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A table of contents for *Scripture* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_scripture-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_scripture-01.php)

# LAYMEN AS CO-OPERATORS WITH THE APOSTLES

by DOM RALPH RUSSELL

(This article is based on a paper called *The Theology of Catholic Action* read at a Discussion Day for Priests organized by the Chaplains of Y.C.W. on November 11th, 1945.)

FOR four hundred years the Church has been fighting Protestantism. The attack at the Reformation was upon the Mass and the office of Christian Priesthood. Hence all Catholic resources were mobilized to defend them. Our martyrs died for them. Our books of theology were constructed to demonstrate their place in Revelation. This was particularly true in a heretical country like England, but since the whole Church was at grips with Protestantism, the whole Church was affected.

Now Protestantism is all but dead. The Church is at grips with the new paganism and the paganization of society which has followed its collapse. Another theological formation is needed and another kind of apostolate. Were the Church only a human institution, she could hardly have readjusted her approach. But since she is guided by the Holy Spirit of God she is never at a loss. She is always able to bring forth from her treasures old doctrines which are yet new. And she has been set upon her fresh path by the Vicars of Christ themselves.

The lead was given, of course, by Pius XI. He showed in his great Encyclicals and by his constant instructions that the "co-operation of the laity in the Apostolate of the Hierarchy," which he called by the name of "Catholic Action," is under present conditions essential for the spreading of Christ's kingdom, that lay people can reach where the priest can never reach, that the need is not only to convert individuals but to change society, that the proper apostles of the working men are working men and of employers, employers, and that the duty of the clergy is to train leaders for Catholic Action.

There were some who said that all this was a development which would die with Pius XI. Perhaps it is not sufficiently realized that the present Holy Father has given the most authoritative confirmation to the work of his predecessor by providing in his Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* its permanent dogmatic setting. In fact this Encyclical may be called the *Magna Charta* of "Catholic Action," for it shows that the functions of the layman in the Church derive from his membership in the Mystical Body of Christ.

The aim of this article is to indicate the scriptural sources of the truths which the Holy Father thus inculcates, and to illustrate them in practice from the writings of the New Testament.

1. *Pentecost.* "Since Christ has been glorified on the Cross," writes the Pope, "His Spirit is communicated to the Church in abundant outpouring, in order that she and *each* of her members may grow daily in likeness to our Saviour."

Our Lord had told His apostles that after He was glorified He would send His Holy Spirit upon them, and that His coming was so important that it was better that He should withdraw His visible-presence from them and send them the Holy Spirit instead (John xvi, 7). We may now examine what happened at Pentecost. The perseverance of the old notion that sanctity and initiative are the monopoly of the clergy is well illustrated by the fact that almost all Catholics, when asked on whom the Holy Ghost descended, will answer "on the twelve Apostles"—somebody later remembering that Our Lady was there too. But St. Luke tells us that about 120—that is ten times the number of the Apostles—were present in the upper room at the choosing of St. Matthias (Acts i, 15) and that they were all together in the same place when the day of Pentecost came (see note at end of article). Then the sound as of a mighty wind filled the whole house, parted tongues "as of fire" rested upon each one of them and all were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts ii, 1—3). As St. John Chrysostom remarks: "He would not have said 'all' when the apostles were there, unless the others too had shared in it" and "they did not simply receive the grace of the Spirit, but were filled" (M.G. lx, 43). This is further emphasized by St. Peter when he quotes the prophecy of Joel: "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. . ." (Acts ii, 17; cf. Joel ii, 28). Why did the Holy Spirit fill so many?

