

DOERS OF THE WORD

UNLESS we candidly acknowledge, and begin to repair, the shortcomings in our own Christian life, our deeply-pondered schemes for 'social reconstruction' are in danger of misfiring. The danger in these war-time social plans of ours is that we over-emphasise the planning element and spend our time talking about how we are going to act in the future without attempting to put our principles into action here and now. Consequently when the time comes for setting our schemes before a waiting world we shall have nothing more concrete to offer than the distillations of our academic ponderings. Such vagueness will stand little chance of survival against the more practical methods employed by such opponents as the Communist Party. Unless we realise that our plans must be set in motion now and not kept till the end of the war, and unless by the end of the war we have a plan already coping in practice with the problems not only of the intellectual, but of that more influential body, the working class, we are going to be left like dogs baying at the moon while the community falls victim to the tender mercies of the Marxist propagandists. All this because we have talked too much and acted too little.

A second danger lies in regarding our plans as nothing more than 'emergency measures.' By definition, such plans fall into disuse the moment they have served their purpose, which in this case is to prevent chaos and disorder after the strain of war. This implies an attitude towards social reform that arises from a misconception of the causes of social injustice. If totalitarianism, and that alone, were the cause of all social evil, then indeed we need only trouble to destroy that and the world would be righted. But the real evil, and we have been told so time and again, is that Christian people have made the evils of totalitarianism possible: not by any political act, such as the Treaty of Versailles, for which a few politicians are to blame, but by deeds and behaviour which have extended over several hundreds of years, and which have

set up a false sense of values, by fostering materialistic ideals in which worldly power and material comfort are the be-all and end-all. We are all guilty in this respect, and therefore we must first cure our own ills, our own uncharity, selfishness, injustice to others, our own materialistic outlook. 'Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only' might be altered to 'Be ye doers of the word and not talkers (or writers, or debaters) only.'

From this arises the third, and perhaps the gravest, danger—Pharisaism; which is the more insidious if unconscious. We are called to defend a good cause, to remedy certain evils. Instinctively we preen ourselves and begin to point out the truth to others; we lay our plans for teaching others the true meaning of Christianity; we found study circles to discuss social problems, arrange meetings of influential thinkers to probe the causes; but we never translate our plans into action by uprooting the sins of materialism from our own lives. If at the end of the war we were to put these schemes before any one of those who make up the bulk of the society for which we are supposed to be planning, the reaction for the most part would be blank incomprehension; it would at best provoke the retort, 'Physician, heal thyself.' For we have been talkers only, and not doers. The average man is not merely a talker, for he is not a disembodied intellect; he is a complex organism of emotions, affections and desires, all of which, with his mind, play their part in determining his behaviour. Life for him does not consist in abstract thought alone; it means doing things about which he deliberates as well as thinks, things which he sees and desires as good in reality and not merely on paper. Such a man requires some substantial proof that the terms offered him are going to be of value in helping him to live his life better, and if we offer him a code which we ourselves have never put into practice, he will rightly convict us of hypocrisy. This danger is so apparent that not only our spiritual but also our temporal leaders have warned us of it more than once—we must be worthy of the cause we are defending.

The solution of this threefold problem is therefore something primarily practical, in the sense that it must consist

in something to do in the same sort of way that brushing our teeth and cleaning our shoes is something to do. We are preaching a Christian mode of life. If we practised this we should automatically create a working Christian society. And this would give us 'ready made' a tried scheme of Christian life to offer to the soldier and sailor at the end of the war. In addition, such practical Christianity would automatically nullify the danger of being talkers only and planners of mere 'emergency measures,' for it is the Christian apostolate of realising the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

The first task before us, therefore, is to make ourselves as a society more consciously Christian. This means Christian unity, the source of which, St. Paul tells us, is charity in Christ, the corner stone which the builders rejected. Charity resides in the will, so that there is no reason why disparity of intellectual ability, of physical skill, or of any other human attribute should be a bar to Christian charity if men have only the willingness to practise it. But in point of fact, most of our schemes for a Christian society begin by trying to remove all intellectual differences. To dragoon all minds into one way of Christian thinking is not only impossible, but creates hostility. Even within the Church the 'intellectuals' or 'highbrows' come to be ranged against the 'workers' or 'lowbrows'—an intolerable situation—when each should be complementary to the other. Consequently, a vast body of Catholics with the best will in the world is left to say its prayers, do works of charity and stumble along to heaven as best it can, whereas if its energy were harnessed it would become a force greater than all our books and articles, all our discussions and study circles put together, a force which would be dynamic in bringing Christ into everyday social life. This does not mean that the people are never to be taught the meaning of their life—on the contrary, this is the very means of making them into a Christian society, but the teaching must be done by deeds rather than words. We can have no excuse for ignoring this. The present Pope in the encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, specifically concerned with the contemporary social problems, explicitly mentions three things which

we can do: prayer and mortification; the restoration of full Christian family life; and organised Catholic action. Again, who has not heard of cases like that of the poverty-stricken mother who was led to the faith because she had met with 'real Christianity' from Catholics? She is one of millions whom our schemes concern. These people have been alienated by our insistence on reasons that are divorced from practice. We have been too academic and have never lived a full-blooded Christian life outside our books and discussions.

