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PUBLISHER’S NOTE: Clarence J. Enzler was the author of many Catholic books and booklets, including *My Other Self* (1957) and *Everyone’s Way of the Cross* (1970). His nine-part series of Lenten reflections, published under the title “Heroism and Holiness,” first appeared in the *Ave Maria* magazine in February, March, and April of 1963.

Lenten Reflections

Eight: Heroic Holiness Demands a Heroic Apostolate

BY CLARENCE J. ENZLER

To insist that holiness resides in what we *are* rather than in what we *accomplish* is not to say that it is a private affair.

On the contrary, holiness is so little a private affair that it demands an apostolate. And heroic holiness demands a heroic apostolate.

This can be a frightening thought; but surely it is a realistic one. The essence of holiness is love, therefore it has love’s characteristics; and what is more characteristic of love than its dynamism, its aliveness, its need to express itself?

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See how the heroic holiness (love) of St. Paul and St. Francis Xavier drove them to magnificent missionary endeavor; and how the holiness of St. Thomas Aquinas found expression in the “divine” *Summa*.

It was the heroic love (holiness) of St. Francis of Assisi which brought forth the great Franciscan orders, and the love of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Peter Claver that “made them” minister to the poor, the sick, the enslaved.

Heroic love and loving holiness is channeled into different activities in different saints: In Mother Cabrini it led to schools, orphanages, hospitals; in St. John Bosco to instructing the young; in St. Charles Borromeo to founding the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; in St. Catherine Labouré to introducing the Miraculous Medal.

Heroic apostolates, all. And consequently discouraging to you and me? Never! For though heroic holiness demands a heroic apostolate, the caliber of the latter is not necessarily measured in terms of manifest achievement. How indebted we are to St. Thérèse for conclusively demonstrating this truth!

Everyone’s Way of the Cross

Clarence Enzler’s perennially popular *Everyone’s Way of the Cross* was first published by Ave Maria Press in 1970 and has since gone on to sell over 3.6 million copies, in both a [regular](#) and a [large print](#) edition. Ideal for either private devotion or public Stations of the Cross, Enzler’s meditation booklet urges us to carry on Christ’s “unfinished business” and unite our will with His.

Here was a young woman who taught by the minutest details of her life what all the saints have had to learn, namely that “Our Lord doesn’t ask for great achievements, only for self-surrender and for gratitude...it isn’t that He wants us to do this or that, He wants us to love Him.”

But like all love, Thérèse’s needed “to be proved by action.” Indeed, so insatiable was her love that “to be betrothed” to Our Lord as a Carmelite, to become through union with Him “a mother of souls,” even this was too little for her vaulting ambition. She wrote in words addressed to Our Lord Himself, “I feel as if I were called to be a fighter, a priest, an apostle, a doctor, a martyr; as if I could never satisfy the needs of my nature without performing, for Your sake, every kind of heroic action at once.”

“I’d like to travel all over the world,” she continued, “making Your name known and planting Your cross on heathen soil; only I shouldn’t be content with one particular mission. I should want to be preaching the gospel on all five continents and in the most distant lands, all at once. And even then it wouldn’t do, carrying on my mission for a limited number of years; I should want to have been a missionary ever since the creation, and go on being a missionary till the world came to an end.”

So it was that her heroic love gave to the Little Flower a heroic apostolate; that without leaving the cloister she became, after her death, the heavenly patroness, with St. Francis Xavier, of the Catholic missions.

St. Francis Xavier made history. The Little Flower, so far as the world knew, created hardly a ripple. Yet because of the common denominator of love, they share the exalted privilege of being patron and patroness of the mission apostolate. How encouraging this is!

Even if holiness were not apostolic by nature, Our Lord would have made it so by His last words before he ascended to His

Father. “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the very ends of the earth.”

Though He spoke to the Apostles, Popes and Bishops from St. Peter to His Holiness John XXIII have never ceased interpreting this command as one involving an apostolate of the whole Church. Every Catholic, then, from the beginnings of the Church until now, has had a duty, conferred by Baptism and Confirmation, to be an apostle.

It is in our own century, however, that the layman’s call to be an apostle has become particularly insistent. St. Pius X: “What is the one thing that the Church today needs and will need in modern times more than anything else? An intelligent, informed, holy, and active laity.” And again, “Give me in every parish a handful of laymen—alert, well informed, devoted—and I will change the face of the earth.”

Pope Pius XI: “It is necessary that all men be apostles.... None can remain inactive.”

Pope Pius XII: “The consecration of the world is essentially the work of the laymen themselves.”

Pope John XXIII: “Take action, then, boldly and with confidence. Heavenly light will shine upon you. God’s help will be granted you.”

Why? Why does our age demand more apostolic effort of you and me than other eras demanded of their laity?

Surely it is caused in part by a widespread decay of morals. In many quarters today there is little more sense of sin or of shame than existed in that period of moral nadir just before the Incarnation.

Even more surely it is caused by a decay of faith. Now has come to pass Cardinal Newman’s prophecy of a century ago.

“All times,” he wrote, “have their special trials which others have not. I think that the trials which lie before us are such as would appall and make dizzy even such courageous

hearts as St. Athanasius, St. Gregory I, or St. Gregory VII....

“The special peril of the time before us is the spread of that plague of infidelity, that the Apostles and Our Lord Himself have predicted as the worst calamity of the last times of the Church.”

Not only is faith in Christ’s divinity being eroded, but even belief in God’s existence at all.

