

# Devotion to the Father

## Its appropriateness – Its doctrinal value

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Devotion to the Father began with Jesus. How can it not be ours too?

The divine Saviour taught it to us in the only prayer He composed for us. From the Gospel we know that He always told His apostles about His Father. But for how many Christians is the Father, today, a living person ?

They almost always have a feeling of fear towards Him. They don't dare draw near to Him.

Among God's attributes we willingly acknowledge His fatherhood. But, for many, it is only a sort of metaphor or abstraction. Now, worship isn't directed towards an abstract attribute: it rises towards a person.

In fact, the whole liturgy of the Mass invites us to raise our souls to the Father, to offer ourselves to Him, with His beloved Son, to pray “for our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit”.

“Every Catholic prayer, an eminent liturgist says, is offered to the Father by means of the Son, in the Holy Spirit”.<sup>1</sup> Thus we can be certain that this devotion won't lead us to doubtful innovations; to us it seems something new only because we have forgotten it.

Those – preachers and spiritual directors – who have spread it, have pointed out with joy the profound effects of purification and sanctification which it brings forth in souls. It seems as though there is a special grace attached to it. Why?

First of all, perhaps, because spreading this devotion means continuing the Saviour's mission itself. Before Jesus, God was known, but not as Father.

Christ's main mission was to reveal to the world that God was His Father, and ours as well. By teaching men who no longer know this wonderful mystery of infinite Love, we continue, therefore, what Jesus called “His work”<sup>2</sup>. He blesses His own work.

Moreover, can we not try to discern the providential reasons for which our era is more able to understand Christ's divine message concerning His Father?

## OPPORTUNENESS OF THE DEVOTION TO THE FATHER

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<sup>1</sup> Don Cabrol. The ancient prayer ch. 19, p. 262. Cf. Don Lefebvre: “All the prayers of the Holy Mass are usually addressed to the Father. When we pray at the Altar, according to the Councils of Ippona (393) and Carthage (397), our prayer must always be directed towards the Father. In the Roman Missal there are only twenty-seven prayers addressed to the Son and almost all of them date back before the XIII century”, Liturgy ch. III, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Jn XVII, 4-6 “Father! I have glorified You on earth, I have finished the work which You gave me to do... I have manifested Your name to men...”

We discover these reasons both inside the life of the Church and outside the Church itself.

## **1. Inside the life of the Church**

Jesus Christ is the way that leads to the Father.

Therefore, first of all, Jesus Christ had to be known.

Certainly, the revelation had already established all His facial features. However, the long succession of centuries, from the beginning of Christianity until our times, was necessary for the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, enclosed in the incarnate Word, to be contemplated, in a harmonious synthesis, by Christian souls, without, however, expecting to be able to understand the fullness of holiness of the divine Humanity of the Saviour. The heresies of the first centuries were, for the Church, an opportunity to make known the perfections of the God-Man with the definition of the dogmas of the Incarnation, Redemption and Holy Trinity. Through the liturgy, moreover, the Church allowed the faithful to adore all the mysteries of the life of Jesus, allowing them to go through, in its annual cycle – from Advent and the Nativity, to the Resurrection and Pentecost – the different stages of the Saviour’s human existence, in order to allow them to relive them intimately in their hearts and minds.

Let us note it in passing: if the Church, with the feast of the Holy Trinity, honours the Three divine Persons with the same worship, and if it didn’t wish to authorize the institution of feasts which would honour the single divine nature of one of the three Persons<sup>3</sup>, in fear of introducing, in the spirit of the faithful, a division of their one divine nature, it didn’t even authorize the institution of a feast to celebrate the attributes of the Father in his relationship with us<sup>4</sup>.

The liturgy focuses on Jesus Christ.

But how can we not point out that the two most recent liturgical feasts – the feast of the Sacred Heart and the feast of Christ the King – as the magnificent fulfilment of the surge of love which brought humanity towards the divine Saviour, are an invitation to consider devotion to the Father as a fundamental element of Christian mercy, an element which fits in logically with the great current of Catholic liturgy?

By trying to perceive, with a respectful gentleness, Jesus’ Heartbeats, and discover the profound movement which regulates the rhythm of His love, theology emotionally encounters – in the core of this Heart – the love which prevails over all, the love of Jesus for His Father, and it is able to understand that the tenderness and mercy of the Sacred Heart for all men are the manifestation of the infinite tenderness and mercy of the Father’s Goodness.

