

Blessed Sacrament will throw light on the Real Presence, the liturgy on the prayer of the Church as a collective person, the love of one's brethren and the apostolate on the unity and catholicity of the kingdom of God. It seems difficult to think that, living with Christ, Christians can fail to make progress in Unity or fail to love its demands. It is from Christ as the starting point that the Catholic Church will reach plenitude. There where the life of Christ is, is catholicity. *Ubi Christus, ibi Ecclesia.*

Such is the direction in which the impressions of a continental in contact with Anglicanism travel. In spite of the difficulties which logic, being of the intellect, may meet with, he retains his hope in life, because he has found among Anglicans loyalty to and love of Christ. Doubtless for an Englishman his reflections have no originality, but from time to time it is essential to come into contact with the evidence. This enables every man to examine his conscience on the catholic quality of his faith and to continue his efforts along the long road which will gather together the separated brethren.

PAUL YELLI (*Translated by K. P.*)

THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND

A MYSTERY AND A PROBLEM

THE 'Conversion of England' presents itself to us both as a problem and a mystery, but for one reason or another we become so preoccupied with the problem that we overlook the mystery. Yet our very handling of the problem is bound to be influenced by our awareness of the mystery. It must be confessed also that the problem has hitherto received only intermittent attention, and that nothing like a strategy of conversion has yet been evolved. It is my contention that our tendency to date has been to view the question as a matter of immediate practical concern demanding immediate action; and there seems moreover to be a belief abroad that this is a problem which will yield like any other to persistence and the correct technique—backed always by the grace of God. Certainly we should be active if only intermittently, but have we any reason for believing that our usual methods of tackling this immense problem are likely to lead to improved results? I would submit that the inevitable sense of frustration which follows on our efforts is due to an insufficient consideration of the truth that the problem is not only a problem, but also a profound mystery.

In its general lines the conversion of a great nation involves

the mystery of God's Providence, and his permission of evil. The classical justification for the existence of moral evil is that God draws from the evil a greater good; and when we look for the justification of the evil of heresy we can see in the history of the Church how it has resulted in the articulation and clarification of Christian truth. Heresy thus becomes the occasion for development of doctrine in the Church. It is manipulated by the hand of God to make the truth shine more brilliantly and apply itself more fruitfully to the souls of men. But when heresy is translated into Schism what then? If 'pure' heresy does contribute to the elucidation of the truth, what purpose does the evil of schism serve in the providential order of things? It may be doubted whether the origins of heresy are as purely intellectual as they seem to be, but the great national schisms of the reformation period, whatever their origins in the mind of man, certainly worked themselves out through the agency of every kind of human evil, and it was pride, lust, ambition and greed which made them possible rather than any concern for truth. Inevitably we try to penetrate the darkness of it all and we ask what purpose will it all serve? Will the agonies of our western world, increasing it would seem with each generation during the past 400 years, will they ultimately contribute to a spiritual purification of the Church? That the Church through all the vicissitudes of her history remains One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic we do not doubt, but are these great marks of her supernatural character static or dynamic qualities? And if they are dynamic will that dynamism work intensively rather than extensively in the future? The fool, it is said, can ask more questions in a few moments than a wise man can answer in a month, but frequently the only difference between them is that the wise man knows that he does not, and perhaps cannot know the answer.

Then let the fool proceed! Conversion is a mystery as the personal record from St Augustine to Newman is there to show. The most perfect antecedent reasoning may bring a man to the threshold, but without the operation of a mystery—the mystery of the grace of faith—he cannot pass into the house of God's church. The transition from natural reasoning to supernatural faith must of its nature be mysterious, because it implies the acceptance of truths which in the last analysis are one truth—God in his inner mystery, the divine essence itself. How the finite mind can 'know' the infinite in its intimate essential structure must be mysterious to us. And it is my whole point that unless we are convinced of the mysterious supernatural quality of conversion we shall approach the problem in a manner unfitted to solve it. We shall be cheerful

and argumentative when we should be merely tentative and sympathetic: we shall mistake the scale and depth of the problem.

Turning to the strategy of conversion I would suggest that we Catholics as a first requirement should institute a process of self-examination, *vis-à-vis* the rest of the community, in order to judge the impact we make on others. Now the effect of the reformation in this country was to drive the Catholic Church out of the national life. Throughout most of the 18th century Catholics were a dwindling remnant; and the Catholic revival of the 19th century was almost a rebirth. That rebirth was due under God to what has been called the diaspora of the Irish race. The overwhelming majority of Catholics in this country today owe their faith to Irish ancestors one, two or three generations ago. Those exiled Irish were what Arnold Toynbee has called an 'internal proletariat'; they were 'in' but not 'of' the community in which they found themselves. As a consequence the Catholic Church in this country has always been predominantly the church of the poor, and in the eyes of the rest of the community has always had about it a slightly alien character. Now I believe these to be facts which perhaps we cannot change, perhaps do not desire to change, but which we should still remember, and allow for in their effect on others.

If we come to examine more closely how the Church is regarded in this country, we can discern three common attitudes of mind; namely Indifference, Suspicion and Incomprehension: the classifications are not however mutually exclusive. Hatred of the Church is rare and only of local occurrence, though dislike of our non-conformity is natural, and admiration though it is not unknown is seldom a stable and habitual attitude of mind.

