

The Catholic School

You are acclaimed the hope of the world; let us trust not a flawed hope, an illusion.

Each genuinely Catholic school has the power to influence the whole world. Yet, so low have sunk our standards and our ambitions that the suggestion savours of the ridiculous. Nevertheless it is in that strain that I proceed.

But, first, we must make sure that when we speak of Catholic education we really have the same thing in mind. It is possible to use the same expression and yet to mean quite different things. I start by defining the object of Catholic education as being the minting of Christians, each of whom is a soldier with an inescapable duty of labouring the fighting, not so much for himself as for others. A second essential note of Christianity must be conquest, not a mere holding on to what we have. Here are no mere academic propositions, but a stating of the vital principles of Christianity upon the practical realisation of which depend not alone the possibility of influencing the world, but the survival of religion in the world.

The Aim of Catholic Education

That said; let me put to you the elemental question: What is your purpose in regard to your pupils? Strange, you hesitate over replying! Your minds are not provided with a formula wherein to answer instantly. You would object if one were to describe that hesitation as a bad sign. You would retort that it is not everyone who is ready at a second's notice to go into the witness box; it is not everyone who has his ideas nearly parcelled up as handy formulae. True, no doubt, in regard to the secondary details of life, but surely not in respect of the central ones. What is your name? Where do you live? What is your profession? The normal man replies without necessity to sort his thoughts. Just as quick should be the reflex of the catholic teacher to that question – central to him or her. What are you aiming at? Here hesitation means that you have never clearly defined to yourself your objective. That is fatal. For surely success depends on energy; energy in turn depends on conviction; and I suppose it is a truism to say that conviction depends on a clearly seen purpose. In a word, if your objective is vague, it is physically impossible to aim at it, and it is psychologically impossible to mobilise your full energies.

What is a Good Catholic?

The foregoing supposes that your aims are hazy, but in the main right. But that often supposes a whole lot too much. Your aims may be wrong, and thereby you may be doing positive harm to the Christian cause that you so ardently desire to further. For instance, many among you are satisfied in practice to turn out what they call 'good Catholics,' a term which constitutes a libel on the Church, for by it they mean the practising but otherwise

inactive class. How can the word 'good' be applied to those who are not a model, who omit the characteristic note of Christianity, which is that of service, helping, neighbourliness? This half-circle Christianity is often designated by the phrase 'going to one's duty,' an expression which contains a dangerous untruth, i.e. the sense that duty is fulfilled, which is not the case in fact; indeed if you think it out, it is only the same thing as feeding without working. Of universal application is the following assessment, which a writer in the May 1945 number of the *American Ecclesiastical Review* makes of his own country.

'The present educational programme they frankly say, is limited to instilling in the student the belief that his first, and practically his only business, is to save his own soul. Not much is said about his obligation to "sanctify others as he would sanctify himself". The student finishes his course deeply imbued with his responsibility to "love God above all things," but little concerned with "loving his neighbour as himself," except in terms of giving money or material help to the poor. It seldom even occurs to him that he has within him that truth for which men are yearning, or that many with whom he daily rubs elbows will never in their lifetime partake of that truth if it is not in some small measure communicated to them by himself.

'A friend of ours recently graduated with honours from a leading Catholic college. She had a fine sense of devotion to religion. But to her the great gift of faith was a private proposition. Only in the vaguest way did she think of it as belonging to others as much as to herself. She received Holy Communion each day. But here again her outlook was more or less restricted to "myself and God". She

never adverted to the fact that over 1,300,000,000 human beings over the earth would never be able to receive Holy Communion once in their lives simply because Christ had never been brought to them as he had been brought to her.'

Low Standards Become Lower

Multitudes live their lives on a minimum level both religiously and in every other way. Consider this test. Recently a group of important people spent some time trying to work out a practical formula of popular culture. Here is what they finally agreed on: 'That a person should be regarded as cultured who had a fair knowledge of any subject; was enthusiastic about it; that it was such as was calculated to elevate him; and that the religious note was not missing.' You will observe that it would not be necessary even to be literate to conform to that formula; and probably it will be conceded that one who does not conform to it can hardly be deemed to be living in much more than the vegetable sense of the word. Yet examination will disclose the disconcerting fact that after centuries of Christian formation the bulk of the populations do not conform to a standard that only asks that they be really interested in something that is mildly elevating.

Not so good – all that! Yet some schools are almost as much responsible for producing it as if they deliberately set themselves to it. For there is a point at which thoughtlessness, indifference and worldly preoccupation become culpable. Except by accident we are not going to turn out a higher type of person than we plan to do. More than that, by reason of the extent to which even our best efforts fall short of our ideals, we will necessarily produce

results of a lower grade than we desire; so that if we only think in terms of the practising Catholic, the product will, in the main, fall short of that poor mark. Then this constant diminuendo operates from generation to generation – lower, ever lower – until finally the abysmal depth can be reached where we can be glad to have half of the members of Catholic Action itself (Which is, remember, the organised apostolate of the faithful) going to Mass and the sacraments.

