

THE SOCIETY OF ST. PIUS X
District of Australia and New Zealand

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“For me, to live is Christ...”

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Dear Friends and Benefactors of the Society of St. Pius X,

Pope Pius XI in his encyclical on education tells us: *“Hence the true Christian, product of Christian education, is the supernatural man who thinks, judges and acts constantly and consistently in accordance with right reason illumined by the supernatural light of the example and teaching of Christ.”* If we wish to be truly Christian, we must be transformed into supernatural men; we must become *Christ-like*.

But do we really understand what it means to be Christ-like? We can speak about the specific qualities of Christ such as His kindness, His mercy, His goodness and love, but unless we take these qualities and imitate them in our daily lives, we do not become Christ-like. No doubt the devotional, liturgical and sacramental life of the Church touches our lives to some extent, but it would be a mistake to imagine that the acquisition of the virtues of Christ can be left simply to this aspect of Catholic life. Likewise, through our catechism, we may learn about Christ's life and doctrines, but can it be said that we truly know and therefore live Christ?

For too many Catholics the faith is like a garment they put on occasionally, maybe for church on Sunday, but which is left in the closet during the rest of the week. Their faith and their daily lives never really coincide. They are content to watch Christ in the distance going up the steep and narrow path to the mountain of perfection but they are unwilling to get closer to Him by self-denial, acceptance of their cross and closely following Him step by step on the path to holiness. Thus remaining content to watch from a distance they remain unable to truly know and live Him. Pope Pius XII said that one of the chief causes for neo-paganism was *“the frightening ignorance of Catholics in matters of religion.”* He would surely find this ignorance terrifying today.

Indeed, our transformation into Christ begins with our learning the truths of the faith. But to become Christ-like, knowledge alone is insufficient. Dogmatic definitions and doctrines should be known by heart, but it is hard to imitate a doctrine or definition. We live by faith, but God sent His only begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to teach us how to live this faith. Knowledge is not meant to simply remain in our intellect or memory, but rather to move our will and stir it to action. It must become real living knowledge that comes from seeing and imitating Christ's life. Christ did not say: *“Learn about me.”* He did say: *“Learn from me.”* We have in Christ a concrete personification of what the supernatural man should be and we need to not only examine Him closely by

looking, studying and meditating upon Him but also imitate in our daily lives His example. The more we have faith in Christ and live in Him the more will we be transformed into Him. *“Let it be our greatest occupation to meditate upon the life of Jesus Christ”* (Imitation of Christ, I; 1). We will thus take this knowledge and put it to work in our daily lives and Christ’s example will reach the whole man – intellect, will, emotions. Pope Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis* says: *“Let those who glory in the name Christian all look to our divine Saviour as the most exalted and most perfect exemplar of all virtue.”*

Unfortunately, through experience, we know about the battle against human weakness, which is mainly that of the will - a problem of doing. St. Paul expresses this to the Romans (7,18): *“For to will is present with me; but to accomplish that which is good, I find not.”* The intellect must be formed but even more important is the formation of the will. Pope Leo XIII once wrote: *“And this is likewise a need which is innate in the very nature of the child and the peculiar conditions in which we live. On no account may we call down once again on the child the judgement of Solomon, and split him by an irrational and cruel rupture of intelligence and will: while the former is to be taken in hand and cultivated, the latter must be prepared so as to practice virtuous habits and attain the final goal. Anyone educating the young who neglects the will, concentrating all his efforts on the cultivation of the mind, makes instruction a dangerous weapon in the hands of the wicked”* (Letter *In mezzo*, June 26,1878 —to the Cardinal Vicar).

To help overcome this weakness and strengthen our spiritual life, we must develop good Christian habits. Added to our continued study of the faith there must be the will to incorporate this knowledge into thoughts and attitudes. Frequentation of the sacraments, the channels of sanctifying grace, and the practice of devotions, especially daily prayer, are means that help move the will to action. Care should be taken to develop a solid personal piety with a proper balance established between obligatory practices and practices that are a matter of personal choice. In this regard Pope Pius XII said: *“Even in the exercise of piety there must be a proper balance so that they will not become an insupportable burden or distasteful. Deplorable results have often been noted from imprudent zeal in this matter. Students have been known to give up their most elementary Christian duties such as assistance at Sunday Mass once they left the Catholic school in which were required practices that might have taxed a seminarian. We should most certainly help and encourage young people to pray but let us do it in a way that prayer will become for them a response to a need of the soul”* (April 20, 1956).

Another important aspect in the formation of the Christian is the atmosphere or spirit in which it is given. Education as a whole and especially religious education is primarily a question of atmosphere. Especially for children, whether at home or in school, the atmosphere helps to make religion a vital factor in their lives and helps them to accept religious practices willingly. Christian habits must be presented as a program for imitating the virtues of Christ rather than as a body of restrictions which only arouse rebellion. The emphasis on true love of God must be brought into relief. Only from the point of view of love will the commandments and laws be accepted as a means of advancing freely and spiritually towards God. If the home and the school do not have this atmosphere and do

not conform to the requirements of Christian morality, especially regarding charity, the children will not willingly accept religious practices.

It is also very important that the atmosphere in the home and school coincide. The harm done to souls by the lack of morality in many schools today, both public and so-called Catholic, today is treacherous. Yet even more deadly is the harm caused by an irreligious atmosphere in the home. Many Catholic homes have allowed the poison of the modern world to creep in. The internet, television, modern music, video games and a variety of other virtual worlds of pleasure, convenience, impurity and softness have been allowed to corrupt the minds, wills and affections not only of the children but of the entire family. In such an atmosphere love of God grows cold and eventually is lost and the Catholic education which seeks to train their minds, wills and affections will be hard pressed to influence them. In his Radio Message for the “Mothers’ and Children’s Day” January 6, 1957 Pope Pius XII said: *“We would like to exhort fathers and mothers to realize the importance of their calling and to use their authority effectively, to teach the child with wisdom and moderation, to dominate his instinctive tendencies, to stimulate his good will, to awaken his intellect and affection and to transmit to him the precious inheritance of the most beautiful and elevated traditions of human and Christian culture.”*

To become Christ-like is certainly not easy for any of us and in fact is impossible without God’s grace. But He has given us freewill and expects that we do our part and to this end there are certain natural and acquired traits of mind that every mature character should have, which serve not only our natural interests but more importantly our supernatural ones. Such habits as good decision making, love of consistency, taking impersonal attitudes, and self-respect arising from the fact that we are rational creatures, are traits that can help us in the spiritual life. I will speak about more at length in a future letter.

Especially after having witnessed the great depth of mercy and love revealed during the commemoration of our Saviour’s Passion and Death and as we experience once again the great joy of His Resurrection, let us take courage and have no fear for as St. Paul says, we *“can do all things in Him who strengthens us”*. Thus, with joy and courage let us *“so run, not as at an uncertainty”* but so as to receive the eternal prize of Heaven, which we will do only if we truly become Christ-like.

Sincerely yours in the Risen Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John D. Fullerton", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Fr. John Fullerton
District Superior