Jesus said to Philip: “Whoever sees Me sees the Father”. Therefore, the Sacred Heart is the revelation of the invisible Heart of the Father! Also, Jesus, in His divine Humanity, exerts His kingship over souls and over society, precisely because He is the Son of the Father.

The proclamation of Jesus Christ’s Kingship prepares for the advent of the Father’s Kingdom, which Jesus taught us to ask for, as a supreme grace, in the prayer we often recite: “Our Father...thy kingdom come”. And St. Paul the apostle teaches us that Christ’s kingship

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<sup>3</sup> Encyclical by Leone XIII “*Illud divinum munus*”.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the feast of the Father, read “*Devotion to the Father*” by R.P. Plus. Version of P.C. Testore S.J., Marietti, Turin.

will be accomplished when the Son has delivered up to the Father all humanity, redeemed and acknowledged in a single Mystical Body<sup>5</sup>.

Does not devotion to the Father perhaps magnificently accomplish, in Christian worship, Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman: "But the hour has come and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeks such to adore Him"?"<sup>6</sup>

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Theology, having studied thoroughly in the latter times certain truths contained in the Holy Scriptures and in Tradition, now has a greater knowledge of the adorable person of the Father.

Didn't it give pre-eminence, in its research – and we cite a few examples taken from the most recent theological texts – to the doctrine of the Mystical Body, a doctrine whose connections with the worship of the Father we have just pointed out? Following its studies on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, didn't it highlight the fundamental value of the offering of the Victim who was immolated and glorified to the Father? By analyzing the nature of sanctifying grace, the grace of filial adoption, won't it discover more and more the infinite love of the Father? In the works of Marmion which have enlightened and touched many souls, especially "Christ, life of the soul", this concept prevails.

Since we are taking a look at the spirituality which is most popular in our times, shouldn't we note that the doctrine of spiritual childhood, which was lived out by the little Carmelite Saint and approved by the supreme Authority of the Supreme Pontiffs, logically requires, as its foundation, the doctrine of the divine fatherhood?

Being children implies having a father. If we are to imitate a child, we will imitate the filial sentiment and the trustful simplicity with which we must throw ourselves into the Father's arms, according to St. Theresa of the Child Jesus.

Wouldn't it seem that the Holy Spirit, with the rapid propagation of the doctrine of spiritual childhood, wanted to prepare souls to rediscover the great evangelical truth through devotion to the Father?

## **2. Outside the Church**

In these times in which official secularism is the ruin of souls, taking away their support and hope and leaving them helpless before the struggles of life, because it destroys their faith in the existence of God, how appropriate is the doctrine which reveals to men that they have a Father in Heaven who loves them and who, in every moment of their lives, protects them with His infinitely merciful Providence!

The logical result of laicism is a movement of God-less people. With what sadness do we consider the stages which brought our era to these deadly theories! It is easy to follow the evolution which made souls arid: from the austere and fearful God of the Jansenists, to the abstract and remote God of philosophers; to the supreme Being of the Revolution, to the

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<sup>5</sup> I Cor, XV, 24-28 "Afterwards the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God the Father...When all things shall be subdued unto him, then the Son also himself shall be subject unto Him that put all things under him".

<sup>6</sup> Jn 4:23

distant and impersonal God, pure axiom, before which the XIX century prostrates. Yet Jesus revealed a *living* God!

“As the living Father sent me and I live by the Father...”<sup>7</sup>, - a God who is essentially Father, and who has desired, out of pure mercy, to adopt other children through His Son.

The only way to go up the current which drags souls away from God and draws them away from Him is to go to the pure spring of evangelical doctrine, and show the world the true face of God.

Besides, this doctrine is not only most appropriate in religious matters. The social issue is becoming more widespread. Barriers are raised between classes. Hatred rules in hearts. In vain do economists look for solutions. Next to economic solutions, the Supreme Pontiff Pius XI pointed out the remedy which saves: “So, then only will true cooperation be possible for a single common good when the constituent parts of society deeply feel themselves members of one great family and children of the same Heavenly Father, nay, that they are one body in Christ, but severally members of one of another, so that if one members suffers anything, all the members suffer with it”<sup>8</sup>.

