

CATHOLIC ACTION FOR CHRIST OUR KING

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CATHOLIC ACTION FOR CHRIST OUR KING

INTRODUCTION

What can we do to help re-establish the reign of Christ the King in modern society? In the world today, the rights of Christ and His Church have been systematically attacked and suppressed to the point that Our Lord has been exiled from society. Modern world rulers, instead of working for the reign of Christ the King, are working for the *Reign of Man*, by setting up mankind as the god of this world.

This is especially evident when we consider that the criterion, or norm, for truth and error, good and evil, and law and order in the modern world is no longer the authority of God and the Church of Christ, the Ten Commandments, or even the natural law, but rather the authority of man—that is, the State and the “common will” of the people, based on the so-called “rights of man” with no reference to the rights and commandments of God, and man’s duty to love, honor, and serve God in this world in order to save his soul.

Some may say: “But what can Catholics do, seeing that we are so few?” In response, we can point out that Our Lord began with only twelve Apostles, yet consider how His Church has spread over the whole world since its foundation. So, it’s not a question of numbers, but rather of using the means which Christ has given to extend His Kingdom, which are: His Church, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Sacraments, public and private prayer, the missionary work of priests and religious, and finally, the work of Catholic Action.

Christ wants to reign over the minds and hearts of all men, but He also has the right to reign over all nations. The mission of the Church, therefore, is to work for both goals. Catholic Action refers to the role of the laity in this work. Unfortunately, due to ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of many Catholics, this important apostolate has been neglected, leading to the appearance of other socio-political movements, imbued with a reactionary and revolutionary spirit, all claiming to be working for the restoration of social order. And the real danger is that Catholics may be drawn into the errors of these false movements if they are not sufficiently instructed in the

Church’s social doctrine and in the principles of Catholic Action.

The enemies of the Church have always tried to associate Catholics with anti-government movements in order to accuse the Church of promoting political unrest and a spirit of rebellion against the State. In fact, most of the great persecutions against the Church throughout history were based on this false accusation (e.g., Nero and the Roman Emperors, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I of England, the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution, etc.).

Catholics, therefore, should be on their guard not to be influenced by or associate with those persons or movements that promote a disregard towards civil authority, or socio-political antagonism by subversive and revolutionary ideas such as neo-Nazism, neo-fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, and white supremacy. And although such movements may claim to be combating communism, capitalism, globalism, and the like, they are in reality being manipulated by Marxist forces, whose method of “dialectics” is precisely to create socio-political unrest and disorder—by antagonism, disinformation, and contradiction—so as to impose their own socialist and anti-Christian solutions.

Our Lord said to St. Peter and the Apostles: *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And behold I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world* (Matt. 28:19-20). By these words, Our Lord entrusted to His Apostles and their successors His redemptive mission of bringing the means of salvation and sanctification to all men, and of extending His social kingship over all nations.

The faithful, too, as members of the Church, play an important role in extending the social reign of Christ. This is especially clear when we consider that it is precisely the role of the laity to direct, organize, and perform the activities of the temporal order, seeing that the role of the Church is principally in the spiritual domain.

Pope Pius XII says in his allocution to the members of Italian Catholic Action on September 4, 1940:

From this it is clear how exalted is the mission of Catholic Action, since it contributes to the attainment of the very end of the Church: to labor for the salvation of souls, and to continue through time and space the work of Our Lord Jesus Christ for the redemption of men. Is this not the high purpose of the Church and of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, to convert the world and to unite all nations in the Kingdom of God?¹

The same Pontiff admirably expresses the generosity and selflessness of Catholics in their works of Catholic Action in the same allocution:

Membership in Catholic Action does not elevate to a position of privilege or of superiority, but it infuses into its members a conscientious purpose to make themselves, through a spirit of humility, self-denial, and charity, "*all things to all men*" in order to win all men to Christ, and to regard themselves, like the Apostles, as "*debtors*" to all men, to share with them the ineffable treasures which they have received from the divine Bounty.²

And as St. Pius X says in his encyclical *Ed- itae Saepe* of May 26, 1910, on the Third Cen- tenary of the canonization of St. Charles Bor- romeo:

The same designs and plans of affectionate forethought, Venerable Brethren, find a practi- cal application in that Catholic Action which We have frequently recommended. To take part in this most noble apostolate, which embraces all the works of mercy that are to be rewarded with the eternal kingdom, the elite are called.