We may get an answer to this question if we ask another: What kind of grace was given to them? A grace which "filled them." A grace symbolized by a mighty wind and by fire. Fire was the symbol of the giving of the Holy Spirit in Messianic times (Matt. iii, 11). It is symbolic of the presence and the power of God (Ex. iii, 2; Matt. iii, 2), of the sanctifying Spirit (Ez. i, 13) and of abundance and vehemence, an abundance and vehemence which spreads, and was to spread over the whole earth (M.G. lx, 44, cf. Luke xii, 49; James iii, 5). St. Luke goes on to mention an effect which was exteriorly manifested and which gives a further clue to the nature of the Pentecostal grace. He says that they began to speak various languages according as the Spirit gave to them to speak. Why? He gives the reason immediately. There were at Jerusalem "devout men of every nation under heaven." Probably many of these were pilgrims who had come for the Feast and would then return to their homes. The Holy Spirit designed to spread the Gospel among them without delay. The gift of tongues was given not only to the Apostles but to the other Christians also, because, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, they had been made *sharers in the work of the Apostles*.

There were 3,000 converts to be dealt with that very day ! These converts also were told by St. Peter that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (ii, 38). After the Feast, the pilgrims among them would naturally return home and start conquering the world for Christ, they would be the forerunners of the Apostles, the first to take Him to places where Christianity had not yet penetrated. "For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, whomsoever the Lord our God shall call" (ii, 39). It is highly probable (cf. ii, 10) that some of these returned to Rome itself and that St. Peter found them there waiting to welcome him.

Further, to fit them for the work of the apostolate, the Holy Spirit gave an interior strength and courage. Our Lord had said "You are witnesses of these things. And behold I send the promise of my Father upon you. But stay you in the city till you be clothed with power from on high" (Luke xxiv, 48, 49). And the same apostles who had fled at the Passion (Matt. xxvi, 56), the same Peter who had denied his Lord, the men who even after the Resurrection still shut themselves into an upper room "for fear of the Jews" (John xx, 29), immediately after being filled with the Holy Ghost came forth and preached Jesus openly before a hostile and mocking crowd (Acts ii, 15) and were ready gladly to suffer for the name of Jesus (v, 41). Moreover we presently find the whole congregation—for the passage seems to refer to all—praying for a like freedom and assurance in proclaiming God's word, and in answer all are filled with the Holy Spirit and speak the word of God with confidence (Acts iv, 29—31).

But one must not forget that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon them when they were all praying in one place *together*, and He "filled the whole house." They did not receive the Holy Spirit as so many individuals apart from one other and apart from Our Lady and St. Peter and the Apostles. They were filled by Him precisely as members of the Mystical Body in which each must abide and in which each has his function. The leadership of the Apostles and of St. Peter in particular is perfectly clear and the effect of the gift of the Holy Spirit is to unite them together under the Apostles: "They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles and in union, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts ii, 42). The Apostles therefore teach the rest as disciples; they work "many wonders and signs" (ii, 43), and "give testimony with great power to the Resurrection" (iv, 33); moreover they act together as a College, "the Twelve," or "the Eleven," and Peter is their leader and spokesman (i, 15, 26; ii, 14; v, 3, 15, 29; vi, 2, 6; viii, 14, etc.). But also there is "great grace" upon all the Christians and the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit has produced among them a complete union, moral and material; they have "but one heart and one soul" and share their goods in common, so that no one of them is in

want (iv, 32—34). A very great impression is made upon those outside not only by the words and miracles of the Apostles, but also by the bearing and fervour and unanimity of the whole community (ii, 47; v, 13). One remembers that to be a “witness” to Christ, for which the Greek is “martyr,” is to show forth Christ not only by words, but also by a Christian way of life and specially a Christian death. The grace to live such a life and to die such a death is given by the Holy Spirit.

How was the Pentecostal grace transmitted to other Christians? An occasion soon arose which shows us how. Philip the deacon presently went down to Samaria, preached Christ there and baptized. When the Apostles heard of the conversions in Samaria they sent Peter and John who “prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. For he had not yet fallen upon any of them, but they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts viii, 14—17).

