

replace the terrors of war; there would then be rendered to God that worship of thought and word and action which alone lifts the veil of the future, and shows in the distance the blissful enjoyment of eternity as the fruition of a well-lived life.

THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

The Religious State. A digest of the doctrine of Suarez contained in his treatise "De Statu Religionis." By William Humphrey, Priest of the Society of Jesus. London: Burns & Oates. New York: The Catholic Publication Society Co., 1884.

ONE of the distinctive characteristics of the Church of God is her sanctity. In her doctrine, in the lives of many of her children, in her institutions and preaching, this sanctity appears; it is also found in her sacraments and in the means which she takes to curb human passion and to promote divine worship. Holiness is of the essence of the Church, and is not corrupted by the treachery of some of her members, nor by the scandals of others, neither does it fail amid the fury of persecution nor amid the deceptions of heresy. In the midst of dangers of every kind, her strength lies in the consciousness of the sanctity with which she has been divinely endowed. The Church of God, then, as such, needs no reform; in the essential qualities of her life she is always the same, stemming the tide of human passion and bearing in her bosom, for the good of souls, the promises, the graces, and the merits of her Divine Founder. Possessing the seeds of supernatural truth and of holiness, and fertilized as the Lord's vineyard by the dew and breath of heaven, she necessarily manifests her divine life, in some phase or other, and according to some degree or other. Within her boundaries also grow, apart, the germs of certain forms of virtuous living, and these germs again are trained by reverential hands into different shapes and for different purposes, but the life that is in them all is from the same divine source, and the power wherewith they grow is the same.

As a living divinely constituted body the Church exists with the Holy Spirit always abiding in her to lead her into all truth, with her sacred sacramental system as the great channel of divine grace, and with her divinely organized hierarchy as her governing

authority. The inner life of that Church, her soul, is made up, so to say, principally of the divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity; while the law of their growth is, with God's grace, the observance of the precepts and counsels which Christ has given to men. In his divine wisdom and mercifulness, He has not laid under commandment all human actions, He has not exacted of men all that men can give, but has left to them a large part of the conduct of life which they may dispose of, within the limits of the lawful, according to their generosity.

His commandments from their very nature bind the human conscience, His counsels are left to the free choice of men. The subject matter of the commandments is good, that of the counsels superadded to the former is better. It is laudable to hear Mass on Sundays, but together with that, to hear Mass also on weekdays is much more so. The commandments are for all, the counsels are for the comparatively few. "Of virginity it has been said," writes St. Augustine, "'he that can take, let him take it; of justice it has not been said, he who can do it, let him do it, but, every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and shall be cast into the fire.'" The observance of the commandments brings with it a reward, and the violation of them a punishment, but the non-observance of the counsels by themselves entails no penalty, while the fulfilment of them gains God's special favor. To the divine precepts they are appended, as it were, as motives for the practice of higher virtue, or as tests of the devotedness of generous hearts, though in the eyes of the world they are deceit and foolishness and cruelty. Of the counsels the principal are voluntary poverty, chastity, and obedience, or the evangelical counsels, as they are called.

In Holy Scripture, and we here speak only of the New Testament, the aforesaid counsels are distinctly specified by Christ and by the Apostles. In the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew our Lord distinctly contrasts the counsels with the commandments, and makes them the conditions of a new calling. The observance of the commandments, He teaches, will lead to eternal life,—“if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments,”—whereas the observance of the counsels, as conferring perfection, will merit not only eternal life but also “treasures in heaven.” “If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and, come, follow me.” In the one case, a proof of divine charity is given by the fulfilling of the law; in the other case, a greater proof still of that charity is shown by the doing, from a generous will, of that which is above and beyond the law. In both instances the greater or less perfection of the Christian soul is essentially

derived from the greater or less degree of charity ; it is it which unites the soul to God, its last end, which gives supernatural merit to human actions, and which tempers, as it were, all other virtues with its heavenly elevating character. "Charity is the bond of perfection;" "the end of the commandment;" "God is charity," and, "he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him." Even from a natural standpoint, the love of God is, for man, a dictate of nature, springing from gratitude for the benefits which he has received by creation ; but in the supernatural order that love elevated by grace and aspiring to the beatific vision is also a special precept. Having in view this disposition of the divine dispensations, St. Thomas teaches that "perfection essentially consists in the observance of the commandments," "but secondarily and instrumentally in the observance of the counsels." He who sins grievously against the commandment forfeits charity, but he who, apart from the obligations of a vow, does not observe a counsel, shows only a want of generosity towards his Maker.

Charity, however, among men, is of different degrees ; there is a charity,—the lowest indeed in degree,—whose test is the fulfilment of the commandments, and whose possession is necessary for salvation. He who is not in mortal sin has this charity, and, on the other hand, "he that loveth not, abideth in death." A higher degree of charity is that which consists not only in avoiding mortal sin, but also venial faults and those obstacles which stand in the way of the soul's aiming at greater intimacy with God. In this last grade of divine love, one will be imperfect, of course, when compared with the blessed in heaven, but perfect compared with others whose charity is in a lower degree. The young man spoken of in the Gospel, by keeping the commandments, was within the bounds of God's friendship ; he had charity and the perfection which it denotes ; but that perfection of which theologians generally speak, which, untrammelled by earthly goods, aims in the spirit of charity at higher virtues,—that perfection he had not. It was it which was offered to him by our Lord, and which he had not the courage to embrace. The substance of perfection, therefore, he possessed, but the instruments for gaining a higher degree of it he refused. In more general terms, on other occasions, Christ recommended perfection to his followers, leaving it to themselves to discriminate between what is of precept and what is of counsel. In this connection it was that He said : "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Again, in the same nineteenth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, Christ also recommended the counsel of chastity. In answer to a wily question put to Him by the Jews, He upheld and enforced the indissolubility of the marriage-tie, affirming that the privilege

of divorce granted by Moses was wrung from him by Jewish perversity. But under the New Law He ruled that not even for adultery may divorce be granted. Afterwards, when questioned by his disciples on the expediency in such circumstances of getting married at all, He does not command an unmarried life, but leaves it to the gracious ways of Providence and to the free choice of individuals. "All men," he adds, "take not this word, . . . he that can take, let him take it." St. Paul, giving an inspired commentary on those words, writes: "Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give counsel;" and in another passage, speaking of widows, he says: "But more blessed shall she be, if she so remain, according to my counsel." Virginity, then, by the teaching of Christ and of his apostles, though more excellent than matrimony, does not fall under any precept; there is no obligation by divine law of embracing a life of celibacy; but for those who feel themselves called thereunto there is a counsel. "I say to the unmarried and to the widows," adds the apostle, "it is good for them if they so continue, even as I."