But when they assume this burden, they must be ready and fit to make a complete sacri- fice of themselves and all things belonging to them for the good cause, to bear the envy, con- tradiction, and even hatred of many who will repay their benefits with ingratitude, to labor like "*good soldiers of Christ*," to run "*by pa- tience to the fight proposed to us, looking on Je- sus, the author and finisher of faith*." A conflict, assuredly, of great difficulty, but one that is most efficacious for the well-being of civil so- ciety, even though complete victory be slow in coming.³

Fr. Denis Fahey, in his writings on Catholic social order, shows the necessity of understand- ing the principles of Catholic Action in order to

assure harmony between the clergy and faithful in this important apostolate:

It is certainly true ... that it is in great measure because Catholics fail to live fully as members of Christ that Our Lord's enemies succeed in their designs.... But it is also true that Catholics succumb to [their] machinations ... because they are not trained for the real struggle in the world. They leave school with- out adequate knowledge of the organized oppo- sition they will have to meet and with their minds hazy about the points of social organiza- tion for which they must stand and against which attacks are being directed. They do not realize that the opposition's ultimate aim is the disruption of Christ's order, and they are not ac- customed to think that they must co-operate with other young Catholics for Our Lord's pro- gram.... Thus they display a lamentable lack of cohesion and a pitiable want of enthusiasm for Christ's interests, with the result that Catholics who stand for integral Christianity can always count on finding other Catholics in the service of the enemy.⁴

Cardinal Ottaviani also expresses his con- cern when he says:

"The frequency and power of crime have blunted Christian sensibility, even alas, among Christians. Not only as men, but also as Chris- tians, they do not react; they do not leap to their feet. How can they feel themselves to be Chris- tians if they are insensitive to the wounds which are being inflicted on Christianity? Life shows its existence by the sensation of pain, by the vi- vacity by which it reacts to a wound, by the promptness and vigor of the reaction. But in the midst of rotteness and decomposition, there is no reaction..."⁵

1. THE APOSTOLATE OF CATHOLIC ACTION

A. General View of Catholic Action

Following is a historical sketch of Catholic Action, found in the foreword of *The Lay Apostolate*, a volume, previously cited, in the Papal Teachings series edited by the Benedictine monks of Solesmes:

The objectives [of the Lay Apostolate] were expounded fully in the vast synthesis of the encyclical *Il Fermo Proposito* of St. Pius X: *collaboration in the evangelizing mission of the*

¹ *The Lay Apostolate*, Papal Teachings, ed. Benedictine Monks of Solesmes (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1961), p. 425.

² *Ibid.*, p. 434; emphasis added.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 249; emphasis added.

⁴ *The Mystical Body of Christ and the Reorganization of Society* (Cork: Forum, 1945; facsimile reprint 1984), p. xi.

⁵ Quoted in Jean Ousset, *Action* (Saltcoats, Scot.: Ap- proaches, n.d.), p. 10.

Church and in her work of civilizing the world; in the defense of her liberties and her rights: such will always be the goals to which lay collaboration must always be directed.

The conditions under which this activity will be effective will be found in fidelity to the principles on which the Popes, one after the other, never cease to insist: submission to the hierarchy, unity of forces, and the spiritual formation of those involved.

By approving new organizations, by changing the nature of those which no longer are adapted to modern circumstances, above all by directing their activities now towards one, now towards another of the objectives mentioned above, the Popes have marked the successive stages which give Catholic Action its different forms at different times.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the defense of the Church and of Christian life, which were threatened in Germany and in Italy by the attacks of Rationalism then in power, called into being the first Catholic Federations: German and Italian Congresses, Italian Catholic Youth. These groups were encouraged by Pius IX, and his successors were happy to see in this the first achievements and the starting-point of the organizations of Catholic Action.

With Leo XIII and St. Pius X, the now-organized forces of the laity were called to face a new danger. To build an effective barrier against Socialism, they were asked to introduce into economic life and public life that social doctrine of the Church of which Leo XIII will always remain the uncontested master.

Leo XIII, again, gave "Catholic Action" its name, which was destined to become so important. He drew up its charter in the encyclical *Graves De Communi*, while St. Pius X, in *Il Fermo Proposito*, developed for it a theological synthesis.

The gaps left by the war in the ranks of the clergy led Pius XI to introduce a new orientation: direct help in the work of evangelization. This field of activity, hitherto in the second rank of the objectives assigned to the laity, would at the same time present the hope of evading, legally at least, the demands of a totalitarian State which claims for itself the whole corporate and social field. The repeated appeals of the Pope, the organization extended to all countries, and the appearance of specialized movements always make the name of Catholic Action inseparable from that of Pius XI....

