

THE CONSECRATION OF THE LAYMAN TO THE CARE OF SOULS

The word 'consecration' always includes in its meaning two aspects: the receiving of a power and the receiving of a commission; a faculty and a calling. And so, being consecrated to the care of souls means at once that one can and that one ought to care for souls. The souls with which the care of souls is concerned are those of others: the relationship of one's fellow man to God, his salvation and eternal destiny.

A priori, the very concept of such a care of souls embracing these two aspects seems impossible. The analysis of this difficulty will offer us the occasion for making clearer what a consecration to pastoral care must effect in one who ventures to undertake the care of souls. At the same time, we will be able to establish where in fact such a consecration takes place.

I

Human existence, wherever we may meet it, is always found to be existence in the world, is always necessarily being with others, community. But each community will also be different according to the particular spheres into which human life unfolds. It may be an external joining of forces for the acquisition of an external necessity of life: a *community of work*. Here men are brought together by their common external activity, by a third thing which is as yet extrinsic to man. The community of effort may consist in sharing in the creation of spiritual works of universal validity: science, art, law. These objective spiritual products are indeed as such independent of the arbitrary whim of the individual, and yet they do have a closer relationship to a man's being, in so far as they can come into real existence only as sustained by the spiritual experience of the individual man, they strive for realization only in him. And so from them, and from [264] the work which they demand, arises the *community of spirit*. These spiritual products are communicated by means of speech. It is speech which first makes it possible to co-operate in the same spiritual work. Moreover, it brings man the possibility not only of pointing out such objective spiritual realities, such truths existing in themselves, but also of opening himself and revealing himself of giving to the spiritual insight of others the possibility of penetrating with comprehension into one's own secluded, intimate interior. After all, only in speech (which does not necessarily mean sound) can the personal, spiritual countenance of a spiritual being be grasped, for this is always co-determined by liberty and therefore cannot be deduced from any other source. And so community of spirit can be extended by speech also into the community of those who reveal themselves by speaking.

Since such an unveiling of the inner secluded being of each person in himself avoids profaning the sacred character of the personal mystery only if it be offered and accepted in a love which makes of the two so much one that it is not an indifferent stranger who is allowed to enter into the sanctuary of one's being, the community of those who reveal themselves to one another by the spoken word refers us of itself to the community of love and must be conceived as its development. Thus we have the third kind of community we must distinguish, the *community of love*. It is founded upon a kind of mutual sharing of one's personal being, which is carried by love over into the other and intermingles with his. Here the basis of community is no longer a third term in which men meet one another: in the love of person for person they meet one another in themselves.

But does this mean that in this highest form of human community man can carry his own being over into the inner sanctuary of the other to such an extent that he is able to surround with loving care everything there? Or are there spheres in man which are beyond the reach even of such love? Or, to ask the question this time from the viewpoint of the 'beloved': are there in him spheres whose essential meaning is such as to withdraw them from immediate, intimate sharing by another? Yes: death – to begin with the clearest case – is a matter for each in himself alone with no reference to anything outside him. Everyone must die his own death for himself in supreme loneliness. But if it be true that all life points of itself constantly forward to death, that it is all the time a process of dying, then clearly death is merely a more obvious indication that there is present in the [265] existence of every man a deeper region in which everyone is left to himself, a line of being pointing to himself alone. In death it just becomes unavoidably evident in all its clearness that everyone has to make something of himself, to do and to suffer something by himself alone. What region of being is it, then, which reveals itself in death, which issues in it as its ultimate conclusion, which gives itself its final mark and seal in it?