In the text cited above, our Lord, after having recommended to the young man the renunciation of all his goods in order to gain perfection, immediately subjoined, "and come, follow me." The relation that exists between both members of the phrase clearly suggests that the perfection that is to be gained by voluntary poverty is correlated to the perfection that is to be found in the following of Christ; or that, as the renunciation of all temporal goods is a great instrument for sanctification, so, for the same end, the giving up of one's own will in all things for Christ's sake is a most effectual means. To the same purport is that other divine saying: "If any one will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Whenever or wherever a divine precept is to be complied with, this self-denial is a strict duty; obedience is, then, of obligation. Men, if they be only sincere followers of Christ, must then renounce their own wills to follow His will, whether this be declared by express definite commandments, or be signified by those who have authority from Him. Beyond, however, the sphere of precepts there is a vast field of human activity in which man is not bound by any positive divine commandment. In that field, for his greater abnegation and for the greater love of Christ, he may do what legitimate authority tells him will be acceptable to the Divine Majesty; and then he will obey, not in virtue of a precept, but through the grace of a counsel. Thus, when the human will surrenders itself unreservedly in the spirit of self-denial, to do Christ's will as manifested by particular law or by the orders of superiors; when it depends in

all things on that will as its rule, then the words of Christ are realized to their full extent,—the abnegation of oneself becomes complete in the matter of obedience.

Indeed, so clearly marked in Holy Writ are the laws of the counsel as separate from the words of the commandments that Suarez writes: "The distinction between the counsels and the commandments rests on faith so certain, and is so expressly mentioned in Holy Scripture, and is so taught by the universal Church, that it cannot be denied without manifest heresy."

This being laid down, a further inquiry is, whether the embracing or the confirmation of the evangelical counsels by vows enters into the scope of Christ's teaching.

A vow is a free, deliberate promise made to God of something of superior excellence—*de bono meliore*; it is a law which one, of his own free choice, imposes on himself. If its subject-matter be a counsel, this, under the obligation of a vow, becomes, for him who takes it, a precept whose violation is a sin and whose observance is an act or an exercise of the virtue of religion. Hence, in the very first epochs of the history of God's people, vows received a special Divine sanction. Jacob's vow, given in the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, is the first of which a record has come down to us, while the blessings that he afterwards got prove that his vow was received with Divine favor. In the one hundred and thirty-first Psalm, David "vowed a vow" to build a temple to God, and how acceptable such a vow was to the Divine Majesty we learn from the seventh chapter of the second book of Kings. The tenor of many other passages in the Old Testament shows that one of the special ways by which the Jewish people honored and worshipped God was the taking of vows. All along, from the beginning, the taking of vows had received among them, time and again, the Divine sanction; to it they had recourse when pressed by calamity or when demanding particular favors, or, again, when striving to make amends for past obstinacy. They felt, and they knew from revelation, that the sacrifice of the will through the obligation of a solemn promise was most acceptable to the Lord. Of this they had a suggestive proof also in the exactness with which He required the fulfilment of vows. "When thou hast made a vow to the Lord thy God," it was said in the twenty-third chapter of Deuteronomy, "thou shalt not delay to pay it, because the Lord thy God will require it. And if thou delay, it shall be imputed to thee for a sin."

The practice of taking vows to God had come down to men, then, from the tradition of primitive revelations; in its own peculiar nature it bore an analogy to the custom by which men bind themselves by solemn engagements to each other, and was

grounded not only on religion, but also on the principles of the moral law. The Mosaic dispensation confirmed that practice anew, and, when the ceremonial part of that dispensation ceased, men continued to vow as before, since the obligations of the moral law, and these, too, sanctioned by revealed religion, never ceased to bind consciences. Under the Gospel the moral teaching of the past was ratified by Divine authority. Christ, our Lord, threw around the moral code the light of his own revelations, opened up the springs of human conduct, and pointed out distinctly the aim or the end of human life. More than ever before the trials of that life were depicted for men, while a higher standard of virtue was proposed to them; supernatural aids which they formerly had not were now given to them; they had before them, for their Divine model, the life of God incarnate; and the royal way of the holy cross, they were told, was the way that led to victory. Whatever had braced the soul for special combats, as it were, under the old law, was now imperatively required under the new; and all the strength that vows had given to hearts in former times was now particularly called for in the case of those who, following closely their Divine Master, aspired to religious perfection. It is said, indeed, by some of the Fathers of the Church—such as St. Cyril and St. Jerome—that the prophets of old, in speaking of vows, had sometimes chiefly in view the Christian dispensation. To their prophetic vision the Kingdom of God on earth—"the New Jerusalem"—appeared in all its magnificence, governed by an eternal priesthood and sanctified by "a clean offering" "from the rising of the sun even to the going down" thereof. In that "city of God"—the "glorious church not having spot or wrinkle"—to the prophetic eye there also appeared charity, linking souls to God and to each other, and drawing hearts, through Divine grace and the habits of self-denial, to an entire offering of themselves to the Divine goodness.