While today nations look at each other with distrust and the sentiment of patriotism is increasing, what progress peace will make when the doctrine of the divine fatherhood is propagated and, beyond the legitimate boundary lines, souls will be united in the love of the same Father!

## **DOCTRINAL VALUE OF DEVOTION TO THE FATHER**

It is not difficult to understand the appropriateness of devotion to the Father. However, certain perplexities regarding its doctrinal value emerge in those who see this devotion as something new. We will group them into three objections:

1. Is devotion to the Father compatible with devotion to the Holy Trinity?
2. Is there a danger that devotion to the Father could make us neglect the task of the Saviour’s divine Humanity?
3. Will devotion to the Father ensure the veneration, respect and adoration which form the virtue of religion, in man’s relationship with God?

In fact, we believe the doctrinal value of this devotion is manifested precisely in three characteristics:

1. because of this devotion the dogma of the Holy Trinity becomes a living truth for souls;
2. it allows us to understand the task of Jesus’ divine Humanity;
3. it is an elevated and authentic form of the virtue of religion.

### **1. The dogma of the Holy Trinity**

The dogma of the Holy Trinity is the culminating point of the doctrine, the sublime truth which brightens the peaks of faith.

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<sup>7</sup> Jn VI, 58.

<sup>8</sup> H.H. Pius XI, Enc. Quadragesimo anno, 15 May 1931.

Could it not be, instead, that it remains a dead letter for the majority of Christians?

Wouldn't it be sufficient to be a follower of the Master and follow His divine teaching, so that this dogma can become a living truth for souls?

Jesus did not teach His followers the existence of one God in three Persons all at once. He gradually revealed these profound truths to His Apostles and disciples.

We can point out the Saviour's teaching on the revelation of the Father in three stages.

**FIRST STAGE:** right from the beginning of His apostolic ministry, *our Lord taught men that God is Father.*

This is the sermon on the Mount<sup>9</sup>.

He urges His disciples to do good works so that the world, seeing them, may glorify the Father who is in Heaven<sup>10</sup>.

He tells them that an inner disposition is necessary and He condemns hypocrisy which even penetrates in the holiest actions – alms-giving, prayer, fasting – because the Father, who is in secret, cannot be deceived and the Father, who sees all, will reward upright intentions<sup>11</sup>.

He teaches His Apostles to pray to make them say: “Our Father who art in Heaven”<sup>12</sup>, and to show them that the Father who is in Heaven will have pity on those who pray to Him<sup>13</sup>.

He teaches them perfection in order to give them examples of the Father's perfection<sup>14</sup>, and to make it consist in doing the Father's will<sup>15</sup>.

Our Lord then teaches us the attributes of this Father; He points out His Providence to whom all His creatures' needs are known, and that He watches over even the birds of the air and the lilies of the field<sup>16</sup>.

A similar doctrine was already a true revolution.

The Jews were able to obtain from the Holy Books only a juridical and national concept of divine fatherhood, which was practised exclusively in favour of the chosen people. But they would never have dared to imagine a paternal God who is good and merciful, although the Prophets and Psalms had at times sung divine mercy in a moving way. They trembled before Yahweh. And here is Jesus, as we read in the Gospel, who right from His first speech pronounces the name of the Father seventeen times. The Gospel adds: “When Jesus finished speaking, the people were amazed at His doctrine”.

What Jesus preaches to the crowds, right from the beginning of His public ministry, He also teaches in particular to individuals, for example the Samaritan Woman<sup>17</sup>: it is the same teaching on inner dispositions, for what matters is “to worship in spirit and truth”; it is the same teaching on charity towards one's enemies – to the point that the Samaritan woman is amazed that He, a Jew, is talking to a foreigner; the same revelation of the Father.

What is new about this doctrine is that Jesus portrayed, in God, a Father, and not a severe Judge or dreadful lawmaker.

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<sup>9</sup> Mt V, VI, VII.

<sup>10</sup> Mt V,16.

<sup>11</sup> Mt VI, 2-18.

<sup>12</sup> Mt VI,9.

<sup>13</sup> Mt VII,11.

<sup>14</sup> Mt V,48.

<sup>15</sup> Mt VII,21.

<sup>16</sup> Mt VI,23-24.

<sup>17</sup> Jn IV.

