

Burning With Love

By Rev. R. Stevenson, S.J.
Catholic Truth Society of Ireland No.pr459a (1959)

A CATHOLIC, thinking about the difficulties he faces in the modern world, will readily see that, more than anything else, he needs a deeper, fuller knowledge of, and an enthusiasm for Jesus Christ. All about him, he finds childish intellectual pride, false notions about God, crass and widespread materialism, sensuality in crude and base forms, a coolness towards God and religion, and even despair. For himself as a Christian he knows that Christ is not only the very centre-point of his religion, but that He is also a sure defence against deception, error and folly; “ He that follows Me walks not in darkness” (Saint John 8:12). It is proposed therefore to show, that devotion to Christ’s Sacred Heart is no mere outmoded novelty of the seventeenth century, but that it is precisely the devotion suited to the needs of the day.

All the world knows that the present 20th century is one of extraordinary scientific progress. If our forebears could see the advances made since it began, they would be astonished, in the full, literal sense of the word. Through industrious application, clever research and a measure of good fortune, men have succeeded in uncovering undreamt of secrets of nature. One cannot help feeling however, that had we been the very superior beings we conceive ourselves to be, these secrets would have been discovered much earlier in human history. But since vast numbers of men have no solid background of an accepted philosophy — much less a bulwark of Christian theology, provided by the catechism, it is quite easy for them, because of these human achievements, to adopt a superior and conceited attitude towards God, if indeed through faulty reasoning they do not deny Him altogether. But because man has discovered the principles of electricity or radio television, atomic power or even space travel, it by no means follows that he is master of all knowledge. This would seem to be the most obvious of all platitudes, and yet, it is quite unappreciated by vast numbers of otherwise clever and educated men. Why, one might ask? Because success and some specialised knowledge without humility and balance of mind, easily dispose one to the attitude of mind, which we call intellectual pride, a prevalent failing of the day.

In these circumstances, it must be clear that humility is a need of our age, for humility leads to further knowledge. It leads even more surely to the kingdom of heaven. “God,” says Saint Peter, “resists the proud, but to the humble He gives grace” (1 Saint Peter 5:5). This being so, could there be a more suitable practice for our time than devotion to Him Who said: “Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart”? (Saint Matthew 11:29).

But modern life is a complex thing, and the modern world suffers from other ills besides intellectual pride. Christians today find themselves handicapped by the most inadequate and false notion of God, by which the heresies, deprived of the guidance of the true Church, represent the Almighty. Omitting practically all idea of God’s justice, except where it is convenient to remember it, they picture Him as a kindly old Man, so full of benevolence, as to be forgetful of being true to Himself! He would never ask anything hard! Hence honesty, matrimonial fidelity, the burdens of parenthood, church-going, prayer and the like, have become for the non-Catholic masses ‘forgotten far-off

things'. The result of this attitude is a definite coolness towards a personal God, manifesting itself in the empty churches, — or in the less extreme cases, in the presence of the merest handful of worshippers. The reason is of course different, but the effect is the same as that produced by the Jansenist heresy of the seventeenth century. For this latter landslide, the remedy prescribed by Our Lord himself was revealed to Saint Margaret Mary in 1675. It would seem certain that the same devotion to the person of Christ is precisely what is required in our own time.

In the days of the Old Law God was truly mysterious and unknown: the Jews knew comparatively little about Him. He was spoken of as the King of kings and the Lord of hosts, dwelling in regions of indescribable glory and magnificence. So it was that Isaia (Isaiah) could say; "Verily You are a hidden God" (Isaiah 45:15). The whole divine Being seemed almost completely removed from a very imperfect human understanding: "My thoughts are not your thoughts; nor are your ways my ways... As far as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my thoughts above your thoughts," says the Lord (Isaiah 55:8).

Once again, the reasons for lack of knowledge of God are different, but the effect is the same. There was an excuse for the Jews of old, which does not exist now, for the coming of Jesus Christ on earth has revealed to men the very mind, if one may put it so, of God.

Taking up the gospels they can learn the things God did — the life He led on earth, the words He spoke, even His thoughts. A thorough knowledge then of Our Lord, gained from the gospel in prayer, is a knowledge of God; a solid love of the Sacred Heart is a love of the Godhead. For this we have Christ's own words: "He that sees me sees the Father" (Saint John 14:9); and again: "No man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

The third characteristic of our modern age, as has been noted, is materialism. For Catholic and non-Catholic alike, its cult, a logical outcome of the so-called Reformation, is the cause of widespread unrest, and a serious stumbling-block for the individual Christian. Its grossest forms meet him on every hand, and it is not difficult to see why they grip the world so firmly.

Hemmed in as men are by the things of sense, it is hard to realise that these things are not what they seem to be; that though they are seen and handled every day, and seem solid and lasting, they are shadows compared with things unseen, the realities among which they shall be living before many years have passed. So it comes that many live for money and success, love or self-indulgence, deifying by their lives these passing things of time, as surely as the Jews of old, who bent the knee to the golden calf. Catholics would be a great deal more than human if, surrounded as they are by such living, they were not influenced in some way by this widespread foolishness, and overawed by the worldly success, which plays such an important part in the thinking of so many non-Catholics.

If they would be shielded from this childish error, what better haven could be found than in the Heart of Him Who said: "Have confidence, I have overcome the world" (Saint John 16:33).

But one of the most striking, and to many people revolting sides of modern life, is the preoccupation of the masses with sex.

Public behaviour, theatres and cinemas, radio and television, newspapers and magazines, novels, conversation and pastimes, even fashions, keep it constantly before the eyes and minds of Christian and non-Christian alike.