It must be something in which man has to do simply with himself as such, something which is strictly his own task, which he alone can fulfil and in which no one else can substitute for him. But this is the case only where he himself is, in the strictest sense of the word, the task, where he is at once doer and deed, where doing and what is done are the same and both identical with himself. This is the case with man's liberty, where with the whole force of his nature he gives its ultimate meaning and character to his whole being, where he forms his own existence into what he wants to be. Here he is essentially alone. For the doing and what is done are inalienably his, they are as much his own as he is himself. For his action is the forming of his eternal physiognomy, it is himself in his eternal uniqueness. And hence only he himself can ever perform this act of eternal destiny. Everything that is done to a man, everything that happens to him, remains subject to the ultimate pronouncement of his liberty, in which he is still capable of understanding and accepting his lot (what is done to him, what is allotted to him); so everything that remains on this side of that ultimate personal verdict is not yet what finally counts in man. Only to a being that is not free is its 'lot' really its destiny; for the free being his destiny lies in himself. The choice which God has put into our hands we cannot confide to the care of any other.

But when man with his whole being is called to a free decision about himself, he finds himself without intermediary before his God. For He is the beginning and end of this being, the norm of every decision, and also its ideal and exemplar, even when it is a case of that supremely personal actualization of the individual's being which is outside the uniformly regular and therefore not to be brought within the compass of any humanly accessible rule. Consequently, in such a case God is still always there. He is not alongside one like a second being. He it is in whom we live and move and have our being. Indeed, in Him alone do we possess in the first place that milieu and atmosphere which first renders possible and supports our innermost and most personal decision. This it is which is deepest and ultimate in us, and yet He is deeper than we are at our [266] deepest level. He is beyond what is ultimate in us. And therefore He – and He alone – is not someone who has to wait in trembling expectation upon that word and decision of a man by which he strives to understand and form himself. He is before us, his willing and acting are therefore also before the inmost decision of man. He does not superimpose Himself on an already constituted man; He is already involved in his very constitution by his knowledge and action. He guides the hearts of kings (and in matters of the heart all are sovereigns); He has mercy on whom He wills in order that this person may have mercy on himself.

On examination, the realm of free decision reveals that the impossibility of a direct care of souls is so radical that the attempt does not merely fail in practice, but becomes evidently

self-contradictory. If salvation is always the fruit of a personal decision and everything outside this is not yet salvation and destiny, but at the most a lot which one merely suffers, then the attempted obtaining of the salvation of another is necessarily the obtaining of something which is not his salvation at all.

The impossibility which appears here stems both from an absence of capacity and from an absence of calling. Every influence brought to bear upon a man from outside founders powerlessly before that ultimate sanctuary wherein that which is meant to be influenced takes place. Indeed, the stronger such influence is, the more is it in danger of negating itself. It intends to be an influence in favour of liberty. The stronger it becomes, the more does liberty disappear. Yet it becomes efficacious only if the other himself opens the door of his own responsibility, freely corresponds with the 'influence' and freely introduces it into himself. Therefore if the 'influence' really enters into the ultimate decision, then it is always something dependent upon the person 'influenced' himself, something already transformed by him, therefore *his* own. To exercise an influence of this kind is of course a duty, but this duty is surely ultimately nothing else than the care we take that we 'do *our* duty', that 'we do what we can'; as for the rest, we say, it is 'his' affair and is a matter of indifference to us. So this care is not precisely care for the soul of the other (the 'rest' which is a matter of indifference to us is precisely this soul), but care to fulfil our duty: care concerning ourselves, self-care, not care of souls.

We appear then not only to be incapable of care of souls, but also not to be called to it. For though there might be such a thing as a calling to 'failure', there can be no vocation to what is self-contradictory. Further, we do not appear to be called to the care of others' souls for the more [267] profound reason that no one knows the living God in the heart of the other; each one of us is called to manifest Him in an utterly unique way in his own being as fashioned by his own decisions, yet as the ideal for this purpose He is known only to each one for himself and then only at the moment of decision.¹ For a decision is always something more than a mere application of universal laws and rules, even though it must be made in accordance with them. This being so, how could one person be called to 'care for' the decision, therefore for the 'soul', of another?