With the traditions of the synagogue around him and in the light of the revelations of Christ, St. Paul, joining, so to say, in his own person, the Old Testament and the New by the same religious bonds, had taken a vow, as St. Luke informs us. What he might have done by vowing in honor of God as a son of Abraham he felt he could now do, and that with greater fervor, as a disciple of Christ. The transition from one covenant to the other did not, he was aware, change the aspirations of souls for perfection, but rather increased them, since Christ came to cast on earth the fire of Divine love, and His will is that it be enkindled in hearts. Of this love vows were to be an expression, and to denote, under new forms, a spirit of self-sacrifice and a law for the gaining of greater intimacy with God. As appertaining to Divine worship, they were

to fall also under the legislation of the Church and be regulated by it. Looking, therefore, to the fidelity implied by them, St. Paul, in his First Epistle to Timothy, denounces the wantonness of widows, "who, having made void their first faith, married again." "They had taken a vow," says St. Augustine, commenting on this text, "and had not kept it." The violation of the law which they had voluntarily imposed on themselves explains the severity of the Apostle's denunciation.

The doctrine which the Apostle taught, he had learned from his Divine Master. He knew explicitly, from Divine revelation, "the mind of Christ" when it was often hidden in His words. To St. Paul, as well as to the other apostles, were given by our Lord, after His resurrection, lessons which related to "the Kingdom of God," and which were to enter forever into the body of Catholic traditions. But the very words in which Christ promulgated the counsels contained also implicitly a counsel for the vowing of them. He pointed out means for furthering the gaining of perfection, intending surely that these means should be used not only for some years, but during the whole lifetime. One was not to put his hand to the plough and then to look back, but to persevere unto the end in the way on which he had entered. Hence the recommendation of our Lord was meant not merely for the will in its first purpose, but for the will immovably bound to that purpose by a solemn engagement or by vow. To embrace poverty and afterwards, from caprice, to put it aside, would certainly not correspond with Christ's intention in marking out for some of His followers a special way of virtuous living. According to His counsel, to give up the possession of one's goods implies not only the surrendering of the actual right to them, but also the right of reclaiming them at any future time, since one gives up everything fully and completely only when, by promise, he has made it unlawful for him to possess anything as his own in the present and future. In recommending the counsel of poverty Christ undoubtedly did so also in this latter and fullest sense, and it was in this sense that the Apostles said: "Behold! we have left all things and followed Thee." "By which words," says St. Thomas, following the interpretation of the Fathers of the Church, "the Apostles are understood to have vowed whatever belongs to the state of perfection." They, who were to be to the world the heralds of evangelical virtue, professed it certainly in its most complete form.

According to ancient Christian tradition, too, the narrative given by St. Luke of the manner of life of the first Christian converts in Jerusalem, implies that they confirmed by vow their renunciation of all earthly goods. To this conclusion the sin and punishment of Ananias and Saphira clearly point. Had they not taken a vow,

and, by reserving to themselves some of their goods, committed sacrilege by lying to the Holy Ghost, it is hard to understand how their punishment could be proportioned to their guilt; for, though the sin of Ananias was barely a lie and hypocrisy, it was not a sin against justice, nor against charity, nor against the reverence due to God. It must have been, then, only the violation of a vow that gave to the sin its heinous character. In this sense it is that St. Athanasius speaks of the fact in his sermon on the passion and cross of Christ. "As Ananias and Saphira," writes the holy doctor, "after they had made vows to God withdrew from the same vows, deceiving others; but Peter, the minister of truth, thrust them from him, saying: 'You have lied, not to men, but to God.'"

And St. Gregory the Great writes, in a letter to Venantius: "Ananias had vowed money, from which, afterwards overcome by the persuasion of the devil, he took away something; but with what a death he was punished you are aware."

Again, the first beatitude, as given by St. Matthew, counsels, in the opinion of many Fathers of the Church, the vow of voluntary poverty. By the beatitude our Lord also intended, no doubt, to teach the virtue of humility, or poverty of affection, but the woes which St. Luke records as a kind of counterpart to the beatitudes, show that by "the poor in spirit" Christ had perhaps mainly in view the voluntarily poor. He said: "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven." And afterwards, to bring out, as it were, more strikingly the blessedness which He promised, He subjoined: "But woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation." He promises a kingdom to the poor, a reward which suggests the giving up of all things in this world for Christ's sake. Both in deed and affection He himself had given up all things and thus sanctified poverty, and surely to vow what had been thus sanctified must be most commendable and meritorious in the eyes of God. The vow gives a new value to the counsel, since to vow according to Catholic teaching is to perform an act of Divine worship. It is, moreover, not only to consecrate one's actions to God, but also the faculties from which these actions proceed, or, as St. Anselm remarks, it is to give to God not only the fruit but the tree also.

A line of argument similar to that just given leads to the same conclusion in regard to the vow of chastity. This counsel, as we have seen, was proposed in the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, on the occasion of the Apostle's asking an explanation of the law of marriage originally given by God, but in some instances dispensed with for special causes by Moses. After having explained how, by a defect of nature or by the physical action of men, the law of generation is in some cases frustrated,

Christ adds: "And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that can take, let him take it." The antithesis between these words and the context evidently indicates a solemn promise or vow as a cause of continency. Those to whom allusion is made have, by a voluntary engagement, made it unlawful for themselves to contract marriage. Not obliged to celibacy by any natural or physical cause, since Christ excludes this; not constrained to it also by any common law of Christian life, it follows that they are bound to it only by a law arising from their own free act or vow. After this manner St. Epiphanius, St. Augustine, St. Jerome and Fulgentius interpret the aforesaid words of Christ.

The same thesis is still more clearly proved from the text before cited of St. Paul to Timothy, in which he writes of some younger widows, "that when they have grown wanton in Christ they will marry. Having damnation because they have made void their first faith." The Apostle had taught elsewhere that death dissolves the marriage bond. It is not, therefore, on account of a second marriage that a widow is in a state of "damnation;" nor can it be even for a sin of incontinency, since she does not thereby violate her first faith; but her sin is that, having taken a vow of chastity or having pledged her faith to Christ, her spiritual spouse, she violated it by marrying again. It is only the violation of a vow that could entail such punishment as the Apostle mentions. For the interpretation of the text just given there is, according to Suarez, a consensus of Greek and Latin Fathers, and the "consensus Patrum" is a certain rule of belief.