But it still isn't a relationship of filial intimacy with God. God is good, paternally good with His children; Jesus emphasizes above all His fatherly Providence. He says: "your Father", but the word could have been and was certainly intended in a metaphorical sense, like a king who dedicates himself to his subjects, we could say: He is a father.

**SECOND STAGE:** *Jesus Christ teaches men that God is His Father.*

It takes Jesus three years to prove that He is the Son of God, equal to the Father, and, even in this case, He manifests His divinity gradually. He uses visible signs and miracles to bear witness to His divine strength and to prove that He is truly the messenger of the Father<sup>18</sup>. Since it is the Father who has given Him the power to accomplish His works, or rather, it is the Father who accomplishes them through Him<sup>19</sup>.

At the end of the last year of His public ministry, He solemnly confirms His profession of faith with which Peter, at Caesarea, on behalf of all the Apostles, recognized in their Master "the Son of the living God"<sup>20</sup>. The day before His death, He strongly affirms before His judges that He is the Son of God<sup>21</sup>.

Our Lord reveals His Father with the expression of His humanity towards Him.

He lives only for His Father. He came only to do the will of His Father. All glory must be given to His Father. He gives back to the Father all that He is, and all that He possesses, as man. Only the example of their Master could give the Apostles the highest idea of the supreme Majesty of the Father and of His infinite Love.

With what astonishment must they have listened to the words of Our Lord regarding the unique mutual relationships of knowledge and love that He has with His Father<sup>22</sup> and the unity of action and life which exists between them!<sup>23</sup>

What do those who listen to the Master understand, that the two possess the same divine life, but one is Father and the other is Son? They begin to glimpse the mutual relationships of the divine Persons, through the relationships between the Father and this man they love and who is the Son of God. However, they still do not understand, they still do not know that they too will have an intimate relationship with these divine Persons. In fact, does not the person of Jesus appear infinitely distant from their poor humanity? If He is God, equal to the Father, isn't there an insurmountable abyss between them, weak humans, and Him? Whereas, for a moment, they hoped that Jesus had come to fill in this gap...

But Jesus reassures them. Oh, what an unprecedented prodigy! He makes them understand, with the touching parable of the vine and the branches, what an intimate union exists between souls and Him. Jesus is the true vine. They are the branches. They abide in Jesus. The same vital lymph passes through them and Him. As long as they abide in Him they will bear fruit for the glory of the vine-dresser. And the vine-dresser is the Father<sup>24</sup>.

It seems as though the revelation is now complete. On the contrary! The divine Master announces something even greater, and He Himself announces the next stage: "These things I

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<sup>18</sup> Jn V,36.

<sup>19</sup> Jn X,32-38.

<sup>20</sup> Mt XVI,16.

<sup>21</sup> Mt XXVI,63-66.

<sup>22</sup> Mt XI,27; Jn III,26; V,20.

<sup>23</sup> Jn V,19-23; X,29; XIV.

<sup>24</sup> Jn XV.

have spoken to you in parables, but the hour has come when I will no longer speak to you in parables, but I will tell you plainly of the Father”<sup>25</sup>.

Plainly? In what way? Everything is summed up in one word: “The Father himself loves you”<sup>26</sup>.

THIRD STAGE: *our Lord teaches men that God, His Father, is also their Father.*

Here are the utmost secrets, the secrets reserved for the decisive hours. The Master gives His soul to His Apostles. He raises His eyes to Heaven and prays to His Father in front of them<sup>27</sup>.

They hear Him say that they are of the Father, and that the Father has given them to Him so that He may make known His name to them. This great Father, whose supreme Majesty immersed their Master in the most profound adoration, in His silent prayer on the mountain, became their Father, full of infinite love. Jesus dared to ask Him to give them the love with which He, the Father, had loved Him: “that the love wherewith you have loved me may be in them”<sup>28</sup> ... “you loved them as you loved me”.

He also asked that they may be with Him, wherever He went, in the bosom of the Father. In short, He revealed to men that the glory of filiation, which He naturally possesses, was earned and given by Him so that all may be one, as He and the Father are one.

Therefore, the Father of Jesus became their Father. He became our Father.

And when, after the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, He told her: “Go to my brethren and say to them: I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God”<sup>29</sup>. Jesus is not ashamed, as St. Paul says, to call men His brothers, not only because He has taken on their own human nature, but because He shares with them the same Father.