Is there then no such thing as care of souls? Is the soul of the other completely beyond our anxious care? Do we escape all responsibility for it, because we are not capable of nor called to, the care of souls? Do the wonderful words about the care of souls fundamentally only mean that a man must have a care for his own duty, for a duty does not and cannot penetrate to what is inmost in the other?

Indeed, there is a genuine care of souls, an anxiety for the soul of the other which is not merely anxiety for oneself as in duty bound to influence the other. Examining our difficulty will permit us to understand how it is possible.

We have already said that this inner inaccessibility of a man as freely deciding his own fate does not of its nature exist for God. Consequently, if we are to exercise any care for a man, then the shortest way into his inmost sanctuary will be that which leads through the infinitely distant God; any shorter route would in fact not get us there at all. In addition to the fact already mentioned, that God is the basic ground of every human decision, two things are required to make this possible: the man charged with the care of another's soul must first find the way to God, and then the way from God to the other. This is realized in the love which is poured out in us by the Holy Spirit, whom the Father has given us through Jesus Christ. A look at the effect of such love will make it clear that it does in fact travel this double road and that in doing so it does really go 'behind' the decisions of the man cared for.

The love which proceeds from God makes it possible to comprehend the decisions of the

¹ Cf. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations* II (London & Baltimore 1963), pp. 217-234.

other, in fact it is itself such comprehension.

Love 'knows' more deeply than knowledge itself. Knowledge always strives to get behind the object known, to 'get to the bottom' of it, to resolve it into its causes, its 'principles' or into the evident inner necessity [268] of its being. Where there are no such 'hidden roots', knowledge comes to a stop faced by a stranger, by itself alone it is incapable of receiving the other completely into the being of the knower, to become one with him. And this strangeness, this absence of further roots, this bare, uncomprehended fact is essentially what is first and last. The last is always the God who has freely created me at a particular time, and has freely acted with regard to me in such or such a particular way, and who would therefore remain alien and incomprehensible to me were I to meet him face to face merely by way of knowledge. It is only in and through love that this 'strange' element becomes understandable, capable of being accepted into me in a way leading to ultimate peace. In love one can ask no further questions, because love has its own light. In love all questioning is silenced. Is love unjustified in imposing silence upon all questioning? How could it be? But if on the other hand genuine questioning can be brought to silence only by an answer, then love must carry the answer within itself it must have its own intuition. Love is directed to the beloved precisely in his irreducible uniqueness, it is a giving of itself with its whole being (which is an eternal question) into the beloved You. Its own absolute character overcomes the absolute relativity which makes the appearance of every You so frighteningly foreign. And just as a decision, in spite of its unique and irreducible character, is quite clear to the one making it without its being reduced to something necessary, so it will be clear also through and in love to him alone who loves the person making that decision, because his being and his questioning now repose in the beloved and have no need of asking questions; in the other everything is quite clear and comprehensible. And so love sees clearly why the beloved God has dealt in this or that way with a particular man, with the clearness of an intuition born of loving prayer, which can never be converted into any other form in intuition. And when God acts, in a way which is free and not subject to retrospective explanation and brings it about that a man should make his own decision, then this adoring love understands why the man decides this way; this is an understanding which would not be possible at all directly from man to man, because our being does not permit of being directly transported into that region in the other where decisions are made.