This vow of chastity has been especially dear to the Church from the very beginning. The fragrance of virginity was all around her at her very rising, and virgins were the object of her special attention. St. Ignatius of Antioch, the disciple of St. Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of St. John, wrote of virgins, "being consecrated to God, they are to be honored," and that "they are to remember to whom they have consecrated themselves." In the third century Tertullian and St. Cyprian wrote treatises on "the veiling of virgins,—*de velandis virginibus*." The same spirit of love for virginity is traceable through the legislation of the primitive Church. In the third book of the Apostolic Constitutions, ascribed to Pope St. Clement, the disciple of St. Peter, it is prescribed that vows are not to be taken rashly or without due consideration. In the Council of Ancyra, in 310, it was decreed that those who put aside their vow of virginity and married were to be held guilty of bigamy. The General Council of Chalcedon ordained that monks or nuns who, after having taken vows, attempted to marry should be excommunicated. The like teaching runs through

the acts of the Popes Sergius, St. Leo the Great, Gelasius and St. Gregory the Great.

The vow of chastity, then, as a means of gaining perfection and as a sacrifice most agreeable to God, has ever been, from the very dawn of Christianity, before the mind of the Church. It could not forget the example of the glorious and Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, or the solemn promise of virginity with which she had consecrated herself to her Maker, since it is only on the supposition of the virgin's vow that, according to the great doctors of the Church, her words in answer to the message of the archangel can be explained. This is the doctrine which St. Gregory of Nyssa lays down in his sermon on the birth of Christ; and St. Augustine, in his book on virginity, on the words of the Virgin, "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" writes: "She would certainly not have said this had she not formerly vowed her virginity to God." The Virgin's whole soul in the spirit of charity, suggests St. Anselm, was intent only on this, namely, to consecrate her body and soul, by perpetual virginity, to God. And thus it has come to pass that this truth, like a beautiful star, has cast its mild, soft light, in every age, on the Christian world. In the mysteriousness of Divine revelations the Virgin had taken her vow, and, though afterwards betrothed to St. Joseph, she knew from God that that vow would remain inviolate. "A just man," Joseph himself, as ancient Christian tradition teaches, had also vowed chastity to God and become the guardian of the Virgin and of her Divine child—a shield of defence for them against the calumnies and plotting of Jewish enemies.

The counsel of obedience, as we have seen, was proposed by our Lord, in the invitation which he gave to the young man to follow him, as well as in the more general statement that, "If any one will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." Here, however, we wish to examine whether the vow of obedience was inculcated by the same divine teaching.

A most striking feature of Christ's teaching, in general, was its plain, simple, practical character. There was nothing like mere theory in it; it was not formally based on reasoning from induction or deduction, was not the result of human experience or a summary of the views of former ages. On the contrary, it ran counter to most of the philosophy of the time, brought out prominently virtues that were ignored by Jew and Gentile, and put into the mind of the world ideas for all time and for all peoples. The authoritative manner in which that teaching was given, the luminousness with which it shone in on the soul as on its fitting abode, and the elevation which it gave to human nature, made it to be a new light for the world. Men might know, even from Christ's method of

teaching, that it was God Himself who spoke with them. He began by building up the soul, and then laid down rules for human conduct. Faith, according to His doctrine, was to be the first great element of supernatural life, and the key to the knowledge of supernatural things; while the following of Himself, or the imitation of His life, was to be the practical rule for all those who wish to be saved. This rule men can observe more or less closely; in its essential form, or as it is marked out by the commandments, it has to be observed by all the faithful. Every one who wishes to gain salvation must follow Christ in this manner, he must be ready to die sooner than commit a mortal sin, and to forfeit the whole world sooner than lose his own soul. He who tramples on Christ's law and is thus estranged from Him by grievous sin, does not follow Him, but rather Satan, or the world, or the flesh.

To observe the commandments, then, is the first necessary condition for following Christ, and those who fulfil it are on the way to salvation. But the generosity of divine love will induce many of the faithful not to stop at that, or not to measure their devotion by the bare fulfilment of the precepts. They will wish to observe not only these, but the counsels also, in order to follow Christ more closely, and to imitate Him in that which was the great distinctive feature of His life, obedience; "becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." In the abnegation which this obedience supposes there are, of course, different degrees. Some will purpose to follow Christ as faithfully and as closely as they can, but will, however, retain the power of limiting the extent of their obedience. They will follow Christ, but still with some reservation. Others will follow Him in all things and at all times, putting no restriction on their obedience save that which sin puts on it, and surrendering their free power of choice by solemn engagement to Christ through the representatives of his authority on earth. They retain no dominion over themselves, but, to gain true liberty within the laws of the just and the holy, give up the natural liberty with which they are endowed, and thus become "free by the freedom with which Christ has made us free." It was to this liberty through the laws of obedience that He called His Apostles. They gave up in the spirit of self-denial all external goods, together with certain gratifications of the body, for God's sake; and not only that, but they vowed their understanding, will and soul in Christ's service. "Behold," said they, "we have left all things and have followed Thee. What, therefore, shall we have?" The reward which they here look for supposes the labor of the entire life as well as its duties solemnly engaged to Christ; they had not, of course, then actually lived out their whole lives, since life is made up of successive moments; but because they had solemnly dedicated those lives to

Christ, they speak of them as if already spent, or as offerings permanently and irrevocably consecrated to Him. They were in a special manner, and according to a special subordination, His disciples; they had received from Him particular precepts and a commission to preach the Gospel, and were "the foundation" of the Church, of which St. John wrote: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." From the office, therefore, which they received from Christ as well as from their profession of obedience sprang their unchangeableness of resolution, since, as St. Thomas teaches, "this unchangeableness in the following of Christ is rendered firm by vow." By this, as it binds up, as it were, in a moment a lifetime through the force of an obligation, one is enabled to offer, all at once, to God his whole life in abnegation and obedience. Hence, as man's will is that which is dearest to him, his greatest renunciation will lie in surrendering, in what is lawful, his will to him who holds authority from Christ, and who in virtue of his office is, in regard to those subject to him, in the place of Christ. To His disciples, and in their persons undoubtedly to all in His Church having power from Him, our Lord said: "He who hears you hears me, and he who despises you despises me." On this subject St. Basil writes: "The superior of those who have taken a vow of obedience to Him represents in their regard the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, performing the office of mediator between God and men, and offering to God in sacrifice the wills of those who profess to obey Him."