Just after the upheavals of another war, Pius XII made new appeals to meet the new needs. By renewing the Sodality of Our Lady, he united them to Catholic Action, like a body of chosen troops. At the same time, he invited

all men of good will, wherever they come from, to strive in all spheres in the urgent work of saving souls and the construction of a "better world."⁶

Fr. Mateo Crawley-Boevey, SS.CC. (1892-1961), the saintly priest whose principal apostolate was the enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the home, gives some important insight into the apostolate of Catholic Action (as reorganized by Pius XI) in his book, *Jesus, King of Love*:

Catholic Action, today a worldwide apostolic crusade, had its official starting point in Italy under the personal high supervision of its founder, the great Pius XI. This clever and saintly Pontiff personally wrote and traced its program—the social strategy of Catholic Action—and installed and codified the genuine supernatural spirit of this modern crusade.

Invited in 1925 to join the movement, I had the honor of preaching Catholic Action in 104 dioceses of Italy.

It's interesting to observe that while several times Pius XI modified and corrected the program and the tactics of Catholic Action according to what experience suggested, he never modified a line or a word of what he had affirmed from the beginning concerning the fundamental Catholic ideal: the supernatural soul of this providential crusade!

... "A Catholic Actionist must necessarily be an apostle of Jesus Christ"

[He] must be the forerunner of the great King, preparing the way, and then building the City of God in the midst of de-christianized society, under the guidance of the hierarchy, and in constant filial touch with the bishops and the clergy.

...this social apostolate, so delicate and so important, presupposes in the Catholic Actionist a superabundance of faith, a solid piety, radiating, expanding from his own soul.⁷

*** Note: Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Catholic Action**

In all our works of Catholic Action, we should always have recourse to Our Lady, for just as Our Lord has come to the world through her, so also it will be through her intercession and devotion to her Immaculate Heart that Our Lord will pour forth His divine grace to convert

⁶ Pp. 9-11 *passim*.

⁷ (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 1997), pp. 107-108.

the hearts of men and forgive their sins, and establish His social reign over all nations.

Thus, in his Radio Message to the Lebanese Marian Congress of Oct. 23, 1950, Pius XII emphasizes devotion to the Virgin Mary for the members of Catholic Action:

Active members of Catholic Action will look up to Mary, who is the surest means of leading souls to Jesus.⁸

St. Pius X, in his encyclical *Ad diem illum* of Feb. 2, 1904, also says:

Can anyone fail to see that there is no surer and more direct road than by Mary for uniting all mankind in Christ, and obtaining through him the perfect adoption of sons, that we may be holy and immaculate in the sight of God?⁹

Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Iucunda semper* of Sept. 8, 1894, underlines the importance of devotion to the Blessed Virgin in view of the miserable conditions in the modern world, both in the spiritual and temporal domains:

As the sad conditions affecting both the Church and civil society proved to us the extreme need for signal aid from God, it was clear to us that that aid should be sought through the intercession of his Mother.¹⁰

And, lastly, we should all call to mind the words of Our Lady to St. Dominic over eight hundred years ago: “*One day, through the Rosary and Scapular, I will save the world.*”

1) Catholic Action: Spiritual and Temporal Domains

* *Note 1:* In this study, the term *Catholic Action* will be taken in its *strict sense*—that is, referring to *the social action of Catholics, of a religious or spiritual nature, under the guidance of the clergy*—whereas the action of Catholics in the temporal domain will be referred to as *Catholic political action*, which is generally associated with *Catholic lay organizations* in the socio-political and economic domains.

This distinction in Catholic Action can be seen in various pontifical writings on Catholic Action, especially in its later development and application under the pontificate of Pius XI.

* *Note 2:* In itself, *Catholic Action* refers to

all activities, whether in the spiritual or temporal domains, that are ordered to the sanctification of souls and the extension of the reign of Christ the King over individuals, families, and society. As St. Pius X says in his encyclical *Il Fermo Proposito* of June 11, 1905, to the Italian bishops:

Immense is the field of Catholic Action; it excludes absolutely nothing which in any way whatsoever, directly or indirectly, pertains to the divine mission of the Church.