It is of course true that genuine direct love from man to man has also the intention of embracing the beloved in his whole being, with his incalculable individuality, with his decisions, to 'take him as he is'. There alone [269] does true love begin. Otherwise one is loving only one's own ideal, and the other person only as object of, or means to, its realization; in other words one is loving only oneself. To this extent love already 'understands' the beloved and his decision in an 'evidence of love'. It loves the fact that he 'is as he is', 'it would not have him otherwise'. In such love the torment of the question arising from bare, irreducible factuality is resolved. But in so far as this love is directed immediately to the other person, it is, if it is not to become sinful, idolatrous love, bound to an indispensable condition; it is, therefore, almost against its nature which does not want to be bound by any condition or reservation, made relative. Whenever mistaken or evil decision is possible (and that is possible in the case of every man on this earth), love cannot love the other quite for better or worse, cannot simply love that 'he is just like that', cannot simply accept the other 'as he is'. In the face of sin there is no evidence of love. The contingent fact of free will, the shaft fatal to mere knowledge, certainly goads love to its noblest deeds. But sin as a contingent fact would be its own death if it were to make the attempt at it. It is true that the intention of immediate love too tends to include in its embrace the 'other in his decision'. But because it can neither take away this decision from the beloved, nor in any proper sense 'take care of it', nor assent to it without reservation, it fails in this ultimate

attempt to embrace the other's being in his decision, it sinks back powerless in its attempt to love to the last. And because it is never given us to know with ultimate certainty what is the *right* decision, whether in our regard or that of the other (no one knows whether he or the other is worthy before God of love or hate) this love which desires to penetrate directly into the inmost sanctuary of the other, in order to understand in its love, must necessarily and in every case fail.

It is obvious that we are only able to cast ourselves lovingly into God and to attune ourselves to the free movements of his actions towards us because he himself transports us into himself, because he himself has given us the power to love him in the ultimate secret of his reality. This we can really love immediately, presupposing the elevation of our love by God, not merely because he has given us the power to love him as the triune God, but – and this is in the present connection the decisive consideration – because his decision, his freedom is always good. And so in the case of our love for God there is not present that alien reservation which attaches of necessity to every direct love for man. Love for God, for him who acts [270] freely with man, can be unconditional. Thus there really shines in it and for it the light of its evidence. We 'comprehend' God and his action, and in his action in which he concurs with the action of man we comprehend also the action of man, and through it the man himself in his free and unique character.

Further, love can be a participation in God's care for the salvation of the other. It can be this, because it is a love of the other for God's sake.

In general, to love someone 'for the sake of someone else' is no love at all. Love after all strives to embrace the person itself of the beloved, wants to be transported into the beloved, in order that *he* may be enriched thereby. That it should be 'for the sake of someone else' appears to redirect the love away from the 'beloved', to reduce him to the function of a means or passageway for love in the proper sense towards a third person, to attribute to him a value only in relation to the third person, and therefore precisely not in his supreme uniqueness, as is the case with true love. This 'for the sake of' may mean 'as coming from' or 'as directed towards' a third person. It is clear right away that love 'directed towards' a third person does not sincerely love him whom it traverses on the way to the third person. For true love considers the beloved always as its 'end-goal', not as its means of access (though this does not mean that it ought not always to be subordinated to a higher and more determining love). Whoever loves someone only because this love makes possible his love for someone else (by increasing it, by attesting it, by spreading it, and so on), does not love the first person in the sense of a truly genuine, personal love.

If love for a man for the sake of someone else means to love him with a love coming from someone else, so that the first is the true end-goal of the love and the other only the region, as it were, or the standpoint from which the love proceeds, then it is impossible to understand how one man can be for another something like a 'region of love'. He, though being another, a stranger, would have to make it possible for the ultimate; uniqueness of the beloved to be presented to the love, this uniqueness would have to have in him its reason and ultimate norm, if it is to be in a position to be loved with a love proceeding from him. But this is essentially never the case. Therefore it is true to say that one does not genuinely love a man, if one loves him for the sake of another man.