It belonged to the fulness of the apostolic power to give the fulness of the Spirit, and that fulness we have all received at our Confirmation (cf. Acts xix, 1—6; Heb. vi, 1—3) which is the Sacrament of Catholic Action.

2. *The Formation of Apostles: Imitation of Christ.* The Holy Father, in the passage we quoted, said that the Holy Spirit is given abundantly to the Church “that she and each of her members may grow daily in likeness to our Saviour.” This is the work which Our Lord Himself attributes to the Holy Spirit: “He shall glorify me, because he shall receive of mine and shall show it to you” (John xvi, 14). This work may be looked at in two ways, and first as teaching Christians how to imitate Christ’s life on earth, by illuminating their minds to understand the Gospel story and apply it to themselves. St. Paul’s epistles pre-suppose the first instructions given to the converts about the life of Our Lord, but a few quotations may illustrate how he applied them.

“Be ye imitators of God, as most dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved you and given himself for you an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness” (Eph. v, 1—3). Their love was to be shown by an answering sacrifice, by a self-dedication to God. This offering Christ Himself had made for the sake of others: “For them do I sanctify myself, that they too may be sanctified in truth” (John xvii, 19), and Paul was minister of the Gentiles that their sacrifice might be well-pleasing and sanctified in the Holy Spirit (Rom. xv, 16). They were to present their bodies a living, holy sacrifice to God (xii, 1). And each of them was to please his neighbour, to do him good, to edify him, for Christ pleased not Himself (xv, 2, 3). Christ’s word must dwell in them abundantly, and they must have hearts full of pity, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, putting up with one another and freely forgiving one another. His peace must be the arbiter of their hearts, and above all

things they must have charity, the bond of perfection. In a word, they must "put on" Christ, who must be all in all things and in them all (Col. iii, 11—16). This whole passage illustrates the way in which they must liken themselves to Christ as He was on earth, and so does the famous description of charity in I Cor. xiii, 4—7. Again, they are to have Christ's own sentiments, taking Him as model in unselfish care for each other's interests and in the humility and willing subjection to each other which is a condition of unity; for He, though He was God, emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and made Himself lowly, being obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross (Phil. ii, 1—8). The whole life of Christ from the Incarnation to the Ascension was set before them and Christ crucified was "placarded" before their eyes (Gal. iii, 1):

But Christ was not only a model, for His life had passed into theirs: "With Christ I am nailed to the Cross. I live now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (ii, 20).

3. *Baptism forms other Christs.* The work of the Holy Spirit is also to develop in Christians the Christ-life which they received in baptism. Theirs is a life which has been "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. iii, 3), and the best clue to its secret is given by the sixth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

St. Paul has been saying that where sin reigned abundantly and produced death, grace has superabounded and reigns unto everlasting life. He then supposes that someone argues: Let us then remain in our sins, that grace may abound. "God forbid!" he cries. "We that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer in it?" Why are we "dead" to sin? Because after baptism we no longer form one with Adam, with sinful flesh, with fallen humanity, but we have been incorporated into Christ. Christ died, was buried and rose from the dead, and in baptism we die, are buried and rise with Him—a fact symbolized more clearly in the early rite when the baptized were immersed and, so to say, buried under the waters and rose fresh on the other side. "Know you not that all we who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized in his death? For we are buried together with him by baptism unto death, that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. . . So do you reckon that you are dead to sin but alive unto God in Christ Jesus Our Lord" (Rom. vi, 1—12).

Baptism, therefore, makes us die and rise with Christ. We really leave our "old man" with all his sins, original or actual, behind, we have renounced Satan, we are freed from the slavery of sin and able to bring forth fruit of holiness in a new life whose end is life eternal (vi, 22), we have our part with the saints in light, we have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's Beloved Son (Col. i, 12—13).