It is plainly necessary to take part individually in a work so important, not only for the sanctification of our own souls, but also in order to spread and more fully open out the Kingdom of God in individuals, families, and society, each one working according to his strength for his neighbor's good, by the diffusion of revealed truth, the exercise of Christian virtue, and the spiritual and corporal works of charity and mercy.¹¹

a) The Spiritual Domain:

With regard to the spiritual domain, and in the *strict sense* of the word, Catholic Action refers to *those social activities of a religious nature which assist the Church in the conversion and sanctification of souls*—that is, all those works which pertain to the Church's threefold office of teaching, ruling, and sanctifying. Thus, Catholic Action is nothing other than “*the participation and the collaboration of the laity with the Apostolic Hierarchy.*”¹²

Examples of Catholic Action are: Ignatian Retreats, the Third Order; the Legion of Mary; the Holy Name Society; Catholic Scout movements; teaching in Catholic schools; public conferences or talks on matters of Catholic doctrine; lay associations established for the publication of books, cassettes, etc., on official Church doctrine, Catholic Literature and Spirituality; etc.

b) The Temporal Domain

The social action of Catholics in the temporal domain—called *Catholic political action* in this study—refers to *the temporal actions of the Catholic laity in the work to implement Christian social principles in the State and in*

⁸ Quoted in *Mary, Mother of the Church*, by Fr. Francis J. Ripley, p. 14, #24.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21, #51.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67, #297.

¹¹ *The Lay Apostolate*, p. 214.

¹² Pius XI, *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*, June 29, 1931 (against fascism in Italy). In *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, ed. Sr. Claudia Carlen (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1981), p. 446; emphasis added.

social legislation. Economic and trade associations or other socio-political associations are examples of temporal social action.

Since the Church does not exercise a direct role in the organization and direction of the temporal order of society, seeing that her mission is primarily in the spiritual and supernatural domain, she naturally turns to the faithful, for being members of both Church and State, it is their role to work to extend the social Kingship of Christ in the temporal order by the work of *Catholic political action.*

It should be pointed out, however, that Christ's external reign over society naturally presupposes His internal, or spiritual, reign over the minds and hearts of citizens, just as man's external actions naturally manifest his internal state of soul. As Our Lord said, *The kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17:21). Consequently, Catholic Action in the spiritual domain should precede and accompany Catholic political action, for the spiritual dispositions of the citizens is the necessary foundation to establish Christ's social reign.

Without the formation of these internal dispositions (at least in a greater number of citizens), the temporal action of Catholics will not attain its intended goal. For if people are not properly instructed and disposed to practice Christian virtue and embrace Christian social order, especially since they have been infected by the false liberal-democratic principles of the French and American Revolutions (that is, liberty, fraternity, and equality), they will surely revolt against its establishment and cause greater social disorder.

2) Direct and Indirect Role of the Church Hierarchy

a) Direct Role in the Spiritual Domain:

In all activities of Catholic Action in the *strict sense* of the word, that is, those of a spiritual nature and intended for the sanctification of souls, the Church hierarchy—the pope, bishops, and priests—exercise a *direct authority* in guiding the laity.¹³

As St. Pius X says in *Il Fermo Proposito*:

¹³ Thus, for example, those Catholic lay associations that collaborate with the Church hierarchy in teaching and promoting the Church's social doctrine on economics and politics (e.g., by means of books, articles, conferences, etc.) necessarily fall under the *direct guidance* of the clergy.

... all those works which are immediately in conjunction with the spiritual and pastoral ministry of the Church, and which have a religious aim intended directly for the good of souls, should submit in every smallest particular to the authority of the Church and to that of the bishops, who are appointed by the Holy Spirit to rule the Church of God in the dioceses assigned to them.¹⁴

This stands to reason because, as Pope Pius XI says in *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*, his encyclical on Catholic Action, Catholic Action "*does not wish to be nor can be anything other than 'the participation and the collaboration of the laity with the Apostolic Hierarchy.'*"¹⁵ And in his letter *Laetus Sane Nuntius* of November 6, 1929, to Cardinal Segura, the same Pontiff says: "*Catholic Action...is nothing else but the apostolate of the faithful who, under the guidance of the Bishops, put themselves at the service of the Church and in some sense complete its pastoral ministry.*"¹⁶

In his encyclical *Graves De Communi* of January 18, 1901, Pope Leo XIII says:

This Catholic action, of whatever description it may be, will work with greater effect if all of the various associations, while preserving their individual rights, move together under one primary and directive force. In Italy We desire that this directive force should emanate from the Catholic Congresses and Reunions so often praised by Us, to further which Our predecessor and We Ourselves have ordered that these meetings should be controlled and guided by the Bishops of the country. So let it be for other nations, if there is any leading organization of this nature to which this matter has been legitimately entrusted.¹⁷

Again, with regard to Catholic social action to help the poor and the working class, the same Pontiff points out in his letter *Non Abs Re* of October 12, 1899, to the Archbishop of Turin:

It is certainly Our wish that Catholics should devote themselves zealously to the reform of morals as well as to the relief of the poor and to the welfare of the disinherited working-class. For this purpose it is good to organize public meetings on a wide scale, to found so-called Boards of Patronage and other suchlike institutions, to study social questions,

¹⁴ *The Lay Apostolate*, p. 228.