All this is no longer true if the 'other' is God. Love for a man for the sake of God does not lead out of the beloved man but into him. God is not [271] another 'alongside' man. He is what is most intimate, the essential kernel of the beloved being, he is within even the inmost, the least relative, the ultimate enclosure of man in himself. He sustains it in his unfathomable love and almighty power, to which even the sovereignty of every individual is still subject. From him one can love man, whose inmost inaccessible centre can only be reached from God. Whoever loves such a God, whoever casts his whole being into God, in love and

adoration and submission (for if all love is already a humble inclining of oneself, then when directed towards God it becomes adoration and self-abandonment), is by that very fact in the innermost kernel of the loved man. He has penetrated behind the ultimate mystery of that man, because he has reached where God is. He can now truly exercise the care of souls, in union with God who alone can care for souls, for he has become one spirit with him; he can now hold in the anxiously attentive hands of love the very salvation of his brother, and not merely carry out a duty which he owes to himself. For he is united with God, who has power over souls.

And because this pastoral care takes place in an act of love for God, it bears all the characteristic marks of that love. That love is adoration, surrender of one's own will to God, confidence. And so the loving will directed to the salvation of the neighbour is an adoring self-surrender, confidence, prayer. It is the care of a man who in an attitude of humility implores the salvation of his brother, but who also knows himself to be bound by love to him with whom everything is possible, a bond which permits a man to reach out into the most intimate secret of another. It is just because the care of souls is thus essentially prayer, that pastoral love, particularly when it softly enters into that abyss where a man is alone with the God of his heart, remains humble and pure and leaves the other alone with the living God in spite of the loving proximity with him thus discovered. – And so all apostolate is in its deepest essence prayer. Therefore even every form of contemplative life can be pastoral; and all pastoral activity whatever its shape and form remains prayer of love to the God of all hearts.

Now we can understand why only he who loves God can love his brother, can be a pastor: because a direct love for a man cannot penetrate efficaciously and creatively to that point where the man is in reality and properly 'himself'. All direct love does not reach as far as the real self, to the 'soul' in the sense of the capacity to make a personal choice for salvation. For that is the true biblical sense of the word 'soul', and not [272] something like an interior room where thinking and feeling take place as opposed to the external happenings in the world. Therefore a true care of 'souls' is possible only through God.

We are now in a position to say where the consecration to the care of souls is produced. Fundamentally it is Baptism which consecrates us to it. Baptism is the pouring out of love for God and therefore consecration, power, and commission to pastoral care. And every sacramental increase of grace in Penance and Eucharist is a renewed commission to go forth and search out the innermost being of our brothers and lead them to God. Everyone who is baptized is consecrated a pastor.

II

But it is not as though this pastoral love lived only in the hiddenness of an ardent supplication for the salvation of the other. Out of the inmost recesses of a soul into which only God can make his way, it gushes up again actively into those domains which are accessible to all. It also travels upon the ways where men normally encounter each other; it can carry along with it all earthly loves and all earthly communities which it meets back to where it came from and where it properly belongs; it can make of every action among men an act of apostolate.

In this way the first community which we considered at the beginning, the community of labour, can become a pastoral activity. This community arises from mutual help and service in the material concerns of life. The whole of everyday life, which consists to a large extent in working together for the necessities of this earth, can be lifted up and consecrated, and by pastoral love become an apostolate. All the cares of daily life, all 'welfare-work', ought to become 'salvation-work'; it may usefully be directed to making possible a personal saving

decision for God. Since all everyday activity is capable at this deeper level of being related to salvation, the love which concerns itself with the corporeal and material welfare of the neighbour can be elevated, consecrated, and transformed by the love which is directed to the salvation of the other. It is for this reason that all activity which can in any sense be called a work of Christian mercy, of charity, is in the profoundest sense pastoral work, care of souls.

