers, the weak, the suffering. Not a step can we take without meeting heroic deeds of love and mercy. The spirit of the Third Order is one of love. If the Third Order is to fulfill the mission prescribed by its holy Founder and by Popes Leo XIII and Pius X, the members must vie with one another in performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

The practice of this part of the apostolate will naturally and necessarily at first be of a private nature, exercised by the individual Tertiaries. It is a silent but steady work carried on at home and in the circle of one's friends, and consists in giving a good example by the most conscientious fulfilling of one's duties. Much good can be accomplished by the members in this way. They can, for instance, advise the erring, reprove unseemly conduct and words, dispel false opinions, sever perilous acquaintances, banish dangerous books and pictures from the home, check the rash, succor the poor and needy, visit the sick, and

perform numerous other acts of charity which their time and means may permit. Luchesius, the first Tertiary, nobly pointed the way, and left an inspiring example to his fellow Tertiaries. He went great distances to seek out the poor and to deliver them from their misery. At times, he was seen returning with two or three of God's poor, carrying the weakest on his back and leading the others by the hand.

He even went to help the scattered and forsaken inhabitants of the unhealthy marshes of Sicily, and gave them medical assistance. Above all, he prayed for his fellow men, and instructed them in their holy religion.

But it is chiefly the united, organized apostolate of charity in the Third Order that St. Francis and the Popes demand of the Tertiaries. In the past centuries, the Third Order admirably fulfilled this mission. To be brief, we find numerous hospitals, asylums, and other charitable institutions spread all over Italy, France, Spain, and Germany that owe their existence to enthusiastic Tertiaries, such as St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Margaret of Cortona, St. Louis of France, St. Ferdinand of Castile, St. Roche, and many others, so that in this respect the Third Order was a forerunner of the great apostles of charity in later years, namely, St. Vincent de Paul, St. John of God, and St. Camillus of Lellis. The Venerable Don Bosco, the apostle of the street waifs, was also a member of the Third Order. The so-called Montes Pietatis, or public pawnshops and banks established by members of the First Order of St. Francis to

protect the poor from the insatiable greed of unscrupulous usurers, were placed under the care of the Tertiaries, and did untold good. In fact, Tertiaries were so active in every kind of charitable enterprise, that it seemed, as one writer expresses it, as if the era of love of the first Christians had reappeared on earth.

In our own day, we notice hopeful signs of a revival of this spirit of charity among the Tertiaries. Thus, in Europe we have clubs of educated Tertiaries, who in union with the pastor instruct poor children, and prepare them for the reception of the sacraments. Some Tertiaries are engaged in helping the young, especially young men studying for the priesthood; others again succor the aged, the sick, the poor, the working class; others make it a point to furnish poor parishes with the necessary articles for divine worship; others have established employment bureaus, especially for the benefit of deserving girls and other worthy persons. A new field of organized charity that has found favor with the Tertiaries and is productive of the best results, is the so-called "Protectorate". Its aim is to assist in every possible way unescorted girls and women when travelling. The Tertiaries assigned for this work wear a medal of the Blessed Virgin pendent from a yellow ribbon. One branch of the "Protectorate" can boast of having protected and assisted over 30,000 girls and women in one year.

Thus are the Tertiaries of Europe, South America, and Canada engaged in the apostolate of charity, in their efforts to realize the lofty purpose of the Third Order—the happy solution of the social problem.

A pertinent question to be asked now is: What have the Tertiaries of the United States so far achieved in this line? The answer is, that, although we find numerous examples of deeds of charity exercised

by individual Tertiaries, organized charity is still a desideratum. Do we, perhaps, lack the means necessary for such an undertaking, or has the spirit of indifference towards the needy that possesses so many of our fellow citizens also found its way into the hearts of the Tertiaries, so that they are content to work out their own salvation and leave others to the care of themselves?

The occasions of practicing charity are plentiful, indeed. "Think," says a writer in the *Ave Maria*, "of the hosts of neglected ignorant or ill-instructed children in danger of being lost to the Church; the number of unfortunate, exposed, suffering, tempted, friendless persons in need of help and encouragement that could be so easily given; the sick in hospitals to whom a friendly visit would be as a ray of hope; the orphaned children whose sad lot so few compassionate, whose little hearts are hungry for some one's affection; those languishing in prison, who long for a kind word, to whom some good reading would be a blessing and a joy."

Let the Tertiaries, therefore, in this country emulate the glorious example set them by their brethern in other lands; let them aid their suffering fellow men wherever and whenever they can, that all may know that the Third Order has a great mission to fulfill not merely for the individual but for society at large.

To conclude, the lay apostolate of the Third Order may be thus summed up: "The activity of the Tertiaries consists in a series of good works of piety and charity, that are really not prescribed by the Rule, but that are in perfect accordance with the tradition of the Order, the spirit of the Rule, and the oft expressed wish of the Church. These works are partly purely religious, that is, for the immediate honor of

God; partly works of charity especially such as serve the local conditions and needs." Thus writes the editor of a widely read Tertiary weekly. It is, therefore, the duty

of all Tertiaries to work for the religious, moral, and social uplift of mankind. Only then are they true children of St. Francis, the great social reformer.

A DUTIFUL SON

Nowadays, when liberty is being extolled on every street corner and men, especially the youth, are trying to throw off the irksome shackles of authority, it is refreshing to find here and there young men and women of sterling worth, who have learnt that true liberty is not license but humble submission to lawful authority. Such children are the pride and comfort of their parents and the future hope of Church and State. The following incident illustrates the case in point.

In Wuerttemberg, Germany, a young man of eighteen whose parents were poor, was hired by a rich man to work on his farm. Overjoyed at the prospect of earning something, he set earnestly to work, to the great satisfaction of his employer. The little pay he received for his toil, was regularly sent to his parents. One day, as he was busy plowing in the field, a friend came, and asked him whether he had heard the bad news from home. The young man replied in the negative. He was then informed that during the previous night, the only cow his poor parents possessed had suddenly died. This was, indeed, a great blow for the young man, as he knew that the cow had been almost the sole source of sustenance for his aged parents. What was now to be done? His filial piety and quick wit soon came to his assistance. Politely thanking his friend for the information, he continued his plowing until dusk. After his frugal supper, he begged the good farmer to sell him one of his many cows. "Indeed, I have no money wherewith to pay," he said, "but in lieu of money I will work for you gratis for a whole year." The farmer was very much surprised at this proposal, and at once agreed to the novel plan. That same night the young peasant took the cow home, and placed it in the stable of his parents, without their being aware of it. Great was their joy the following morning on finding the animal in its stall.

The young man faithfully kept his agreement. At the end of the year, his employer, who had greatly admired the self-sacrificing spirit and thorough honesty of the young peasant, made him a handsome present, and raised his wages considerably. This enabled the young man to lay aside a portion of his monthly earnings, and within ten years he succeeded in paying the entire mortgage on the old homestead. His name became a byword in the neighborhood for economy and every manly virtue, and parents were wont to point him out to their sons and daughters as an example to be imitated.