Do not say this has always been the case. It has indeed been true of individuals—but today we live in a world largely, perhaps predominately, irreligious and proud of it; and Christianity has never faced that situation before. In other days there was superstition, but not infidelity; not a complete casting off of the idea of religion, of unseen powers that govern the world. Even among the skeptics of Athens, St. Paul could appeal to the Unknown God.

And partly the demands upon us of the laity stem from progress in literacy and communication. In earlier generations, to believers and unbelievers alike, even to those who hated the Church he represented, the priest stood intellectually tall.

Now the unbeliever no longer looks to the priest. More and more, only the lay believer can catch his eye and command his ear. And this is why the consecration of the world is essentially the work of the laity, “of men who are intimately a part of the economic and social life, and who participate in the government and legislative assemblies” (Pius XII).

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What must we do? How is the holiness of the lay person to be expressed in an apostolate?

It seems strange in a way, but the fact is that the basic set of instructions for the lay apostle—still applicable today—was set down by St. Peter in his first Epistle:

He tells us what we are: “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people that is God’s possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of Him Who called you out of darkness....”

There must be about us an aura of calm serenity, fitting one who has abandoned his will to that of the all-loving, all-wise, all-powerful God. In an age of unrest, doubt and fear, we must be rocks of confidence.

Our faces must exhibit the gentle strength that is the hallmark of holiness. There must be in our manner such an undercurrent of joy and gladness that others will be happy to be near us.

He tells us how to act: “See that your conduct among the pagans is praiseworthy, so that...they may...glorify God when He grants them the grace of conversion.”

On the street, in the home, at the office; on the playground, at the beach, on the golf course and tennis courts, in the hospital, the university, the nursery school; in the courts and the prisons; in the theaters and libraries, we must carry Christ to the world. We must introduce Him by our example, recommend Him by our life, extend His kingdom by our prayers.

He tells us how to speak: “Be always ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you the basis of the hope you cherish. Do this, however, with meekness and reserve.”

The atmosphere of charity must be our mantle. Our actions and attitudes must point quietly to one fact: That we love our neighbor as Christ loves us. How frequently it happens that our manner offends. How easy it is to become angry, impatient, and resentful when others do not agree with us.

We must be ready to “give an answer.” It is no excuse to say we are not prepared. True, the Catholic who goes into the world expecting to hold his own in religious discussions by parroting the pat answers of the catechism is due for a rude, disappointing and painful awakening. We have precise

positions to uphold and explain in terms that make sense to intelligent, if doubting, Thomases; and it seems to take considerably more than a diploma or a degree from the typical Catholic high school or college to fit us for the task. If this is true, the fault lies partly at the door of educators but partly also at the door of parents. Some educators act as if *all* the *rights* of educating were theirs. Many parents act as if *none* of the *responsibility* of educating were theirs. No wonder neither educators nor parents are satisfied with the product.

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If we ourselves are ill-prepared we have a certain duty to train ourselves in how to take advantage of opportunities to speak up for the hope we cherish, in how to approach others, in letter writing, in how to do all that an apostle should do—gracefully.

St. Peter tells us to share our talents: “Each of you should use what endowments he has received in the service of others, as good stewards of the manifold bounty of God.”

It used to be customary to tithe out of one’s income. But it has always been more important and is so today to tithe out of our time. Nobody can tell anyone else how much of his time or of his income he should devote to apostolic endeavors. But it is certain that we are obligated to be reasonably generous with both.

Each of us is free to choose apostolic endeavors which fit his ability and circumstances—CCD, family life, interracial justice, Legion of Mary, Holy Name, Sodality—but we *must choose*. If circumstances prevent our devoting ourselves to outside activities, we can at least devote some time to study, spiritual reading, writing letters, or to the best and most effective apostolate of all—he apostolate of prayer.

“Beloved,” St. Peter says, “rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ.”

To be an apostle will not be accomplished without difficulty. Our Lord did not promise to spare us work and trials. He promised only to make our burden light. We will meet with rebuffs even as He did. We may have to endure calumny, false charges, scandal, as He endured the charge that He had a devil. Some of our friends may turn against us, and wound us, as He was wounded when His friends deserted Him.

Yet all the while He will be with us. Deep within our souls we will know that our sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the joy of being His apostle.

“Above all things,” St. Peter writes, “practice constant love among yourselves; it wins forgiveness for many sins.” In this, perhaps the best-known of St. Peter’s admonitions, is the supreme test of today’s apostle.

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How speedily we are entrapped by pride and self-preferment when we are opposed even by those of our own Faith, those who do not choose to march side by side with us in our particular apostolate. Surely this is an indication that our apostolate is more of ourselves than of Our Lord. Christ told us to expect opposition. Why become angry when it comes? It is all too easy to forget that God asks us not to succeed in our apostolate but only to try, so that He can take from our efforts what He wants and fill up in them what is lacking for their success.

The co-operation of the laity with the hierarchy, according to Pope Pius XII “has never been so necessary” as today. “It seems to Us,” he said, “that Christ is repeating to each of you, the question He put to Peter: ‘Do you love me?’ and He is looking each of you straight in the eye, hoping to read there

the sincerity of your reply: ‘Yes, Lord, You know I love You.’”

And to Christian women he addressed these words particularly appropriate to this series of articles: “Never in the course of humanity have events required on the part of woman so much initiative and daring, so

much fidelity, moral strength, spirit of sacrifice and endurance of all kinds of suffering—in a word, so much heroism.”

Holiness *demand*s expression—an apostolate. Have you found yours? Are you working at it?

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