¹⁵ *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, p. 446; emphasis added.

¹⁶ *The Lay Apostolate*, p. 302; emphasis added.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

lastly to publish books and journals dealing with the needs of civil society and of immortal souls. However, We desire that such works should not be subordinated to the private interests of groups, and should never depart from the course of justice. For this it is absolutely necessary that when undertaking the above-mentioned works or others like them, submission to ecclesiastical authority should be maintained unimpaired. To resist the will of the Bishops and to wish to teach them rather than to listen to them is quite contrary to the duty of laymen.¹⁸

Also, as Pope Pius XII explains in his letter *Con Singular* of January 18, 1939, to the Philippine bishops:

It clearly follows from the foregoing that Catholic Action is a movement not in the material order, but in the spiritual; its character is not profane, but sacred; it seeks not political ends, but religious ones. Its special purpose clearly distinguishes it from any movement or association whose purposes are purely temporal and of this world, however noble and praiseworthy they may be. Nevertheless, Catholic Action is also a social work, since it tends to promote the greatest of social goods: the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

b) Indirect Role in the Temporal Domain:

With regard to *Catholic political action*, such as matters of economics and politics, the activity rests principally with the laity. Nevertheless, the clergy still exercises an *indirect authority* over the laity by teaching and explaining Catholic social doctrine and by correcting errors or methods of action which go contrary to the doctrine or spirit of Christ and the Church or which are harmful to souls due to ignorance, imprudence, or reckless zeal.

As Leo XIII points out in *Graves De Communi*:

Now in all questions of this sort where the interests of the Church and the Christian people are so closely allied, it is evident what they who are in the sacred ministry should do, and it is clear how industrious they should be in inculcating right doctrine and in teaching the duties of prudence and charity.

To go out and move among the people, to exert a healthy influence on them by adapting themselves to the present condition of things is what more than once in addressing the clergy

we have advised....

But in the fulfillment of this obligation, let there be the greatest caution and prudence exerted, and let it be done after the fashion of the saints.²⁰

And St. Pius X says in *Il Fermo Proposito*:

But those other works also, which, as We have said, are designed chiefly to restore and promote in Christ true Christian civilization, and which constitute Catholic action in the sense explained, must by no means be considered independent of the advice and direction of ecclesiastical authority....

It is certain that such works, from their very nature, ought to move with a befitting and reasonable freedom, since they are held responsible for their acts, particularly in temporal and economic matters, and in those of public, administrative, or political life, all of which are foreign to a purely spiritual ministry. But as Catholics ever bear aloft the standard of Christ, for that very reason they bear aloft the standard of the Church; and so it is proper that they should receive it from the hands of the Church; that the Church should see that its honor is unstained; and that Catholics should submit, like docile, loving children, to this maternal vigilance.²¹

The Catholic author *Jean Ousset* in his book *Action* emphasizes the necessity to understand well these principles:

Only if these two spheres, the temporal and the spiritual, are clearly distinguished will it be possible for both clergy and laity to find a sure basis for effective, complementary, and harmonious action....

.....

Only this distinction can offer to the apostolic and evangelizing clergy, on the one hand, and to the civil, social, and political action of the laity, on the other, the freedom which is indispensable to their respective and complementary missions. This alone makes harmony possible—without either betraying the interests of the temporal order or crippling the spiritual apostolate of the clergy.²²

²⁰ *The Lay Apostolate*, pp. 190–191.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 228–229.

²² (Saltcoats, Scotland: Approaches, n.d.), pp. 109, 104. NB: The French Catholic writer, Jean Ousset, was well known in the 1950's (and later) for his writings on the Church's social doctrine and the principles of *Catholic action*. It should be noted, however, that he uses the term *Catholic action* in the sense of *Catholic political action*, i.e., the social action of Catholics in the purely temporal domain, under the *indirect* guidance of the clergy.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 401.