Christ's appeal was made in flesh and blood; our appeal, too, must be in flesh and blood, on common ground that all men can understand and appreciate. We have this common ground ready to hand, but familiarity has blinded us to its use. In the Sacrifice of the Mass we have the greatest act of Christian charity performed by the Founder of Christianity Himself. We take part in that act of Charity every day, but only too often we fail to carry it beyond the confines of the church and practise that 'real Christianity' of which it is the pledge. In so far as we fail in this we make even our hearing of Mass a mockery; for when we offer the Mass we pledge ourselves to Christ in love, and through Him to all our fellow men. To keep this pledge we must practise charity outside. Hence the Mass is the source and inspiration of true Christian unity and Christian society. Our social reconstruction must begin, therefore, with the Mass, with liturgical prayer fully understood in all its implications of practical charity in our social relations and business transactions—in other words, liturgical prayer which bears fruit in the consciousness of membership in the Mystical Body of Christ, the real Christian society.

Here, again, in the liturgical camp, there have been factions and divisions: the reformers who wish to revise church music, architecture, rubrics; the theologians who wish to instil a sense of incorporation in Christ through an understanding of the Mass and Sacraments. Again, division has meant the dissipation of energy. Thousands of people attend Mass with great devotion, but because liturgical 'talk' has been for the most part above their heads, they have remained ignorant of some of the widest

implications of their prayer with Christ, things which they might well understand and profit by. None the less, true liturgical prayer has continued even without the best external trappings. The first thing to be done is not to begin with the externals of liturgical prayer in the hope that if they are polished up the inner spirit will prosper, but to stir that inner spirit which is already there, active but not fully conscious of why and how it is active. In other words, the influence of the liturgy on everyday life should be made more real. The Mass is the 'high spot,' so to say, of our life, the most intensely Christian moment of the day, and therefore should have an influence on the rest of life if the whole of life is to be Christian. We must develop a deeper realisation of our brotherhood with Christ and in Him with our fellow men as a guiding influence in the ordinary conduct of life. This is crystallised daily in the Sacrifice of the Mass, but is incomplete unless it overflows into the rest of the day in the form of practical charity, self-sacrifice, forbearance. We go to great lengths to point out the uncharity, selfishness and self-indulgence of Nazism, but remain blind to the same faults in ourselves which have made it possible for us to accept such standards for so long before becoming aware that they are wrong. In this way we fail to make ourselves 'worthy of the cause,' and as long as we are fighting materialism the failure to remedy our own faults is a kind of fifth-column treachery, for these faults are the very embodiment of the evil we are trying to uproot—the extolling of personal, material satisfaction at the expense of the Kingdom of Christ. Society will only be made Christian if these barriers to the life of Christ in each one of us are removed: this means the daily sacrifice of ourselves with Christ on the altars of the church, and, as a necessary consequence, the sacrifice of ourselves and our own interests outside church. These things, and these things alone, will produce that moral unity which is the foundation of Christian society. If we neglect it, as we have done for the sake of the more pretentious intellectual decorations, we neglect Christ Himself, the corner stone which the builders rejected. If we look to it first, the whole edifice of the Christian community will spring to life, a thing of

Christlike beauty because a thing of unity in Christ. The conflict of intellects and personalities will to some extent remain; Christ never intended them to depart; he was prepared to accept various modes of Christian thought in his Father's house of many mansions; we find even the Apostles in disagreement, disagreement which was often necessary to settle vital issues; but Christ intended these manners of thought to implement one another and to cooperate in the higher union by charity in Himself.

Nor do we suggest that the liturgy is a panacea for all moral and social ills, but certainly attention to our use of the Mass, and care to see that we practise the Christian charity we preach in our brotherhood with all men in Christ, the priest of the Mass, will lay foundations of Christian unity which study circles and discussions alone can never do. When we have established this fundamental unity of wills, then perhaps our intellects will bear more fruit on ground already prepared by the practice of mutual charity, forbearance and self-sacrifice. In the first age of the Church the same plea for united action in and through the Mass was urged by St. Ignatius of Antioch, and we may conclude with his words, written eighteen hundred years ago, but as modern in their application as if they had been inscribed yesterday:

'Be ye careful therefore to observe one Eucharist—for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup unto union in His blood; there is one altar, as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons—that whatsoever ye do, ye may do it after God.' Again, we must avoid those who preach doctrines without cooperating in the action of the Mass: 'They have no care for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the afflicted, none for the prisoner, none for the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from the Eucharist and prayer, because they allow not that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which flesh suffered for our sins, and which the Father of His goodness raised up.' If Christians are to be doers of the word, that action must first begin in the united action of the Mass.

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