In the ears of the primitive Church the words of Christ, as He invited men to the higher life of the counsels, were continually ringing. Conduct, they knew, was the great proof of love, and the measure of that love was the abnegation practiced for Christ's sake. They heard repeated to them, that the rewards of the perfect are the treasures of heaven, and that every one that "hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold and shall possess life everlasting." These texts and similar ones were present to the minds of the first generations of Christians. They knew, moreover, from the teaching of the Old Law, that a seal, so to say, of perfection, is a vow, since it implies a special dedication to virtuous living, and they had read it in the book of Numbers: "When a man or woman shall make a vow to be sanctified, and will consecrate themselves to the Lord, all the days of separation he shall be holy to the Lord." And again, "This is the law of the Nazarite, when he hath vowed his obligation to the Lord in the time of his consecration." With this divine teaching before them, and in the fervor of their love for Christ, many of the Christians of

the Apostolic Church, in view of the highest perfection, made by vows an entire offering of themselves to God. In this sense, St. Chrysostom, St. Jerome and St. Augustine understand the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and with their opinions before him, St. Thomas pronounces, doctrinally, that "it was from the disciples of Christ that all religious life took its origin." St. Chrysostom styles the religious life "a philosophy introduced by Christ," and Suarez holds that the Apostles themselves took the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, as belonging to the state of perfection.

As a corollary, then, from the premises which we have been laying down, it follows that from the profession of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience there results a state of perfection or the religious state. That is, a state whose principal end is the perfection of charity, and whose means for attaining that end are chiefly the facility and peace and firmness which spring from the obligations of vows.

A state of life, when there is question of persons, implies, according to Suarez, two things (1), "perfection in some condition or mode of existence; (2), rest and stability therein." The latter requires a certain adhesion of the person to the state or an obligation of remaining in it, and this obligation again must come from something like a permanent cause, or from a cause morally permanent. The ever-varying accidents of life, then, do not make a state. A servant, by the mere fact of his obeying his master, is not in a state, since, at his will, he can change his condition; neither is he in a new state who happens to obtain some civil office, which confers a dignity but does not make a state. But persons are said to be in a state of sin, since they are in a state of bondage, arising from the impossibility in which the sinner is of freeing himself from his sinfulness by his own natural power, while the just are said to be in a state of grace, having an obligation of serving God, and possessing His divine help, which, of itself, is a support of their state. And thus they are in a state of bondage to God, but this bondage is true liberty.

A state for acquiring Christian perfection, therefore, or the perfection of charity, implies a fixed condition of life in view of that end; it also imports the removal of what impedes the practice of charity and has coupled with it certain stated exercises which relate to the worship and glory of God. It is the obligations which are contracted that go to make the state. Hence, those who bind themselves by a vow of chastity, as all those who receive holy orders in the Latin Church, are "inchoative," as Suarez writes, or, in a limited sense, in a certain state of perfection. But the state, properly and simply so called for acquiring Christian perfection, is

the religious state. It alone embraces all the means marked out in the Gospel for furthering the soul in the practice of virtue, it removes all these general impediments to charity which spring from our fallen nature, and invites and prepares persons, if they be willing, to gain higher and higher degrees of charity. It supplies instruments for the acquiring of virtue, but, by itself, does not make persons virtuous. The religious state springs essentially from the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, approved and accepted by the Church; but, as the doctor just quoted remarks, other obligations than those arising from vows the Church may take to constitute a state of perfection.

In religious life, then, the obligations which come from vows give to it stability or a moral firmness on one unchangeable plane, and thus make it a state—a school for the exercising and acquiring of Christian perfection. Outside of that state, most certainly, persons can attain the greatest sanctity by the practice of charity, which is “the bond of perfection;” they may also minister to others with great zeal and merit, but for all that, though, perhaps, individually perfect in a high degree, they are not in a regularly constituted state for acquiring perfection. “For one,” writes St. Thomas, “is properly said to be in a state of perfection, not because he elicits an act of perfect charity, but because he binds himself forever in a certain solemn ceremony to these things which belong to perfection.” In another passage, he explains what these things are and how they help to the forming of the soul to perfection. They are,—the vow of poverty, which cuts off all solicitude and cupidity about earthly possessions; the vow of chastity, which forbids all deliberate sensuality; and the vow of obedience, which excludes a badly regulated will. All the other observances of religious life are in some way directed to these laws of the vows, and form that discipline of life and give that freedom of mind which promote the exercise of charity. To perfection, therefore, it belongs not only to do what is perfect, but also to vow what is perfect. To observe continence is in itself a perfection, but to observe the same under the obligation of a vow is not only to practice the virtue of continence, but also that of religion, or to acquire a double perfection. To be poor for Christ’s sake merits His special graces, but to become professionally poor by vow is to add religious consecration to the virtue of poverty. To practice obedience according to Christ’s law is most commendable, but to subject one’s will by vow to the mighty will of God, and, in Christ’s language, to lose one’s soul for His sake, is more pleasing to God than sacrifices. “Obedience is better than sacrifices.”