In so far as this love which turns into 'charity' all merely human assistance is love of Christ, it is a continuation, a making eternal of the pastoral care of Jesus. Jesus confirmed his care for souls by miracles. And his [273] miracles were not mere philanthropic acts of the Almighty, but 'signs', witnesses to the reality and the activity of God revealing himself, therefore witnesses to his activity which was ultimately aimed at the salvation of souls; witnesses to his all-forgiving love, therefore witnesses of his care for souls. A ministering charity continues these miracles of Jesus, these signs, until at the end of time his invisible creative love has no longer any need for such external confirmation and testimony. An isolated act of charity as such will perhaps not be recognizable as a miraculous act of the spirit of Christ. But that this spirit of the love of Christ has never disappeared in all the centuries of Christian history, in all the periodic changes which normally overtake everything, even a 'spirit', but has on the contrary continued to bring forth new acts of love, this is an eternal miracle, an eternal witness to the pastoral care of Jesus. And whoever performs an act of ministering charity in the spirit of Christ inserts himself into this miracle, he bears witness to the fact that in Christ alone can salvation, can the 'soul' be found. When a Sister of 'Charity' spends a night at a sick-bed, when a mother washes nappies because in this way she is serving her child, a child with an eternal destiny, then this is pastoral love and a testimony to the pastoral love of Christ, and therefore doubly a care of souls.

The second community which we spoke of at the beginning is 'community in spirit'. It consists in each introducing the other into the realm of what is eternally true and good, in helping to make objective spiritual forms achieve a reality in men which they can recognize and love. This help is given principally in discourse, in the word. This community attains its highest form when it becomes a community with the God who unveils his being in his revealing word, when he communicates to us his inaccessible mystery. From what we have said it is clear that such a community in its deepest sense is possible only in love, i.e. when God communicates his secret not to 'strangers', but to his 'child', to someone who has already by grace been essentially admitted into his mystery, so that the word in which he reveals himself once again remains modestly confined within him. If such a community of knowledge concerning the personal mystery of God is only possible as ordered to the community of love, then conversely it is also a 'realization', a development of the community of love with God. It is because He loves us, because we are already one with Him in love, that God tells us who He is. The revealing word is an act of love, it issues from love and is proffered in love, it is a realization of love.

[274] Since the secret of a personality can never be open of itself, can never of itself be accessible to everyone from every side, the possibility of its being revealed will always and inevitably depend upon the revealing word of that personality. The personality of God has been revealed to us in his Word, which is Christ, and which he himself has uttered. This Word must be transmitted to all peoples in all times. To this each one of us, including the layman, is consecrated by the Sacrament of Confirmation. Confirmation confers on us the capacity and the commission to render witness to Christ, and to the triune God who has revealed himself in him. Every Christian – the mother who takes the child on her knee and teaches him his first prayers, the teacher who gives 'Religious Instruction', whoever proclaims his faith by a Sign of the Cross – is the ambassador of God, the bearer of the delightful and awesome secret of him who dwells in inaccessible light, whom none has ever seen. In each case God transforms the discourse proceeding from the mouth of man into his

own Word.

Baptism appeared to us as a consecration to the care of souls because as the basic act of God's love it communicates to man his love for God, and man first achieves in this love the possibility of pastorally reaching his fellow man in the deepest roots of his being, in that depth where his being and his freedom are committed into the hands of God. Whenever a man, armed with this power, takes upon himself the care of another, then his care is a sharing in the loving care which God bears for the salvation of that other. But because God, moved precisely by his loving will for man, unveils his own being in the testimony of revelation, the testimony which man renders to revelation is, in virtue of the Spirit of Confirmation, an expression and extension of his pastoral love for his brother, an act of that love he bears towards God and which is his consecration to the care of souls. Having entered into the love of God, man is drawn out of the eternal distance of the God he loves back towards man, following out the direction of the love of God itself; together with God he pronounces the word of love in which God wills to express his love for man as far as the region of knowledge. The enlightening Spirit of Confirmation, the Spirit of Truth, is at its deepest a Spirit of love. And so our witness of faith is an act of love, a care of souls which finds in Baptism its deepest root and which receives in Confirmation the power to transform the community of love in God into a community in the one knowledge of the personal mystery of the Eternal.