It must not be concluded from this that 'sex' is in itself something 'bad'; the contrary is the truth. The instinct of parenthood placed in the human heart by God is not only wise, necessary and good,

but even beautiful and holy, provided it is used according to the laws of God and nature in holy matrimony.

But the new-pagans seek sex gratification merely for the animal pleasure which it gives, without apparently any regard to its true end, its duties and responsibilities.

At times, they go so far as to pervert it in unnatural, beastly and degrading manner.

Great numbers of men and women, either through ignorance, lack of intelligence or selfishness, try to build successful marriages on the physical reproductive instinct alone, forgetting or ignoring, that the only motive for a successful married life is love.

Of course, the consequences are disastrous, as the daily sessions of the divorce court show. Here too the loving Saviour has an important lesson for the masses, the lesson of true unselfish love.

“Learn of Me,” He says, showing how to love unto the end on Calvary. “Greater love than this no man has, than that a man lay down his life for his friend” (Saint John 15:13). Even more important for misguided humanity is the revelation of a love that alone can fully satisfy. “Our hearts were made for You, O Lord,” writes Saint Augustine in his ‘Confessions’, “and they shall never rest until they rest in You.”

So much for the groping, misled millions, outside the fold of the true Church. But we Catholics are also in dire need of the love and leadership of the Sacred Heart in our own private spiritual lives.

Thoughtful observers sometimes notice a leaning towards religious extravagance in the lives of some of our Catholics. This expresses itself in an over-ready credence given to wonders and marvels, new “revelations” — even superstitions and religious ostentation, to the detriment, and often the neglect of the Ten Commandments, the Mass and the Sacraments.

Devotions, good in themselves, sometimes tend to be multiplied, distracting attention from what should be the very core of our Christian Faith, Jesus Christ Himself.

To non-Catholics, this is something entirely baffling. They meet ‘pious’ people who are slack about Sunday Mass, the Sacraments, married life, honesty, truth or such like, and one cannot blame them if they find an apparent contradiction here, between the high ideals of the Church and, the daily life of many of her members.

If then our Catholic churches are to be frequented by the lapsed as well as by the practising, and if the Christian way of life is to flourish in the home and place of business, it can only be done through the divine leadership of Christ.

The enthusiastic love of the Saviour, which has drawn men over the ages to lives of unbelievable heroism and beauty, is the only power on earth, which can move the masses.

“I, if I shall be lifted up from the earth, shall draw all things to Myself” (Saint John 12:32). The present Holy Father, Pius XII, referring in his Encyclical Haurietis Aquas to the false materialistic philosophy and way of life of today, writes “And where, venerable Brothers, must we seek the remedy for these evils surely unsurpassed in history, which so gravely threaten individuals, families and nations in every part of the world? Can we find any more excellent form of devotion than this one of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, any form of devotion more fully in harmony with the Catholic Faith, or better suited to relieve the needs of the Church and of the human race today?”

I. THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

It strikes one as strange that Christians, including so many Catholics, know so little about Our Blessed Lord — the kingliness of His Person, the attractiveness of His character, and the burning love of His divine Heart. True indeed, artists throughout the ages have supplied us with paintings of Christ; and modern commercial art has not been wanting in pouring out thousands of pictures. But for the most part, they are disappointing, and large numbers of representations do us a disservice. So many portray the Saviour with pretty, feminine features, and He was, of course, in every sense a Man, with all the qualities of perfect manhood.

A parish priest in the midlands of England has had a life-sized photograph of the holy Shroud of Turin framed. It hangs in his dining room, flanked by curtains, which can be drawn in reverence at meal-time. A quite considerable body of opinion holds that this is a real likeness of Our Lord. If so, it is certainly most striking. Standing on a chair, so as to be level with the feet in the picture, one finds, that Christ must have been ‘tall, perhaps six feet two or three’, and when one raises one’s eyes to look at the countenance, the qualities of nobility and kingliness are immediately most apparent. There is nothing weak, pretty or girlish here, and if the face could come alive on the canvas; if the eyes could open; the lips smile and the wan cheeks take on the colour of life; if the expressive hands could move and the tongue speak, here indeed would be the most wonderful Person Who ever walked the earth, the Man God, Jesus Christ.

In appearance, He was attractive and undoubtedly fascinating. Above all His eyes, with their merciful, reproofing or at times angry looks, must have struck all who saw them. In them one might perhaps read a little of the holiness and sinlessness, of the love and tenderness that was His. Was it not He Himself Who said, “Is not the light of your body your eye?” (Saint Luke 11:34), and surely both His eyes and countenance must often have been lit by a light that was not of this world.

We never read that Jesus was sick, and though He was full of the energy and well-being that comes from good health, we sometimes read that He was tired from bearing the heat and burden of the day, having traversed the dusty roads of the Holy Land, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead to life, disputing with the scribes and Pharisees and seeking the lost sheep. Indeed all His journeys seem to have been made on foot, and apparently, He thought little of such tedious and difficult climbs as that from Jericho to Jerusalem, where the road rises 3,500 feet, through arid, rocky country under the blistering heat of the sun.

At day’s end, Christ slept little, often under the stars. But at first dawn, He was about, apparently fully refreshed in mind and body after the few hours He allowed Himself. At times — how often we do not know — these hours were devoted to prayer on the mountainside, — pernoctabat in oratione” (Saint Luke 6:12) ‘he was passing the night in prayer’.

Since most of His life was spent out of doors, it is not to be wondered that He took a great pleasure in external nature. He loved the hills and the sea, the mountains, the flowers and the birds. Indeed many of His sayings are about these same flowers of the field and birds of the air; about moving mountains or about the life of fishermen. So beautifully does He allude to these things, that, if one did not know he would surely ask, is not this the greatest poet who ever lived? Who is He?