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However, along with the sorrow of the separation, a sense of restlessness remained in their hearts. The Master was about to leave them in order to ascend to the Father: would they be left alone? No! The divine Saviour promised them He would not leave them orphans<sup>30</sup> and would send them the Holy Spirit, His Spirit of Son which would bear witness to Him and guide them in the truth, by reminding them all that He taught them. And then came Pentecost!... and everything was transformed in them!... They didn't receive the spirit of fear, or slavery, but the Spirit of the Son, which from that day on cried out unceasingly to the Father, in the outburst of filial love: “Abba! Pater!”<sup>31</sup>.

In Jesus, through Jesus and because of Jesus, they had the right to say: “our Father” in the true meaning of the word.

The Son, by nature, with His Incarnation and Redemption, had “made them members of” His glorified Humanity and, God could pour out His infinite love of a Father on the great human family, so united by the same Spirit that they only form one single Body – the Mystical Body of Jesus. This is the unheard mystery which the first Apostles immediately preached. Let us

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<sup>25</sup> Jn XVI,25.

<sup>26</sup> Jn XVI,27 ‘Ipse enim Pater amat vos’<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Jn XVII.

<sup>28</sup> Jn XVII,26.

<sup>29</sup> Jn XX,17.

<sup>30</sup> Jn XIV,18.

<sup>31</sup> Rom VIII,15.

meditate, along with the Gospel, the first Letter of St. John and the Letters of St. Paul. We will be able to understand how they present the unfathomable mystery of Love to their listeners...

Religion wasn't a collection of negative prohibitions or interdictions; it was a way of life, a life "of fellowship with the Father and with the Son"<sup>32</sup>, a family life, a life which involved "relationships" with living persons.

And the Apostles, although they left mystery in its place, made it accessible... it became a light. Even the most ignorant people knew what a family is and, if they didn't know the analogy, they just had to analyze the most noble, most human and most natural sentiments of their hearts, in order to feel an attraction towards Him who wanted to be called their Father.

Why, therefore, do these sublime truths remain a dead letter?

Very often it is because we forget the Father, He who explains everything, He who is the Beginning and the End of all things.

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Let us admit it! Theology has examined this field very little. If we open up classical textbooks and dictionaries: at most eight, twelve, twenty lines talk about God the Father. If we look at the Bible Concordance under the word "Father" we might ask ourselves why there is silence, (the study of the other two Persons includes the First one too, obviously) or at least a limited space dedicated to the First Person of the Holy Trinity, compared to the Gospel.

Therefore it is not surprising that the faithful ignore the Father. It almost seems as if it were dangerous to talk about Him. We believe, instead, that devotion to the Father is the surest way to lead souls to live the dogma of the Holy Trinity.

There are two dangers from which we must defend souls in their faith in the Holy Trinity: that, on one hand, they may forget the unity of the divine nature and, on the other hand, the distinction of the three Persons.

In the first case, we are dealing with a sort of "tritheism", more or less defined: the three Persons are represented as three gods.

In the second case, we are dealing with the abstract and natural deism of philosophers.

Now, what precisely constitutes the certainty of the devotion to the Father is that it keeps the soul in plain truth: it distinguishes the divine Persons with worship given to the First one and, moreover, it safeguards the unity of the divine nature, by contemplating, in the Trinity, He from whom the other two receive life, one out of generation, the other out of procession, that is, the Father, the original, eternal and only source of divine life.

The mystery obviously remains the unfathomable truth but it becomes comprehensible by analogy. The words "father" and "son" take on meaning; they resound in hearts and the soul perceives with gratitude the infinite Love of a God who is three times holy, and who has deigned to use the most moving words in our human language to reveal to us the eternal plan in which the Father wished to make us His children, by adopting us in His Son, by means of the Holy Spirit.

## **II. The task of Jesus' divine Humanity**

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<sup>32</sup> 1 Jn I,3.

The faithful must avoid two errors in their spiritual life: first, of considering the Saviour's divine Humanity as an ultimate end without following up on it; second, of neglecting or underestimating that Humanity and of neglecting, or minimizing, His task in spiritual life.