St. Paul assumes that the Romans know all about this. "Know you

not?" (Rom. vi, 3). Baptism is not—as the faithful nowadays are far too inclined to suppose—just something negative, merely a removal of past sins, a rite efficacious indeed, but one which must be got over and then can be forgotten. It does wash away past sins (Acts ii, 38; I Cor. vi, 11, etc.), but it does so by uniting us with Christ in His death and in His glorious, risen life, and it therefore introduces a continuous and ever present state of union with Him. Our "old man" has been "crucified together with Christ" and we now "walk in newness of life" (Rom. vi, 4, 6). Christian life is henceforth a continuous response in the depths of our hearts to the grace and obligation of baptism.

The dying with Christ begun by baptism continues, therefore, throughout life, and Christian asceticism is only the drawing out of baptismal grace. The rising with Christ is the source of that glorious life of the sons of God which the Holy Spirit, now dwelling in Christian souls, attests even here on earth. But dying with Christ is a condition of rising with Him. If we suffer with Him, then we shall reign with Him. "For the Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ; yet so if we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him" (viii, 16—17). And "they that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences" (Gal. v, 24).

This new life, "hidden with Christ in God" is wholly supernatural, for it shares in the life of the risen Christ, and so it must be lived under the guidance of the indwelling Spirit of God: "If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. . . Mortify therefore your members that are upon the earth" (Col. iii, 12, 5). "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. . . For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii, 8, 14). "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit . . . walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. . . The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, continence" (Gal. v, 25; xvi, 22). Although the consummation of this life is not yet, and is but hoped for, yet the Spirit teaches us to pray for that which we know not and Himself prays in us (Rom. viii, 24—27). Moreover the life of glory has already begun in us, and the soul, progressively conformed to Christ's likeness, reflects with greater and greater clarity the glory of Him who is Himself the perfect Image of God. "As to us, reflecting on face unveiled the glory of the Lord, we are all changed into his likeness from glory to glory as by the action of the Lord who is Spirit" (II Cor. iii, 18) (cf. Allo, *Seconde Epître aux Corinthiens*, in loc.). This glorious light, lit in our hearts, shines out to illumine others who have eyes to see (iv, 6).

We may now understand better why the Holy Father writes: "Our Saviour so shares with His Church the gifts that are especially His own, that the Church in the whole manner of her life, visible and invisible, portrays most perfectly the likeness of Christ Himself," and why he says that the interior life of the Church, the grace flowing from Christ which makes her and her activity supernatural, while it can never be separated from her external organisation, is far the more important. Further, we see how each member of the Church should in some way reflect and manifest Christ's life: "I live now, not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii, 20).

Christ's life, and above all His death, formed a sacrifice of redemptive love. Such, then, should be the life of His human members, and their co-operation is necessary if the graces of Christian Redemption are to be applied to others. St. Paul says of the sufferings of the apostles and their effect upon the faithful: "Death works in us, and life in you" (II Cor. iv, 12), and of himself: "I rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh for his body, which is the Church" (Col. i, 24). But the whole Church is given this work to do, for if one of its members suffer, all the members suffer with it (I Cor. xii, 16). "Dying upon the Cross," writes the Pope, "Christ bestowed upon His Church the boundless treasure of the Redemption without any co-operation on her part; but in the distribution of that treasure, He not only shares this work of sanctification with His spotless Bride, but wills it to arise in a certain manner out of her labour. This is truly a tremendous mystery, upon which we can never meditate enough: that the salvation of many souls depends upon the prayers and voluntary mortifications offered for that intention by the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, and upon the co-operation which Pastors and faithful, and especially parents, must afford to our Divine Saviour."

We may now understand how baptism generates a "royal priesthood and a holy people" (I Peter ii, 9) every one of them a son of God, destined to perfection. This is St. Paul's aim: "to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. i, 28). But this perfection is only attained by those who are "filled with the Spirit" and are "led by the Spirit," by those, therefore, whom St. Paul calls "spiritual men" not "carnal," not "little ones" any longer (I Cor. iii; Heb. v, 11—vi, 1) but practised and wise, and among these "perfect" ones he can speak "wisdom" (I Cor. ii, 6). We therefore pass again from baptism, the sacrament of Christian initiation, to Confirmation, the sacrament of Christian perfection, the sacrament of Leaders of Catholic Action.