Combined with Christ’s kingliness of character and sublimity of mind we find most wonderful humility. As He washes the feet of the apostles, He would teach them and us to learn from Him, not that He is a King, all-powerful or all-pure, but that He is meek and humble of Heart.

While He is powerful and strong, He is also so gentle, that He would not break the bruised reed; and though He is all-holy and spends many nights on the mountainside in prayer, He forgets not to pass

much time with a ‘wicked and adulterous generation’. How indeed can we explain this majesty and lowliness, this strength and gentleness, this holiness and mercy combined, unless we remember that besides being God He is also Man, the Word Incarnate?

While it is undoubtedly true that the mind of Christ was most sublime, it is also true that He had an eye for the things of every day life. To His disciples He would wish none of the simple joys denied. There was to be no fasting while the Bridegroom was with them. “The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say; Behold, a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners. And wisdom is justified by her children” (Saint Matthew 11:19). With these and suchlike words He defended their life and His own, refuting criticism on the very lips of those who would speak.

Though Christ’s human Soul had the vision of the Godhead all through His life, nothing escaped Him in day to day matters, and going beyond appearances, He had a mind for the heart and core of things. He hated hypocrisy and mock holiness, and so He spoke to the Pharisees about “whitened sepulchres” and their liking for honour, respect and salutation in the market place. Indeed so factual is the mind of Jesus Christ, that we might reconstruct a picture of life in His time from His parables and sayings; the doing of the merchants and the fishermen, the priests, and even the children playing in the streets. Nothing is missed. Though He had no idea of political revolution, He knew all about the Caesars, Rome, the taxes and the burdens of the people. To one who would tempt Him He replied “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s but to God the things that are God’s” (Saint Luke 21:25).

It is of course unnecessary to recall that Our Lord was a hero, — indeed the world’s hero. Everything that He did bore the stamp of heroism. In spite of His constant rejection by priests and people, and even betrayal by His friends, He never gave in. His dying words show implicit confidence in the heavenly Father and in His mission. Indeed, He takes heroism as a matter of course, and likewise asks it of His followers. The young man is to leave all things and follow Him; another is told to let the dead bury the dead; yet another that he must ‘hate’ father and mother; others still, to sell what they have, give to the poor and come after Him. First things must come first, and neither sentiment nor attachment may hold a man back. For His own part, though the world has never seen such magnificent, inspiring and generous love, He preserves it quite unmixed with any trace of either sentimentality or softness. When occasion demands He can be ruthless. Is it not from the lips of the loving Saviour that we hear words, which wither up a fig tree, because it bears no fruit?

But of all the characters of history, Christ stands out as a leader of men. He had but to summon to be followed enthusiastically; “And immediately, leaving their nets, they followed Him” (Mark 1:18). And while He evoked love and enthusiasm, He could at the same time command both obedience and deep respect. The gospel tells us that on one occasion, while the disciples followed Him they were afraid. When they faltered or showed foolishness, He could chide and reprove, sometimes sternly. When Peter, in an excess of love and solicitude for the Master’s welfare, would stand between Christ and His cross, he was told, “Get behind me Satan, for you are a scandal to Me.” Yes, even the multitude feared Him and fled before Him when, knotting some ropes, He drove the buyers and sellers from the temple, because they profaned the Father’s House. No wonder the people, admiring His authority, asked, “Who is this man?” Is He Elias (Elijah)? Jeremias (Jeremiah)? One of the prophets come to life?”

Writers and preachers have filled the books of the world with the theme of the Good Shepherd. Artists have exhausted every aspect of Christ and the sinner. That is as it should be. But to understand a little of His boundless love and mercy we must not forget, that His mind was saturated with knowledge and understanding of human nature. He knew men at their best and at their worst, at their highest and at their lowest, and His sympathy was wider and deeper than the combined oceans of the world: infinite as God and unsurpassable as Man. Like the good Samaritan, His Sacred Heart melted at the sight of the poor man robbed of grace, dying in his sins by the roadside of life. What wonderful stories He told on this theme: The Prodigal Son, the lost sheep, the labourers in the vineyard and a host of others. He sought neither a man's wealth nor influence. He was dazzled neither by rank nor arrogance. He wanted the human heart — the heart of the sinner. His kingdom was, ever will be that of hearts and souls. "Behold," He might well have said, "I stand at the door and knock" (Apocalypse 3:20).

What mere human pen could dare to write of Our Lord's interior life? Were a writer to try, he would find himself lost in the greatest of all mysteries, that of the Blessed Trinity. Nevertheless, one thing can be said without fear of contradiction: for Christ, the Father, and the Father's Will, was His world and His reality. That Will was the motive force in everything He thought, said or did. Since as God He possessed perfect union with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the Blessed Trinity, and as Man He enjoyed the beatific Vision of the Godhead, there was no place, in our sense, for prayer. Often He claimed that He was not alone, and that He and the Father were one. In this perfect completeness, He needed neither the company nor the advice of any man. He needed neither possessions, applause nor profit; neither family life, honours nor advancement. In the Father He was rich in everything. Did He not renounce even His holy Mother, and the consolation of Her perfect service, for the Father's mission?

This is our sinless Saviour Who neither trafficked with temptation nor acted on impulse. He is it Who offers each one of us an undying friendship, throughout ages without end. Well might we re-echo the words of Saint Augustine when we think about it:

"O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, too late have I loved You!"

II. THE REVELATION OF DIVINE LOVE THROUGH THE HEART OF CHRIST.

According to a well-known story, a certain bishop was examining the boys for confirmation, when the following dialogue took place.

His Lordship: "Three Persons in one God? That seems strange to me. I can't quite understand that?"

Small boy: "You are not supposed to, My Lord. It's a mystery."

Yes, the Blessed Trinity is a mystery, but one important aspect we do know.