But the highest state of perfection on earth is the episcopate; it is “*perfectionis magisterium*,” as St. Thomas calls it. It is not a

state for acquiring perfection as the religious state is, but a state of perfection already acquired, and that especially in behalf of others. Religious are bound only to tend to perfection, bishops are bound to possess it; the obligations of religious spring from their vows, those of bishops from their pastoral charges. In the case of the former, the removal of obstacles to their perfection is required; in that of the latter, as their high office implies, such removal is not deemed necessary. Bishops are considered to have acquired that degree of perfection which needs not those means supplied by vows for the exercise of charity. They are the successors of the Apostles, the Council of Trent teaches; "they are the pillars of the Church," writes St. Athanasius; and "nothing is more sublime than the episcopacy," remarks St. Ambrose. "It behooveth a bishop to be blameless," says St. Paul.

For the reception and exercise of the priesthood, and especially in its plenitude as bishops receive it, great interior perfection or holiness is required. Still the sacramental character which they receive in consecration does not of itself place them, strictly speaking, in a state of perfection. Holy Orders fit one for sacred functions, but do not make a state of perfection. By the fact, St. Thomas teaches, "that one receives Holy Orders, he is not thereby put in a state of perfection, although in him interior perfection is required that he may worthily exercise the sacred ministry." The episcopal state arises especially from the bishop's obligations to his flock; it is these moral obligations which condition it as a state, and give to it its stability; and it is from the same obligations that the perfection of the state results. A bishop, in taking the pastoral office, binds himself irrevocably to his see and to all that belongs to the perfection of his state. Nay, even, if circumstances should require it, he is bound to lay down his life for his flock. "The perfection of the episcopal state," writes the aforementioned great doctor, "consists in this, namely, that the bishop, through a motive of great divine love, binds himself to labor for the salvation of the neighbor, and on that account to retain his pastoral charge as long as he can promote the spiritual welfare of those intrusted to his care." It is not permitted to a bishop, then, to lay down his crosier without the Pope's special dispensation, and without the same it is not allowed to him to join a religious order, or to assume an inferior grade in the ministry, in order to curtail the responsibilities of his office, although both of these changes priests in their own sphere of duties can canonically adopt. The bonds of the bishop can be loosened only by the Bishop of bishops, the successor of St. Peter.

It is of faith that the episcopate is of divine institution; it is also a point of Catholic teaching that the religious state, as to its funda-

mental principles (substantialia), is of divine right (de jure non præcipiente sed consulente, writes Suarez). But the determination of that state to this or that form under the sanction of the Church has come from men guided, no doubt, by the Holy Spirit. Christ Himself, all Christian antiquity teaches, sowed the seeds of religious life and put them together with the grace of His words into the great heart of the Church. His will was that they should grow and produce fruit, and that that fruit should remain. But to suppose that His words of life remained dead for ages, that the seed of those words had fallen altogether by "the way-side" or on "stony ground," or that no hearts were found good enough to thoroughly correspond with it until the time of St. Anthony, would seem like derogating from the efficacy of divine grace. The history of the very first ages of the Church does away with such a supposition.

The inspired record of St. Luke, as we have seen, teaches how the first glow of devotion took the multitude of Christian converts beyond the observance of the commandments to the observance of the counsels. In their fervor they wished to imitate Christ as closely as they could; and, after the manner in which circumstances permitted it, dedicated themselves by a solemn engagement to God's service. Even then, sacred virgins consecrated themselves by special vow to God. Iphigenia, we are told, was received to the profession of virginity by St. Matthew, Thecla by St. Paul, and Petronilla by St. Peter.

What St. Luke writes of the Christians of Jerusalem, that St. Jerome writes of the Christians of Alexandria under St. Mark. In his work on *Ecclesiastical Writers*, he says of the Evangelist: "Having taken with him the Gospel which he had finished, he went into Egypt, and, first announcing Christ at Alexandria, founded a Church noted for such doctrine and continency of life that all the converts to Christianity followed his example. Afterwards Philo, a most eloquent Jew, seeing the first church at Alexandria still observing some legal ceremonies, wrote a book on their way of life, and in praise of his own race, and as St. Luke relates that the faithful in Jerusalem had all things in common, so he (Philo) also has recorded what he saw practiced at Alexandria under the great teacher St. Mark."¹ That Philo speaks of Christians and not of Jews in the work alluded to by St. Jerome has, I think, been satisfactorily proved by Cardinal Baronius and by Natalis Alexander. The Jewish author describes in detail what was the manner of life of these early Christian ascetics; how they loved solitude and practiced mortification and prayer; how they studied Holy Scriptures, and meditated on them, and how they offered praise to God,

¹ The testimony of St. Jerome is confirmed by that of Eusebius of Cesarea.

and listened to the instructions of their teachers. He calls them Therapeutæ, either because they offered pure worship to God, or because they cured their own souls and the souls of others by freeing them from sin.

Many writers have also quoted on this subject the testimony of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, in his book on the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. In it the very rites are prescribed for the initiation of the monk into the life of perfection which he proposes to lead; he is to give himself up, we are told, to the contemplation of the divine mysteries, to perform his actions with great holiness, and to attend to his sanctification under the direction of the bishops. Grave critics, however, deny the genuineness of this work, as well as of the other writings attributed to the convert of St. Paul. They were not written, they maintain, by him, but by an author of the fourth or fifth century under the assumed name of the Areopagite; just as St. Sylvanus, they say, wrote under the name of Timothy, and Vincent of Lerins under that of Peregrinus. But waiving the question of the genuineness of the works of St. Dionysius, the argument derived from the esteem with which they were held in the Church retains still much of its persuasiveness. Reference is made to them in a Lateran council in 649, and again in the sixth general council in 680, and by Pope St. Agatho in a letter to Constantine Pogonatus, confirming the acts of the same council. They are mentioned by the Popes St. Gregory the Great, Adrian I., Nicolas I., by Archbishop Hincmar, by Anastasius the Librarian, by Photius, by St. John Damascene, and by St. Thomas Aquinas, who has commented on them. Now, all through the Christian ages no exception was taken to the Areopagite's teaching on the beginnings of the religious life, and no one objected to it, because, undoubtedly, it was somehow in accordance with the ancient traditions of the Church on the origin of the practice of the evangelical counsels. No innovation was noticed in the passage referred to from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, because it only determined in a particular way the teaching of St. Luke, or, perhaps, because it assigned a definite date for the original institution of cenobites, who afterwards, under St. Anthony, filled Egypt with their piety.