4. *The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to all.* "The very well-spring of every created gift and grace," writes Pius XII, "is none other than the Paraclete, the Spirit Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and

Who, in a special manner, is called 'the Spirit of Christ' or 'the Spirit of the Son.' He is the invisible principle dwelling whole in the Head, whole in the Body and *whole in each of its members*, and assisting these with His presence in diverse manners according to their various functions and duties and their higher or lower degree of spiritual perfection. He, with His heavenly breath of life, is the source from which proceeds every single vital and effectively salutary action in all parts of the Body. It is He Himself Who is present in all the members and divinely acts in each, though He also acts in the lower members through the ministry of the higher."

*Note.*

The above account of what happened at Pentecost is based on the standard Catholic edition of the Acts, *Les Actes des Apôtres*, by E. Jacquier. But we have been asked to develop the argument further and answer two objections: (1) What grounds are there for supposing that the "all" of Acts ii, 1, refers to the 120 mentioned in i, 15? Might it not just as well refer to the twelve apostles mentioned in the last verse of ch. i? (2) What grounds are there for supposing that others besides the Apostles received the gift of tongues? Only Peter, "with the Eleven" appears to have spoken to the multitude in ii, 14. Have the others suddenly disappeared? (1) In Acts i, 13, St. Luke says that after the return from the Ascension "they went up into the upper room where there remained Peter, etc." A list of the Apostles follows. "All these were persevering with one accord in prayer, with the women and Mary the Mother of Jesus and with his brethren." The eastern "upper room" is even nowadays a large one. The Rabbis gave their teaching in such rooms, and their disciples were called "sons of the upper room" (Jacquier). The words "remaining" and "persevering" suggest living in the house, or at least constant, daily meetings.

There follows the "election" of a new Apostle. Peter spoke "standing up in the midst of the brethren, and there was in this same place a crowd of persons to the number of about 120," (v, 15). Two of these are presented by the "brethren" for the filling of the place of Judas, the lot decides for St. Matthias and he is numbered with the eleven Apostles. St. Luke now continues: "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in the same place." "Together" and "in the same place" would seem to be a pleonasm (unless it mean "in the same upper room mentioned before"). Some minor MSS. read ὁμοθυμαδόν "of one accord," instead of ὁμοῦ "together," but this leaves intact the circumstance that *all* were *together*. In short, St. Luke seems to be emphasizing by double or even triple repetition the point we wish to establish! He goes on to say that the sound of the mighty wind "filled the *whole* house where they were sitting" and that the tongues of fire "rested upon

*each one* of them ” and that they were “ *all* filled with the Holy Spirit.” St. John Chrysostom’s remark, quoted in the above article, that he would not have said “ *all* ” if only the Apostles had been there, is surely apposite. Again St. Luke seems to be making our point three times. A good commentary on the passage, which at the same time shows how traditionally Catholic is the interpretation we are giving, is provided in the Catechism for the use of Parish Priests issued by decree of the Council of Trent. Having quoted the “ *replevit totam domum* ” and “ *repleti sunt omnes* ” it continues : “ *Ex quibus verbis licet intelligere (quoniam domus illa sanctae ecclesiae figuram et imaginem gerebat) ad omnes fideles Confirmationis sacramentum, cuius initium ab eo die ductum est, pertinere* ” (*Catechismus ad Parochos*, Pars. 11, 202, De Confirmationis Sacramento).