The Heavenly Father contemplating His own all-perfect Essence from eternity, generates the Word. As a human word is the expression of an idea in the mind of some person, so the Word of God is the expression of the Father's contemplation from all eternity. Now God is so admirable and so perfect that, seeing Himself, He must necessarily love Himself with an infinite love. This love is the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Love, by which both Father and Son mutually love one another from all eternity. Of this, namely the Holy Ghost, Saint Francis de Sales writes in his *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu* (Treatise on the Love of God):

"If human friendship can be so agreeable and even delicious, what can one say on seeing the exercise of this reciprocal Love of Father for Son and Son for Father? With what admiration and ecstasy would our hearts be filled?

As however this exercise is, of its nature, not for us here below, God has chosen, if one may put it so, to simplify matters for us, by sending His Only-begotten Son into the world, to take a body and soul like ours, and to live a human life.

Now it is all very well to talk about the love of God in an abstract or speculative way, but poor human nature needs something concrete, something tangible. How for example can one know the magnificent idea in the mind of the artist, unless he expresses it on canvas or in sculpture? Even when he does so, owing to the human limitation of skill, it will not fully and perfectly correspond with the ideal existing in his thoughts. He will be dissatisfied with his own execution and technique. The finished work does not come up to his ideal. Still, as we look at the work we say, "What a beautiful picture! What a wonderful statue!" It has revealed something to us. But God's skill is not limited, and so for us the love of Jesus Christ is divine Love in tangible form. We can read about it and hear about it. In the gospel, we have not only the words and actions of Love, but also Its attitude towards certain things and Its very thoughts! For the Jews of old, God was a hidden God, but as He did not wish to remain hidden from us He decreed the Incarnation, and so 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us'.

But that was only a beginning. The Saviour proved His love in His life. In a certain sense as Man, that love grew stronger from day to day.

The enthusiastic patriotism of a young man is quite a different and inferior thing to that of the veteran soldier who has campaigned and suffered many wounds for his country. It is quite unnecessary to ask, which is the greater love? The love of the young Virgin Mother bending over the crib at Bethlehem is quite a different, and one might add, inferior love, to that of the Mater Dolorosa (Mother of Sorrows), standing by the cross. Thirty-three years of work and suffering have deepened Her attachment to, and Her love of Her divine Son. So too by His life and suffering, Christ as God, proved His unbounded love for us; and as Man deepened and strengthened it. Every time He smiled, spoke, walked, worked miracles, His deed, actuated by the Spirit of Love, was both an act of love and a progress in love. His death on the cross was the final proof of His supreme charity. "Greater love than this no man has, than that a man lay down his life for his friend" (Saint John 15:13).

Often as we hold the crucifix in our hands, we try to think of this crowning token of love. But, though we look at the crucifix, we cannot help wondering if we have ever really seen it? For there are two things about it we find hard to grasp. The first is that the Saviour is nailed to the cross in place of each one of us.

If we could only imagine ourselves in the condemned cell with an execution hanging over us in a day's time; if in our hands we could picture a message from the governor, informing us that, if we find a substitute to stand on the trap door and take the drop for us, we may have our freedom, then perhaps we might succeed a little in convincing ourselves of the truth that, since the Saviour is nailed to the cross in our place, a crucifix is the symbol of the greatest love we either know, or even can experience.

Secondly, we have not the slightest idea of the horrors of this death by crucifixion, and it is only when we read accounts of the dread and ghastly sufferings of men like Blessed [now Saint] Oliver

Plunkett or Blessed [now Saint] Edmund Campion, that our mind flies over the centuries to Calvary, and we think of the warm Blood, the Precious Blood of Jesus, shed in love for us!

There is however still another most striking aspect of Christ's Love, which brings home to us that this is not a thing of yesterday — not merely a happening of two thousand years ago. This is a living, warm, pulsating thing. The activity of Christ's love is prodigious in our individual lives of every day. No day passes that we do not experience its wisdom, bounty and mercy. There is no personal conflict in which it does not take part. For a conversion for example, there may be a thousand or more such conflicts. In each of these, divine Love plays its part, as it does against every temptation and in every victory. There is no phase in life in which it is absent, labouring for our happiness and our eternal success. Just as Christ is prodigal of Himself in the Blessed Eucharist, so too in the hearts of millions of men and women, Christian and pagan, no stone is left unturned by "...Our Saviour, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

The Prophet Ezechiel (Ezekiel) puts this all very beautifully when he says:

"For thus says the Lord God: Behold I myself will seek my sheep, and will visit them.

"As the shepherd visits his flock in the day when he shall be in the midst of his sheep that were scattered, so will I visit my sheep, and will deliver them out of all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and will gather them out of the countries, and will bring them to their own land: and I will feed them in the mountains of Israel, by the rivers, and in all the habitations of the land. I will feed them in the most fruitful pastures, and their pastures shall be in the high mountains of Israel: there shall they rest on the green grass, and be fed in fat pastures upon the mountains of Israel.

"I will feed my sheep: and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord God.

"I will seek that which was lost; and that which was driven away, I will bring again: and I will bind up that which was broken, and I will strengthen that which was weak, and that which was fat and strong I will preserve: and I will feed them in judgement...

"I will save my flock, and it shall be no more a spoil, and I will judge between cattle and cattle.

"And I will set up one shepherd over them and he shall feed them..." (Ezechiel 34:11 and following verses.)

III. THE REVELATION TO SAINT MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE.

"And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, because they shall return to me with their whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:7).