And, indeed, it is a saying of some of the early Fathers of the Church, that St. John the Baptist was the first monk, as the Apostles were the first priests. They also refer to the apostolic college as a model of a perfect religious community. St. Augustine says of himself, that, following the example of the Apostles, he strove to lead a life of perfection, and Pope Pius IV., in a Bull issued in behalf of the clerks-regular of St. Augustine, speaks of them as having been instituted by the Apostles. The writings of Tertullian and St. Cyprian suggest that down from the apostolic age the

tradition of the religious life was kept up in one way or another. About the year 250 the life of the anchorets becomes known in history through St. Paul the hermit, and shortly after, the cenobitical life is illustrated by the life of St. Anthony. He did not institute monasticism, but perfect it. "He exhorted all," says St. Athanasius, "to prefer nothing in the world to the love of Christ." "He was like a physician given by God to Egypt. For who met him grieving, and did not go away rejoicing? Who came mourning over his dead, and did not forthwith lay aside his grief? Who came wrathful, and was not converted to friendship? What poor man came wearied . . . and did not despise wealth and comfort himself in his poverty?" In him the great animating central principle of religious life was exemplified,—a principle which when fully realized elevates the mind, broadens the heart and ennobles the whole being. It is "the principle of *heroic love* thrown into system by the saints;" *love*—for it is the entire abandonment of self for Christ's sake in order to serve him with all devotedness; *heroic*,—because self, with all that the world can give, and natural affection and self-love suggest, is sacrificed through the soul's energy for God's love by the sword of the Spirit.

But during those first ages of the Church, the sword of the persecutor was almost always unsheathed against the Christians. In town and country their footsteps were dogged by Roman imperial agents, so that amid such difficulties the Christians' greatest safeguard was not to attract notice by any new form or manner of life. Men and women aspiring then to high Christian perfection strove as best they could to carry out their holy purposes privately or under the common conditions of social life; though even then, during, perhaps, the bloodiest of all the persecutions, that of Domitian, we read of a convent of fifty virgins on the borders of the Roman empire, at Nisibis in Mesopotamia. But when peace and liberty were given to the Church by Constantine, the spirit of piety, that had been pent up, burst forth like "a mighty wind," and bore thousands of Christians into the desert, there under rule to lead lives of religious perfection.

The history of the Church bears ample testimony in every age to the devotedness and labors of religious orders. Along the line of centuries, amid the ravages of barbarians and the strifes of peoples and the inroads of heresy, the religious life has been light as well as life for the world. "From monasteries piously instituted and rightly governed," says the Council of Trent, "splendor and utility have come to the Church." In our time, summing up the traditional glories of the religious state, Pope Pius IX. styled religious orders "those chosen phalanxes of the army of Christ which have always been the bulwark and ornament of the Christian

republic as well as of Christian society." Far back in the Christian ages, when the Church was shaken to her foundation by heresy, and when mercenaries, instead of true pastors, were within her sanctuary, it was Athanasius, who had lived in the desert for some years under St. Anthony, that in the first general council, with God's power and grace, victoriously upheld faith in the divinity of Christ. In the fourth and fifth centuries, especially when the offshoots of Arianism were continually appearing, some of the greatest champions of orthodoxy came forth from the cloister. By their writings they opened up the sources of Catholic truth, unfolded divine revelation, by the force of genius linked together Catholic doctrines, and thus became, in the Church of God, for all future ages, "the light of the world." Catholic teaching will always turn for guidance to such doctors as Saints Gregory of Nazianzen and Nyssa, Saints Basil and Chrysostom, Saints Jerome and Augustine and Gregory the Great. In those by-gone times, it not unfrequently happened that when Catholic faith was trampled on by unfaithful guardians, it found a secure asylum among the monks in their monasteries. "His monasteries," says Cardinal Newman, writing of St. Basil, "became, in a short time, schools of that holy teaching which had been almost banished from the sees of Asia; and it is said that he was in the practice of making a circuit of the neighboring towns, from time to time, to preach to them the Nicene doctrine. This, indeed, was a benefit which was not unfrequently rendered to the Church, in that hour of apostasy, by these ascetics, and for which we who now live have reason to be grateful to them."

Another great splendor, arising to the Church from religious orders, has been the preaching of the Gospel. It was they who, in the early mediæval period, gave those men who converted some twenty barbarous tribes and made them the parents of so many Christian nations. Having received a commission from the vicar of Christ, the successor of St. Peter, to preach the Gospel, monks went forth to plant the cross in lands whither the legions of imperial Rome had never gone. Their only arms were their virtues. "In hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness," they preached Christ crucified, and often sealed their testimony of Him with their life-blood. Their monastic homes, the centres of industrial activity, as well as the centres of enlightenment for the neighboring tribes, they established in the open plains or on the mountain-side or in the depths of the forests. After they had taught barbarians how to live as Christian men, they instructed them, under the guidance of the Church, how to live as members of society. The spirit which swayed the monastic preaching of the mediæval period is that which has animated the preachers of re-

ligious orders in modern times. Their great final aim has been always the same, namely, to gain souls to Christ, to bring them to repent of past sins, to subdue, to pacify and discipline them in accordance with Christian law, and to make them live with hope as heirs of the Kingdom of God. But though their final object has always been the same, the enemies whom the missionaries of latter times have had to contend with are different from those of the former period, and the field of their labors, owing to the discovery and exploration of foreign lands, has grown more vast than that of their predecessors. Heresy had now put on new features, or rather had fitted heresies of the past to the corrupt spirit of the age, and thus separated whole nations from the fold of Christ. Under the direction of the Popes and of the bishops, the members of religious orders went forth to battle with this new enemy. They preached from pulpits and by the way-side, lectured in the schools, explained the true faith before assembled national conventions, grappled with their adversaries in close controversy and compelled heresiarchs to fall back and shift their position or to abdicate their errors. The contest for truth was a long one; in Germany, according to Lord Macaulay, Protestantism was driven back to the German Ocean; in England and Ireland missionaries had a price set upon their heads, and lived under the shadow of the rack and the gibbet in order to preserve the faith of the people.