Large numbers are indifferent to us, as indeed they are to all forms of organised religion, which they will tell you means nothing to them. They are of course ignorant of the elements of Christian truth; and, what is perhaps as important, they are men into whose lives little that is ennobling or elevating has ever entered. But they are not consciously hostile; as far as maybe they are neutral. The attitude of suspicion is, one fears, deeper and more widespread than we are inclined to believe, since it is far from being incompatible with an outward courtesy. The prejudice which is the mother of this suspicion is I would suggest more commonly found among the middle and more educated sections of the community than among the working classes. Here the feeling is we are 'alien'—Irish—and therefore unpredictable, that we owe allegiance to a foreign power—the Papacy—a word which conjures up in the Protestant mind a lush vision of duplicity and corruption. Suspicion is still

very much alive and often in influential quarters. Finally there is the attitude of incomprehension concerning which it may be objected that this is an attitude common to almost all outside the Church. To this I should answer that a failure to understand the Church is indeed very widespread among unbelievers, but it is seldom as it were a total condition of mind or even the dominant characteristic. It is usually accompanied by hostility, indifference or suspicion. But the attitude of mind which I am here considering, something which ignorance is too vague a term to describe, which is found without hostility, is predominantly that of incomprehension. This attitude is I think very commonly found among the working masses of the country. They are not hostile to the Church, for the majority of them have no real religious allegiance; they are less infected with suspicion and prejudice. It is perhaps worth adding that morally they are less unsympathetic to the Church than those nominally above them in the social scale. Admittedly a great obstacle to conversion is the Church's teaching on the nature of Marriage and the duties of the married state. Divorce and Birth Control are much less common among the working classes than among any other section of the community.

In short I think it is a point to be considered whether the working people are not the most 'convertible' element in the country. In any event their strategic importance in a plan of campaign which envisages the whole country is undeniable. The future (if there is one for any of us) lies with them; for I assume that we are on our way to an egalitarian society. How are we to approach them? Through action I would suggest rather than through the written or spoken word: this at least as a preliminary tactic. In other words an immense work of preparing the ground is necessary. In general we should welcome and approve political and social measures which benefit the majority, wherever these are compatible with our principles. We should eschew the negative and critical attitude which we have adopted so often in the past; whether it be a question of the Schools, the new National Insurance Act, or any other measure affecting the country as a whole. We should appraise what is good, simply as a principle of correct judgment. It is one of our defects that though we are predominantly the Church of the poor, Catholic social teaching more often than not, reaches the non-catholic world through the medium of a minority among us, who are bourgeois or aesthetically minded and certainly not representative of the Catholic body as a whole. The working classes are the section of the community most free from deeply rooted prejudices concerning the Church; but they will not listen to her

message unless they are convinced that she stands for social justice, and they are not yet convinced.

The more directly religious approach to the non-Catholic working people should be made in the form of a moral and spiritual apostolate and here a movement like the Y.C.W. has an indispensable part to play. Alas, if a genuine impression is to be made, the movement will have to be much more widespread than it is at present. Just as the bad Catholic does incalculable harm to the Church, so enlightened, zealous young Catholic working men can do incalculable good. Here is a task for the younger clergy, themselves so often of working class parentage, a task which will teach them the realities of the world in which they live, and give depth and substance to the whole of their priestly lives.

Having said so much of the approach to the working classes by way of action what of the Church's apologetic in this country? Doctrine must be taught; the Word must be preached in season and out of season. The intellect has the dominant part in man and its demands are supreme. With due diffidence I put the view forward that our usual apologetic to the non-catholic world falls between two stools. It is aimed at the middlebrow; it leaves the real intellectual untouched and the working man, if he comes across it, puzzled and unmoved. The standard works of catholic apologetics have no doubt an indispensable value in the theological training of the priest, but they suffer from the defects of all compendia of vast fields of learning: that they are composed of predigested matter, are skeletonic, and schematic in structure, and thus they minister to a learning which is nominal rather than real. What we need is not so much 'ad hoc' apologetics as theological writing of the highest quality in English worthy of its subject; and we need instead of an occasional work, a steady stream of such writing. We need, in addition, Catholic scriptural commentaries written in English which can compete with the best non-catholic productions in this field. It is clear that we must think in terms of a long distance programme, and not sacrifice our energies in activities which will leave the main problem virtually untouched. The exposition of Catholic doctrine is in itself an apologetic, and perhaps the finest apologetic of all; but there is need for a type of work which will be concerned to *show* the Church rather than to argue about the difficulties of particular doctrines. An apologetic which is demonstrative in this sense; which is concerned to link up doctrine with doctrine, and present the reader with an organic whole, which displays the Church as a thing human and yet divine, recapitulating and storing up in her bosom all human history, such an apologetic

is more likely to convince than the neat and somewhat rationalistic methods of our popular text books.

From what has been said it will be seen that the strategy of conversion moves on two levels: intellectually on the aristocratic level, socially on the democratic. Clearly it calls for a generous dedication of our younger men to a double apostolate: an apostolate of the intellect and an apostolate of the heart.

Having insisted on the mystery of conversion in the beginning, it is right that we should return to it in the end, conscious that when we have done all that we ought we still remain unprofitable servants. It is not for us to predict the result of our labours for God; we must be grateful to be the instruments of his Providence in any capacity. And we must be ready to accept the measure of success or failure he shall assign to us, aware that we easily mistake the one for the other. Prayer we know is one of the supreme instruments of his Providence and that without it certain evils may not be withheld nor other graces granted to men. In the great enterprise of England's conversion, in whatever measure it shall please God to bring it about, the prayer and penance of dedicated souls will count for more than all our labours. For prayer is the real starting point of the approach to that faith, which is the goal in the mystery of conversion.

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