One might be liable to think that devotion to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord was something relatively new in the Catholic Church, but this is far from the truth. Tertullian and Saint Augustine, in their homilies on the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, speak of the Church, born from the side of Christ, opened by the spear, as being prefigured by this passage of Genesis. In Saint Athanasius we read: "Of all the wounds of Our Saviour, none is comparable to that of His side, from which issued blood and water. As by the woman who was formed from the side of the first man, came the fall, so also Redemption and Reparation have come to us from the open side of the second Adam. Redemption by blood, and purification by water." Indeed, it was common teaching in the early church, as recalled by Pius XII in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, that the Church was born of the eternal love

of God, from the pierced Heart of Jesus Christ. So speak Saint Ambrose, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Bonaventure and many others. From these days to our own, there have been numerous apostles of the devotion to Christ's Sacred Heart, of whom it is sufficient to mention Saint Mechtilde, Saint Gertrude and Saint John Eudes.

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque is however, the apostle of the cult as we know it, and it should prove helpful to trace briefly the extraordinary and beautiful story of Paray le Monial.

The seventeenth century is noteworthy, amongst other things, for the appearance of the heretic Jansen, who was born in 1638. Like many other heresies, his teachings contained a great deal of truth: they were almost true. He claimed that God is so holy, so pure, so spotless and immaculate, and man is so sinful, impure and full of moral corruption, that he never could be worthy to kneel at the altar rails and receive God into his heart at Holy Communion. This of course is true: no one, no matter how saintly, could be worthy to receive Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist. But Jansen overlooked, or he forgot or disregarded the wish of Our Lord, Who said, "Take and eat" and, "Do this in commemoration of me" (Saint Luke 22:19). Or again "He that eats this bread shall live forever" (Saint John 6:59). Under the conditions then of being free from mortal sin, fasting according to the laws of the Church and having a right intention, Holy Communion is not only permissible, but it is a command of Christ's which He wishes fulfilled.

But Jansen's teaching appealed to the rigorists, and through their preaching and example, an added excuse was found for the non-practising masses, already grown cold in God's service, and slack in attendance at their religious duties. Others also, in great numbers, commenced to fall away, and so the churches continued to empty on an ever-increasing scale. Sunday Mass was more and more neglected, and prayers and pious practices dropped by ever increasing numbers of the faithful. It looked as if this heresy, already so acceptable to many, was going to spread like a plague over the Church. But of course, Christ could not look on and see His plans frustrated, so, in an extraordinary way He countered and overcame this evil thing.

In the centre of France, at a place called Terrau, near Maconais, a little girl, afterwards called Margaret Mary Alacoque, was born in the year 1647. She grew up an extraordinarily holy child, and it is said of her that, at the age of four, she made a vow of chastity. Whether this is true or not, is immaterial. When she was twenty-four, she begged admission, and was received, into the Visitation convent at Paray le Monial. Margaret was never considered clever, nor would she herself have claimed to be, and she had a facility for making mistakes, that in Ireland would have earned her the adjective 'left-handed'.

The little novice, spiritually away ahead of the others, was of course handicapped by her facility for 'breaking delph' (our Irish way of saying 'breaking dishes') and generally getting practical affairs muddled. However, she was professed. This did not of course change the character God gave her, or make her more clever or practical. Naturally, she found the constant humiliation of her mistakes depressing, thinking herself useless, and imagining that she was not wanted by the other members of the community.

Our Lord of course revealed Himself to her a number of times, but for the sake of brevity and clarity, the revelations, will be pieced together here as if they all happened on the one occasion. Filling in details, according to one's devotion, the scene may be thought of as follows:

It is a June evening in 1675. Being more than usually depressed, and haunted by that feeling of not being wanted, the young nun kneels in the back bench of the convent chapel. It is almost dark, and

the place is very quiet. Before the altar, the flicker of the sanctuary lamp sheds a glow over the tabernacle and the apse. Sister Margaret's cheeks are moist with tears as she prays: "Lord, nobody wants me! Do You?" "Lord, nobody wants me! Do You?"...

As she speaks, a wonderful thing happens. It seems to her as if the tabernacle door opens, very quietly and very slowly, and from it there begins to issue a golden cloud of light. Gradually it fills the sanctuary, till even the chapel is flooded with splendour. The wonder on the saint's face changes to rapture and joy as, to her amazement, a still more extraordinary thing takes place. She seems to see, standing in the centre of this cloud of light, Our Lord Himself in glory: His countenance is shining as with the light of many suns; His garments are white as snow; the wounds in His hands and feet are blazing in majesty. On His face, there is a sad, sweet smile. Spellbound she watches as, raising His hands and drawing aside His cloak, He shows her His Heart. Not a word is spoken as she gazes. The Heart is crowned with thorns, surmounted by a little cross, enveloped in flames, and pierced with a lance. From the wound so made, one drop of blood oozes forth.

Sister Margaret is struck dumb with delight and amazement. Forgetting all about herself, she is rapt in love and adoration.

Now Jesus speaks. It seems to her that she has never heard any sound more beautiful than His voice. Her heart beats fast with joy, until she hears what He has to say.

"Behold this Heart which has so loved men that It has spared Itself nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself to testify to them Its love. And in recompense, I receive from the greater part of men nothing but ingratitude, contempt, irreverence, sacrileges and coldness, which they have for Me in the Sacrament of My love. But what is still more painful to Me is, that those who treat Me thus are persons consecrated to Me..."

Such was the scene. Our Lord went on to ask for her love of reparation, to atone for such neglect, and commanded her to tell the world that He wished this love from others also. Sister Margaret demurred. No doubt, she pleaded lack of sufficient intelligence and education. Any way she was a cloistered nun. How could she preach this love? But these difficulties were easily solved. Blessed {now Saint} Claude de la Colombière, a young Jesuit priest, was given her as helper, and today the devotion is spread all over the world. In all those places in every continent, where the Catholic Church is free to preach her doctrines, the Sacred Heart is loved and honoured. One will scarce find a Catholic church without the well-known Statue of the Sacred Heart, showing to each worshipper the sad token of His rejected love.