But their labors among heathen nations and tribes in distant lands are one of the noblest monuments of the zeal of religious orders. Over the whole globe there is not a country that does not bear witness in their behalf, and no others are there to whom may be so justly applied the words of the poet :

“*Quæ regio in terris nostri non plena laboris.*”

India and Japan and China have not lost the inheritance of the faith that had been given and secured to them by the members of religious orders. By them also the cross of Christ was borne into the heart of Africa and into the various islands of the ocean. To-day in those same countries, as well as in all other heathen lands, members of the same religious families are, as of old, actively engaged in their apostolic missions.

In America, too, the first preachers of the Catholic faith were men vowed to God's service in religious life. Amid hardships and dangers of every kind they sought the Indians in their wilds, lived among them, and comforted and civilized them. Along the banks of the Amazon, down the slopes of the Cordilleras to the coast of the Pacific, in the West India islands, the missionaries were the Indians' defenders against the tyranny of cruel masters, and succeeded sometimes in breaking the chains with which slavery had bound their poor neophytes. On the banks of the Paraguay

and the Parana they taught them how to use the implements of industry, how to conform to Catholic social life, and then how, by cultivation, to fertilize the soil until "the wilderness blossomed like the rose." The first to announce the Gospel in the northern part of this great continent were, again, members of the same religious bodies. Their names, it must be admitted by all, are at the very roots of its civilization, their history enters largely into its primitive annals, and the blood also of some among them as martyrs for the faith has entered into American earth on the coast of Florida and by the courses of the Rio Grande, of the Mohawk, of the Penobscot, and of the St. Lawrence. So that on Catholic truth, sealed with that blood, the Church of God rests here to-day in all her grandeur through the length and breadth of this Republic.

Through the influence of the Holy Spirit within the Church, another glory derived to her from the religious state has been the moulding of her doctrines into a scientific form. Every age has produced its own crop of error, has had its own social dangers and its own greater or less rationalistic tendencies. To keep back as much as possible this flood of evil, and to point out to men the way of truth and life, is the office of God's Church on earth,—an office which she has faithfully fulfilled through the course of ages. For centuries she had to defend Christ and his Blessed Mother against the insults of heresy. Later on, she had to meet not only single errors but also error put into system with all the subtlety and force that keen, well-trained intellects could give to it. Jew and Moslem, having mastered in their schools all the resources of dialectics, attacked by their aid the very fundamental principles of the Christian religion. In that crisis in the life of the Church, her great champions were scholars trained to knowledge in the cloister. With reason fully equipped in all the arts of logic, they braced, as it were, by the force of argument Christian truths, and made reason tell for faith, and faith enlighten reason. While the Crusaders were fighting the Saracen at Jerusalem, at Ascalon and Acre, those great Christian scholars were engaged in a still more vital struggle with him in the intellectual arena. They were victorious, and out of the contest came the great body of Christian truth—definite, proportioned, complete.

Again, in the sixteenth century, the life of the Church was fiercely assailed, heresy denied almost all Catholic doctrine, and tore up all the great landmarks of truth set up by Catholic teaching in the past. And again, to meet the objections raised by error, theology was unfolded with new vigor, and strengthened with new argument by the great teachers of religious bodies; so that, in the controversy, as far as argument went, heresy had no ground to

stand upon. Theology then received a new development, and, in the Church, still runs on, qualified, in matters of opinion, by the teaching of the great schools of her religious orders.

In enumerating the glories that have come to the Church from the religious state, those glories are not to be forgotten which she has gathered from her devoted daughters, the spouses of Christ in religion. Ever since the apostolic age these have been for her the sweet odor of Jesus Christ, and this, with a beautiful variety, according to their different callings. Some of them in seclusion, devoted to contemplation and prayer, and to the singing of the praises of the Lord, by their lives of penance make intercession for the sins of men. Others among them zealously devote themselves to the laborious work of education, or to the care of the sick, or to the solace of the aged and the poor, and that with a heroism of virtue which has won the admiration of men of every creed. Among the homes of savages, in the midst of heathen nations, on the battlefields even, through the islands of the seas as well as through the great cities of the world, those heroic spouses of Christ have ministered to Him, and, with their great charity around them, have been a light to the world.

But the greatest of the glories resulting to the Church from religious orders is the recognized sanctity of many of their deceased members. "Marked with the sign of the servants of our God," they stand "before the throne and in the sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." They are confessors, who "are come out of great tribulation," and with heroic fortitude confessed Christ before men; virgins, "purchased from among men the first-fruits to God," who "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth;" martyrs, "who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," and with their own blood have given to Christ the great testimony of love.

"Like the different forces of the same army," says an eloquent writer, "they (the religious orders) have displayed, even in the diversity of their rules and tendencies, that variety in unity which constitutes the fruitful loveliness and sovereign majesty of Catholicity, and, beyond this, have practiced, as far as consists with human weakness, those evangelical precepts, the accomplishment of which conducts to Christian perfection. Occupied, above all, in opening to themselves the way to heaven, they have given to the world the grandest and most noble of lessons in demonstrating how high a man can attain on the wings of love purified by sacrifice and of enthusiasm regulated by faith."