And further: every discovery of the truth, in fact every step forward [275] in the realm of the spirit, be it in the way of truth or goodness or beauty, is a step nearer to the living God who is Spirit. For each time there is a further degree of liberation from the earth, from everything that is merely material. It is true that this world of the spirit is, in relation to the God of revelation, still 'world'. But the experience of its light and shade is capable of directing the soul to him who is beyond every world, of disposing it not to miss hearing, amidst the words of the world (even that of the spirit) and its rumours, the Word which may proceed – as it did in fact proceed – from beyond every world. For only he who has in some way heard the last word that the world has to tell him – and that is the word which speaks of the distant God beyond every world – has the ears to hear the first word of God when he approaches, should this God deign to come. And so every preoccupation with the realm of the spirit, every opening of ways into it, means clearing away obstacles in the way of God when he comes in his revelation. For this reason it can be elevated and divinized by the Spirit of light and love of Confirmation. Every occasion when a truth is passed on, every act of teaching, of exhortation and education, every conversation about what is true and good and beautiful, can be pastoral, can be a part of that proclamation of the faith to which the confirmed Christian is committed. And so all community of spirit can be inserted into the most intimate community of pastoral love and receive thereby its greatest profundity and most sacred nobility.

The third community of which we spoke at the beginning is the community of love between human beings. Although this community can take on the most diverse forms, its clearest expression is certainly to be found in the community of marriage, which may therefore be representative here of every community of love: two people give themselves to each other and to their child for ever in the highest community of which the power of human loving is capable, love of the person himself. Yet we have already shown that to such love, which aims at the whole being of the other, the direct path from one into the ultimate depths of the other remains barred. Reduced to its own powers alone, the love which dares all must in this venture sink back in impotence before the 'soul' of the beloved.

In the Sacrament of Matrimony, however, this love becomes capable of the supreme act of love in the love of God. The conjugal will of love in which two baptized persons give themselves to each other in the sight of the Church is a sacramental sign productive of grace,

it engenders sanctifying grace, divine love. But this means that whenever two people by the [276] joyful Yes of their wedding-day pour out their being into each other, at the same time their being is drawn into an ever-greater loving proximity to God. By the grace of God, the way which leads to the beloved becomes a way leading to God, closeness to a human being brings about a growing closeness to God. But the way leading directly to God – this was the ultimate meaning of the first part of our discussion – is in its turn the shortest way, indeed the only way, into the ultimate depths of the beloved person, to that profundity where he is responsible for his salvation, a point to which we must penetrate if we want in our love to cooperate in his supreme good. That marriage is a Sacrament does not therefore merely mean that conjugal love is directed to God; it means rather that only then does it acquire its ultimate human profundity, because it opens up possibilities of love which are essentially inaccessible to a merely human love. Thus the Sacrament of Matrimony constitutes a new consecration to the care of souls because it is an increase of supernatural love for God and for men. In fact there is included in this consecration a special mission of the spouses towards one another. According to the teaching of the Church the Sacrament of Marriage has also as its purpose that the two partners should help one another ‘more and more to form and perfect the inner man’ in the image of Christ; indeed, if we consider marriage as a perfect community of life, then ‘constant striving to lead one another to perfection’ constitutes its true meaning. Hence the spouses have a special mission towards one another. Sacramental marriage, as an increase of divine love and a claim upon the graces proper to that state, entails the duty and the power of grace to perform this pastoral mission which are never lost to the married faithful; thus it is a new consecration to a mutual loving care for the perfection of souls *in Christo Jesu*.

Every Christian is consecrated to the care of souls by the love which embraces both God and man. And this mission has a twofold capacity in its zeal for the salvation of men: the Christian thus consecrated penetrates by his loving care and the power with which he is endowed into the lonely depths where an eternal destiny is fashioned, because in his love he has penetrated the even greater depths of God; and he goes forth into the whole wide world of human life right to the outermost peripheral regions, and even there is still consecrated to care for souls and their eternal salvation.