Simply, quietly and without any great external show, God has defeated Jansenism. Wherever the faithful are urged to do as Our Lord asked, the faith is strong, the churches full and the Blessed Sacrament adored. Nowhere is this better seen than in Ireland, for we did not completely escape the chilling breath of Jansenism. But today, owing to the labours of apostolic priests in our midst, amongst whom one might mention Fr. James Cullen, S.J., Christ is ardently loved. It is only necessary to mention the consecration of most Irish homes to the Sacred Heart, the First Friday Communions in every parish, the 'Pioneers' and the 'Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart,' which travels each month to every part of the globe, to begin to understand the greatness of this apostolate, but more important still, the power of Christ's love over a Catholic nation. [The magazine is now known as The Sacred Heart Messenger.]

It can be truly said then, that in the modern world Our Lord has brought about a most remarkable change. This He has done, as must be evident, by changing the individual, strengthening his faith

and warming his love. But the battle is not won till every heart is conquered, and in this campaign, each of us can help, by securing that Christ's love reigns in our own hearts. What practices, or what plan of action we should adopt to this end, are matters well thought out for us in the so highly recommended Apostleship of Prayer. With its help and inspiration, it is possible to deepen our love and come ever closer to Our Lord.

“Heart of Jesus, burning with love for me, inflame my heart with love of You.”

IV. THE NATURE OF DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART.

In order to avoid ambiguity it is necessary to make clear to ourselves, what exactly is the nature of devotion to the Sacred Heart. What precisely does it mean?

The object of the devotion is clearly the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, in a double sense. This means the physical Heart in the first place. As Our Lord is both God and Man, His sacred members are all hypostatically united with the Godhead, and therefore His holy Body and its members, whether in life, in the tomb or in heaven, are all worthy of our supreme worship, called by the theologians *latraria*.

In the second place, the Heart is the symbol of love. At all times and in all places and among all peoples, the human heart has been considered as the symbol of love. Because the heart is effected by the emotions, it was at one time thought to be their source, beating as it does, faster or slower, according to the emotion experienced. So for us, Christ's Heart symbolises His excellent, adorable love, both human and divine. Just as the flag of a country recalls all the glories, the sufferings and the triumphs of a people, to the proud heart of one of that country's subjects, so the Sacred Heart is for us a token or a symbol of the Saviour's ardent love.

At the same time, we do not separate the Heart from the Person. The Heart signifies and sums up the Person of Our Lord, Who is the object of our devotion:

“To conclude,” writes Fr. E. Hugon, O.P., “we adore in the Sacred Heart the physical Heart of Christ, symbol of love and love symbolised: directly the human love, indirectly the divine love, which causes human love to burn; and our cult is directed towards the very Person of Jesus, ‘loving all and all-lovable, in the Heart which He shows to us and which He offers us’.” (Le mystere de l’Incarnation, 1921.)

Pius XII, writing in *Haurietis Aquas*, points out that — “(The) Church accords the cult of supreme worship to the Heart of the divine Redeemer... for two reasons. The first of these... is based on the principle that His Heart is hypostatically united to the Person of the divine Word, and therefore entitled to that same cult of adoration with which the Church venerates the Person of the ‘Incarnate Son of God’... The second reason applies in a special way to the Heart of the divine Redeemer, demanding for it on particular grounds the cult of supreme worship. The basis of this claim is that His Heart, more than any other member of His body, is the natural sign or symbol of His immense charity towards men.”

“Therefore,” he continues elsewhere, “from the physical thing, which the Heart of Christ is, and from its natural significance, we can and must, supported by Christian faith, rise not only to contemplate His love, which is perceived through the senses, but even to meditate on and adore the most sublime infused love, and finally the divine love of the Incarnate word.”

Referring our love back to the Person of the Incarnate Word, he continues:

“Thus the Heart of Our Saviour is a reflection of the divine Person of the Word and also of His twofold nature, human and divine. It not merely symbolises, but sums up in itself the entire mystery of our redemption. When we adore the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, we adore, in and through it, the uncreated love of the divine Word and also His human love, together with His other emotions and virtues.”

Such, according to theologians, was Our Lord’s intention in revealing to Saint Margaret Mary in 1675, the love of His divine Heart. Taking this beautiful symbol, and placing it before our eyes, He asks for two things, love and reparation. In order the more to move ourselves to responding to His appeal, it should prove helpful to consider, first the symbol, and secondly, however briefly, one or two aspects of His love.

The symbol is well known to all from the statues seen in any Catholic church. There is first of all the Heart, from which proceed flames, typifying the intensity of the Saviour’s love. These flames are crowned by a small cross, to remind us that this love proved itself under the most trying of ordeals, namely death. “Greater love than this no man has, than that a man lay down his life for his friend.” Humanly speaking therefore, we have here the token of supreme love. We know no greater. Such love is surpassed alone by the divine, which we can represent to ourselves only by analogy and in a very imperfect manner indeed.

Next, we notice that the Heart is encircled by a crown of thorns. This is to remind us of Christ’s unspeakable Passion, in which, in His generosity, He carries alone the load of the sins of the whole world.

Lastly, we see the Heart transfixed by a sword or a spear, and from the wound oozes one single drop of blood. The Fathers of the Church, preachers and spiritual writers, leave us in no doubt about the significance of this feature.

“The Mystical Body of Christ is born from the transfigured Heart of Our Saviour,” are the words of Pius XII in the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*.

From all this one can see, that when Our Lord showed this telling and beautiful symbol to Saint Margaret Mary, and through her to the world, He was reminding us all of many things which, if they were to be written down would fill books, and even then, owing to technical and theological language, be neither as telling and appealing to the world at large, as the simple and so extraordinarily moving manifestation of His rejected love made at Paray le Monial.