It's interesting to note that the devotion to the Father often creates a surprising effect in souls. They are so powerfully attracted to everything about this spirituality that is appealing and consoling that they feel a bit perplexed with regard to the person of our Lord. They eagerly seek Him like Mary Magdalene did on Easter morning and would willingly ask: "Where have you laid Him?"<sup>33</sup>.

However, by examining this devotion closely, they soon discover with joy that for them Jesus is alive, more than ever. In the past they had too often considered Him an external model that lived 2,000 years ago, and whose virtues they had tried to imitate, with their personal efforts; now they realize that they are in Him and He is in them.

The Father has, so to speak, led them back to the Son, as if He wanted to say to them: "No one comes to me except through my Son. He will lead you to Me. Listen to Him. Do you want to know Me? No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Do you want to love Me? Only the filial love of the Heart of my Jesus can obtain my satisfaction, and your love must go through it, in order to rise up to Me. Do you want Me to love you? My Son consumes all the strength of my Fatherly love; it is in Him that I must find you to love you and extend to you the love I have for Him, since you have become one with my Son".

Devotion to the Father thus leads souls to the fullest intimacy with Jesus, to a sort of inner identification.

The soul then understands who the Mediator is.

By saying that this divine Humanity is like a bridge between humanity and divinity, we only express an incomplete truth, if not an error as well. We need a bridge to get from one side to the other. But, at a certain point we move away from it and leave it behind us: it was only a useful intermediary.

The incarnate Word is not an intermediary. He is the necessary Mediator who, in the unity of his Person, unites humanity and divinity. He is the road we must follow, the road which leads to the Father. The Son lives only for His Father. But He is one with his Father and His Father is in Him: whoever sees Jesus sees His Father, and will find the Father in Jesus.

The divine Humanity of the Saviour cannot be neglected, nor surpassed. It is precisely Jesus, the incarnate Word whose glorified humanity is now in the heart of the Father who by His grace, in the unity of His Mystical Body, leads us to the Father and wants to continue His filial life in our souls, made docile by His Spirit.

In short, devotion to the Father presumes, requires and demands the status of being children. We are children only through the Son, with the Son and in the Son.

We are far from a vague sentimentalism or an unnatural piety; for if we are talking about being children in our relationship with the Father, we can't expect to become children, or continue to be children, without following the Son on the path He shows us, by following His footsteps; conforming ourselves to His filial status with the disposition of our soul.

Now – and this constitutes a new doctrinal certainty regarding this piety – it is the grace of adoption that grants our souls the status of children; it makes us children by a true participation in the Son's divine nature. Therefore, we must let this sanctifying grace expand

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<sup>33</sup> Jn XX,15.

and reveal its work by means of the theological virtues, we must allow the Holy Spirit to arouse in souls, with the gift of mercy, outbursts of filial love towards the Father. These are the solid foundations of this spirituality. It puts the divine Humanity in its right place and gives the meaning of its action working in us.

### III. The virtue of religion

It is sad to observe that so many souls call upon Jesus the Man to ask Him for personal consolations.

It is true that in His merciful Goodness, our Lord Himself said: “Come to me all you are burdened and I will console you”. But if Jesus calls us to Him, it is in order to bring us to the Father; to expect from Him only the help that consoles *us*, is nothing less than running the risk of reversing the order of religion, by falling back on ourselves.

In fact, religion is not intended for creatures: it is for God, in order to give the Holy Trinity and the Father the adoration, prayer, reparation and thanksgiving on behalf of His children. Today the virtue of religion is very underestimated. By it man gives God the worship He deserves. Therefore, it is essentially a part of justice. It concerns God’s laws.

However, we do not belong to a natural order, as philosophers might conceive, outside revelation. In this order, the duty of religion would be of the creature towards His Creator; men should obey God’s laws only in His capacity as Creator.

Instead, the Son, Redeemer, out of His mercy, raised us to a supernatural state, and restored our filial relationship with the Father. Since then, everything has changed.

God not only has the right to be honoured as Creator. What characterizes the Christian religion is the right God has to be honoured *as Father*. In this case also, Jesus’ words: “The Father seeks adorers in spirit and truth” takes on full meaning.

We are certain that in every age there have always been, and in our times there are even more souls who are led by the breath of the Holy Spirit to give the Heavenly Father the worship He deserves. However, isn’t it true that, in the eyes of other Christians, their piety takes on a very personal form?