Further St. Peter’s argument from Joel mentioned in the text presupposes an abundant pouring forth of the Spirit upon “ *all flesh* ” : “ *this is that which is spoken by the prophet. . .* ”

Finally Catholic tradition has always supposed that the group upon whom the Holy Spirit came down were those mentioned in Acts i, 14, at least, and so more than the twelve Apostles. This is shown by the constant assumption that Our Lady was in the midst of the Apostles. The Holy Father seems to refer to this in *Mystici Corporis* when he says that it was she “ *who by her most powerful intercession obtained for the new-born Church the prodigious outpouring of that Spirit of the divine Redeemer who had already been given on the Cross.* ”

(2) What grounds are there for supposing that others besides the Apostles received the gift of tongues ?

St. Luke says that the “ *parted tongues* as it were of fire rested upon *each one* of them.” The “ *parted tongues of fire* ” (the same word, γλῶσσαι is used), were clearly symbolic of the different “ *tongues* ” which they would speak. He continues, “ *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, according as the Spirit gave them to speak.* ” The Greek word for “ *to speak* ” is the word for a solemn enunciation, an “ *apophthegm.* ” The position of the word “ *all* ” implies more naturally not only that they were all “ *filled* ” but also that they all began to speak, but to clinch the argument we can refer again to the fact that the “ *tongues* ” rested upon “ *each one.* ”

Moreover there is a parallel in the coming of the Holy Ghost upon the Gentiles with Cornelius : “ *While Peter was yet speaking these words, the Holy Ghost fell upon all who heard the word. And the faithful of the circumcision who came with Peter were astonished, for that the grace of the Holy Ghost was poured out also upon the gentiles. For they heard them speaking with tongues* ” (Acts x, 44—46).

The same thing happens with the men at Ephesus after Paul has imposed hands on them (xix, 6). The Corinthians too had the gift of tongues

(I Cor. ch. xii-xiv). In all these cases (those of the Gentiles with Cornelius, at Ephesus and at Corinth) it may well be supposed that the fact was connected with their work of co-operation in the spread of the Gospel, for the first Gentile converts had a great work to do, and both Ephesus and Corinth were polyglot seaports.

Why, then, are only the Apostles mentioned in ii, 14? Because they, and Peter above all, were the natural spokesmen, and we may suppose that they had come out from the house to talk to the crowd which had assembled.

(To be concluded)

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*Do not the texts which speak of Christ as Priest and King suggest that He was made Priest only after His Resurrection? Cf. Ps. cix, 4; Gen. xiv, 18; Zach. vi, 13; Heb. viii, 4. Is not this further implied by Heb. vii, 15?*

That Christ was priest after His Resurrection and continues to be such in heaven is of course true. "He, because he remaineth forever, hath an unchangeable priesthood" (Heb. vii, 24). St. Paul stresses this as one point of difference between Christ and the Levitical priests who, after death, are replaced by their successors. Thus the glorified Christ in heaven is both reigning King and Priest. But these texts by no means oblige us to conclude that only after His Resurrection did He assume His priesthood. On the contrary, it is certain that He was Priest before He rose from the dead. The supreme priestly act of Christ was the sacrifice of Calvary, for St. Paul says that, unlike the Levitical priests who have to offer sacrifice daily, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people, Christ once and for all atoned for the sins of the people when He offered Himself. Such, he says, was the high-priest fitted for our needs (Heb. vii, 26—28).

When St. Paul says "If he (Christ) were on earth, he would not be a priest," he is not contradicting the above view, for he means that Christ could not legally serve in the *Temple* since only the descendants of Aaron could perform that ministry. Christ, of course, was of Judah. But Christ could exercise the priesthood of the New Covenant outside the Temple, and continues to exercise it in heaven.

The text of Zach. vi, 13, may refer to Christ in the typical sense, asserting that He reigns and is Priest. It does not say that He was not a priest before He reigned in heaven; nor on the other hand does the reference to reigning necessarily refer only to the life of Christ in heaven. Did not Christ tell Pilate that He was a king? And if it be answered that Christ also said His kingdom was not of this world, we may say that by this He