Christ’s love has at least two aspects, which must prove most attractive to everyone. His is an undivided and an unselfish love.

When Catholics kneel at the altar-rail for Holy Communion, the priest comes to each and holding aloft the Blessed Sacrament says, in the rubrics of Saint Pius V: “May the Body of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, guard your soul unto life everlasting. Amen.” While he says this, he places on the tongue of each the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity made Man, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, whole and entire! Each receives the whole Christ, not in any way diminished by what is received by the others. In like manner, each of us received the whole love of Christ, as if no other human being ever existed. How is this possible? The answer is that of the catechism — “With God all things are possible, and nothing is difficult to Him.” Surely, this is a tremendous thought — all the love of Christ for me!

But there is even more to it than that. Christ loves us for ourselves alone, for what we are, and not from any gain or advantage to Himself. Knowing us at our best and our weakest, He still loves us.

Some years ago a certain girl, who was engaged to be married, came to her priest for advice. The priest knew her family and herself. "Father," she said, "you know of course that I am engaged to be married? But I cannot make up my mind whether Tom loves me or my money! I am troubled, for it would not do for us to make a mistake."

This would not be the first case, nor will it be the last, of a man marrying for money! But for our purposes, it is a good example of the so-called *amor concupiscentiae* — loving for what one can get, as opposed to the *amor benevolentiae* — the love of well-wishing, or true love. Our Lord loves each of us with this latter love. He loves us for what we are, and for what He hopes to make of us in heaven. Our happiness and success give Him great joy. Our failure, or sin, causes Him indescribable suffering and anguish. This is of all loves, the purest and most wonderful. Neither father nor mother ever had an affection to compare with this love of the Being Who is both God and Man, Jesus Christ.

Now two things are abundantly clear. The Heart of Christ was often bruised by the sin and ill-success of those He loved. In some mysterious way sin still strikes at His Godhead, and so He asks for atonement, called Reparation. Which of us could refuse this atonement to Our Loving Friend? An enthusiastic love, burning daily in our hearts, inspires us to all those acts, proposed by the Apostleship of Prayer — prayers and acts of love, Mass and Holy Communion.

V. SOME PROMISES OF THE SACRED HEART.

The twelve promises, which we find in prayer-books and manuals of devotion, are taken from the writings of Saint Margaret Mary. Her writings contain many other promises also, and the twelve are not even a summary of them all, but they are taken as the twelve best calculated to arouse sentiments of love in the hearts of the faithful, and to induce them to practise the devotion.

In a sense, there is nothing new about them. They are prefigured even in the Old Testament:

"All you that thirst, come to the waters; and you that have no money make haste, buy and eat... Incline your ear and come to me; hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you... Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unjust man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him... for He is bountiful to forgive..."

"You shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall sing praise before you, and all the trees of the country shall clap their hands. Instead of the shrub shall come up the fir tree, and instead, of the nettle shall come up the myrtle tree; and the Lord shall be named for an everlasting sign, that shall not be taken away" (Isaiah 55).

Thus did God promise the Jews the bounty and mercy of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. In even more precise terms, Our Lord promises mercy, love, success and heaven, in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere. The words therefore of the Sacred Heart to Saint Margaret Mary are a re-affirmation of the divine plan for our salvation: God wishes all men to be saved.

In the space at our disposal, it would be impossible to take all the promises and deal with them in detail, but four can be considered with profit.

1. "...It is by this means that the Sacred Heart of Our Loving Saviour wishes to save many souls from eternal perdition."

Saint Margaret Mary gives numerous examples of how the devotion brought about the conversion of sinners in her own experience. Any priest will bear out, from his dealings with souls, that those who can be got to love and honour Our Lord, cannot long remain in their sins.

There are few, if any Catholics, who would make so bold as to say they were not sinners, since the just man is said to fall seven times a day! They would have it otherwise, and they would at least wish they could be good. There can be no surer way to this end than by a boundless enthusiasm for the cause of the Sacred Heart, in our own souls and in those of others. "Nothing," says the saint, "is sweeter, nothing gentler, and at the same time stronger or more efficacious, than the sweet unction of the ardent charity of this loving Heart to convert the most hardened sinners."

2. "Devotion to the Sacred Heart is a sovereign remedy against tepidity."

No one is more exposed to this dread spiritual disease of tepidity, than the person who seriously strives to be good. Alas, as everyone knows, it can eat into the very vitals of our spiritual life. Sometimes it is brought about through monotony, discouragement, or even laziness or self-love, but it is always highly dangerous. If it is not quickly shaken off, it brings with it great peril, even to our eternal salvation. The very least that can be said about it is that, at best, it greatly diminishes our heavenly glory and reward.

Here then are the words of the saint:

"Our Lord wishes through this devotion to His divine Heart, to rekindle the charity that has grown cold and has almost been extinguished in the hearts of the greater part of Christians; He wishes to give men means of loving by His Sacred Heart, as much as He desires and merits, and of making reparation for their ingratitude. If we are cowardly, cold, impure, imperfect, the Sacred Heart is an ardent furnace where we must purify and perfect ourselves like gold in the crucible. It will purify all that is imperfect in our actions, and sanctify those that are good."

3. "I will give priests the power of touching the most hardened hearts."

In a sense, we are all priests. Whether lay or clerical, all of us must work for the salvation of other souls. There is no such thing as going to heaven alone; just as there is no such thing as not influencing others for evil. Either we are striving for heaven and bringing others with us, or inversely, we are dragging others down. All good Catholics then partake in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Indeed, even in Ireland, there are very few families where there is no 'black sheep' to be converted. So much is this so, that many people frequently complain of their lack of success. If they only knew the secret! And who can understand this better than the priest, who must daily visit the black sheep of the parish, so often without success. As doors close in his face, and as he drags his weary footsteps to the next case, he cannot but feel, that if the love of Christ were really burning in his heart, his plea would be well-nigh irresistible.