Whereas, we are not dealing with the spirituality of a particular school of thought. Or with the original trend of a free devotion. To say it clearly, this is the devotion which makes up Christianity.

Christianity essentially consists in the state of being children<sup>34</sup>.

We are rightly proud: when we see our brave Catholics stand up courageously and join together to defend and protect God’s rights, against the enemies of religion who violate them. However, there is a fundamental right of God which is too often violated by Christians themselves: *the right to be loved and adored as Father*, - as our Father.

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<sup>34</sup> Pius XI: “This is the great misfortune of those people who live without knowing what Christian devotion is... Christian devotion is not a set of useless practices, or vague sentimentality, rather it is a very solid and important thing, and at the same time it is very simple and very easy to understand and practice. We only have to raise ourselves to God: what is called “filial devotion” or, filiality towards God, conceived, loved and served as Father. Just as He desired, and as Jesus Christ, the divine Redeemer, taught us: *Pater noster!* As the Apostle interprets when he says that the greatest gift the Redeemer has given us, is to place in His hearts, at the price (and what value this price had!) of His Blood, the Spirit that is precisely the reflection and the living expression of God’s Spirit, for which we say from the bottom of our hearts: *Abba Pater*”. (To the Italian Catholic Youth, 4 December 1927).

Now, the right of God demands the correlative duty. It is the *absolute duty* of Christians, who by Baptism became God's children, to give Him due worship as Father and to let the filial spirit which the Holy Spirit pours forth in them penetrate into their virtue of religion. Man's relationships with God are thus increasingly spiritualized; prayer truly becomes the impetus of the soul who loves, it is no longer a painful duty imposed by an external law, but rather a necessity that comes from the heart. By a supernatural instinct, the soul unites the spontaneous effusions of its filial love, to the profound respect which makes it bow down before the Father "of infinite Majesty"<sup>35</sup>.

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In fact, Father Faber used to say that the essential characteristic of devotion to the Father is : "an infinite tenderness". We can add that it elevates souls by giving their life the most noble of ideals, that which fills Jesus' entire life: the glory of the Father that *frees* them, by purifying them of the selfishness that can penetrate even the most sincere devotion, and *establishes them in peace*, establishing them in the certainty of the infinite Love of the Father, who is full of mercy and goodness. (...) Today we entrust to our Most Blessed Immaculate Virgin Mother our desire to assist the numerous souls of priests, religious and lay people to become the fervent apostles of this devotion, so that, following Jesus' example, they may work to make the praiseworthy Father known, loved and served, the same Father whom He has revealed to us.

8 December 1935

N.B. The word "devotion" is not to be understood in the restricted sense which the faithful usually give it – that of a particular form of worship, which is addressed to a particular saint rather than another, but rather in the broad and theological sense, *devovere*, to devote oneself to – to consecrate – to offer – to give oneself entirely. Devotion to the Father is a regular disposition of the soul, a disposition capable of identifying oneself not only with the actions of the virtue of religion, but in all the actions of the life of God's children. It is a fundamental state for which the soul, recognizing Jesus' dispositions and religion as their own, regarding His Father – particularly His filial love –consecrates itself filially to God the Father, who by Christ's incarnation and by the grace of adoption has become our Father; it is offered to the adorable will of the Father, like Jesus and by means of Jesus; - it offers all its work to the divine service, for the glory of the Holy Trinity, which was proclaimed in He who is the Beginning, the only source of divine life, in He who eternally begets His Word and who, along with His Son, is the origin from which the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally. The object of this devotion is God the Father, the first Person. However, the formal object is not directly the function which the Father accomplishes in the Holy Trinity, but the consideration of His relationship with us, who became His adopted sons, in His Son. Our soul consecrates itself to the "Father of mercy" "who has so loved the world as to give His only Son". – Among all the duties which the filial soul desires to fulfil towards its heavenly Father (the duties of adoration, abandoning ourselves to His holy will, trust), there is one in particular towards which it is naturally inclined, with generous tenderness: the duty of reparation. It is determined, with its filial faithfulness, to make up for the ingratitude of so many Christians towards the Father, thanks to whose love we owe the supreme Gift – so often forgotten – of His Son.

15 September 1937

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<sup>35</sup> Words of the *Te Deum*.