4. "I promise you in the excessive mercy of My Heart,
that Its all-powerful love will grant to those
who receive Holy Communion on nine first Fridays of the month consecutively,
the grace of final repentance:
they will not die under My displeasure or without receiving their Sacraments.
My divine Heart making Itself their assured refuge at the last moment."

There is in this, the Great Promise, the difficulty of reconciling it with Catholic teaching, that no one can be sure of final perseverance. There is, according to Fr. Lawson, S.J. (The Nine Fridays, Catholic Truth Society, London), the moral certainty of persevering to the end, keeping the faith and dying in the state of grace.

But perhaps the best answer one can give is contained in the two following, facts:

It has often been noticed that many who make the Fridays, keep the practice up all their lives, and it is pretty generally accepted, that those who worthily receive the Sacraments monthly “never go far wrong,” as the saying has it.

The second fact needs no comment, bearing out, as it does, Our Lord’s own words.

A certain priest, who had been in charge of a Sacred Heart Confraternity for over thirty years, could tell a brother priest:

“Father, I have been over thirty years in charge of this Confraternity. In that time, I have assisted at many death-beds and many funerals in this big parish — I should say, about five hundred in all. This I can truthfully say, on the evidence of my own experience; I have never known a faithful member of my Confraternity to die either an unhappy death or without the Sacraments!”

VI. GENEROUS LOVE: THE DEDICATION OF A LIFE TO THE SACRED HEART.

To specially chosen souls, the Sacred Heart holds out the most difficult and most perfect way of friendship and atonement for sin, namely the religious life, or the way of evangelical perfection. We read in the gospel of a certain young man, of apparently generous disposition who, while keeping the commandments, is anxious to go further and signalise himself in the service and love of God. To him Christ says:

“If you will be perfect, go sell what you have, give to the poor, and come follow Me” (Saint Matthew 19:16).

The programme was however too much for him, for he walked away and we hear of him no more.

Of course, the close following of the Sacred Heart is hard: for the apostles it meant martyrdom for all, except Saint John. For a religious it means dying to the world, out of love of Jesus. Saint Ignatius Loyola, writing to his followers, expressed the wish that they should be men ‘crucified to the world, to whom the world also is crucified.’ This generous and loving “crucifixion” is of course brought about by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which a religious takes at the end of his novice-ship.

Christ, some say, was nailed to the cross with three nails: one through the right hand, the second through the left and the third through the feet.

With the right hand, a man gives and receives gifts and money. By the vow of poverty, a religious nails that hand to the cross. He may neither give nor accept money or presents, without the permission of his superior.

The left hand is nearest to the heart. It is sometimes stated that, from the third finger of the left hand, an artery connects directly with the heart, and hence on that finger a woman wears her wedding ring. A religious centres his affections and interests on Christ, when, through the vow of chastity, he nails that hand also to the cross.

By the use of his feet a man walks. He can betake himself hither and thither, even to the ends of the earth at his own sweet will. Binding himself to the will of the superior, a man restrains his activities, curbs his own will, to go from place to place, to take part in this or that work. And so the vow of obedience completes the crucifixion with Christ on the cross. What more wonderful following could there be? How could a man love more, unless he too spill his blood for Christ in martyrdom?

These three virtues were loved and practised by the Sacred Heart.

He was born in poverty — in a cattle lair. His foster father was poor. His Mother was a country working Girl. His life was lived in poverty, for He had not whereon to lay His head. He died on the gibbet of the cross, a forsaken outlaw, and was buried in another man's tomb.

For us He feared riches and, warned — “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Saint Luke 18:25).

So, down through the ages, in order to have nothing come between themselves and the love of Jesus, holy men have run away from, and forsaken their riches. They felt that if they were to be in any sense worthy companions of Christ, they could not follow in wealth, comfort and ease, while their Friend lived in near-destitution.

Of course, non-believers have said strange things about Our Lord. Some said He was mad; others that He was not the Son of God; others still that He neither died nor rose from the dead, and so on. But no one has ever cast the slightest shadow of doubt on his immaculate chastity. His close friends were the pure and the chaste — Our Lady, Saint Joseph and Saint John. Even Mary Magdalen could not become His friend, till she had cast aside her sins and self-indulgence.

For the pure, Christ has the highest praise and the highest reward. As God He understands what devotedness and fixity of purpose, what love and what self-sacrifice it demands of poor, fallen human nature. At the same time, we cannot imagine anyone desiring to be His close friend, and achieving this wish, unless he be chaste. Of course, cleanliness of heart means many things, as the Scripture scholars are not slow to remind us, but one cannot escape having the feeling, that Our Lord was thinking specially and lovingly of the pure when He said: “Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God!”

Is there need to speak of obedience? The Boy Christ, going down to Nazareth, was from His earliest years, subject to Joseph and Mary. In His life, everything is ordered according to His Father's Will — even to the very death on the cross.

What then can one say of the man or woman who so loves Jesus Christ, as to take up His yoke and His burden? That they find it sweet and light, we take from the lips of Christ Himself. This however can be said with truth: there can be no more generous love, and no more perfect way of serving the Sacred Heart and — is it necessary to add? — no more infallible way of calling down every grace and blessing on home, family and self. God has not yet been outdone in generosity, and he who gives all receives the full measure, pressed down, shaken together and flowing over.

Who else, if we exclude the martyrs, can say with deeper meaning than the religious:

“Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in You!”

Thanks to the Irish Messenger.