Nonsense? No, it is a fact. In many places standards have thus slipped, so that even the most zealous are ruled by those false standards and believe nothing higher to be feasible. One holy, influential person in a current document treats as a sort of joke (because so divorced from the practical): (a) the idea of direct religious approach to the lapsed or unbelieving, and the putting before them of the Mass and the sacraments and the devotions of the Church; (b) the proposing to legionaries of a spirituality bordering on that of the priest and nun. Ideas such as (a) and (b), says the authority in question, only show ‘how radically different the Legion is from our movement of Catholic Action – the psychological climates are utterly different’.

All of you who read these pages are acclimatised to that ‘legionary climate’ and probably see in the legionary methods a reflection of the traditional Christian apostolate, which spoke boldly about religious things to those whom they approached. Accordingly, you will find it hard to sympathise with, and possibly even to understand, the type of apostolate, which is pointed to above. But that type is common in many countries, and in them pursues its way along those quaint lines of not talking about religious matters, or the Mass, or the

sacraments, or the Church. But it does talk all the time of its hope of converting the masses, an event which does not happen, and could not happen through any such watered-down, neutralised, and naturalised mentality – that is if the Gospel still remains our standard.

Is the Church Losing Ground?

Now let us view the world position. Frequently in the past the world has regarded itself as on the brink of a crisis when in fact it was just experiencing the normal shocks and growing pains of life. But now it does look as if we are on a major threshold comparable, say, to the event of Mohammedanism or of Protestantism, or of the French Revolution. This time the chief worry is Communism, which began after World War I and now looks like fully internationalising itself. But even without this menace, the prospect would be intimidating in the shape of the great expansion of materialism at the expense of religion. Protestantism may be said to have collapsed as a religious force, but we have got no gains from its disintegration. Irreligion has won all the stakes. Likewise, the pagan religions of Asia and Africa are losing to materialism. New vices are springing up which imperil mankind. Generally the 'isms' are in the ascendant. On the whole the Church is losing ground. The hopeful signs are few.

Those are dark colours, but one could paint the scene still darker and still be justified. Our individual reactions will be according to our cast of mind – that is defensive or crusading, or might I put it – supine or active.

Mobilise the Laity

It may be urged that the solution of this position lies in the numerous vocations, which many lands are

exhibiting, and in which many schools think they find their justification. In this way, it is hoped, will the de-Christianised be won back and the Faith be carried to the ends of the pagan world.

But the lessons of history do not support the hope that such conquest will proceed from a Christian army, whose officers alone make war while the rank and file content themselves with wearing the uniform. I register my view that never, never will the pagan lands be converted nor the lost ones be reconquered if the problem is regarded as being solely one of providing priests and nuns, foreign or native. If the lay folk in those inconceivably vast regions are not mobilised in the work of evangelisation, then those lands will never be converted. Look at China, where the work of the gospel has been in progress for 400 years and where to tiny a proportion has been won. To convert China it would be necessary to convert yearly many times its present total Catholic population. A partial approach to the work of evangelisation will ever have partial results. 'What,' said Pius XI, 'would the Twelve have done, lost in the immensity of the world, if they had not gathered around them men and women, the old and the young, saying: "We carry with us the treasure of heaven. Help us to scatter it abroad"?''

No amount of ardour on the part of the select few is going to convert the world. For this latter requires the concurrence of the faithful. And this principle applies as much to the home countries as it does to the missions. If the people in any place be irresponsible, inactive (and these two terms are interchangeable), then the Church there is not healthy; it is in peril and sooner or later that peril will find it out.

Catholic Teachers' Responsibility

Have you any responsibility or share in those things? I think you have – in the sense that you are either creating all that fearlessness or else that you are not turning out leavening or converting material. What are the millions and millions of young people doing whom yearly you launch on the sea of life? Very few of them are making their presence felt in the correct way. Now here is the terrific reflection to base on that: If your ex-pupils are playing such colourless parts in their own spheres, a *fortiori* they are going to play no part at all in that world-crusade which we have been eyeing. And, conversely, if you mint real Christians, each of whom Père Plus defines as one to whom God has committed the care of his fellow man – then you are helping to Christianise the world. If this principle is applied to education in general, does it stand the test? I have to say 'No'. And no matter how many priests and religious the system may proudly point to, it does not alter my contention. In the first place, even the worse system of Catholic education cannot help producing vocations. Secondly, it is not on the fervour of priests and religious that the conversion of the world, or the preservation of the Faith depends, but on the efficiency of the Christian army of which the consecrated class are the leaders and the laity the rank and file. Those interested in education should absorb and adopt as a first principle those axiomatic words of Newman: 'In all times the laity have been the measure of the Catholic spirit.'

Use Grace and Expect Miracles

Also I discern a misapprehension as to the nature of Grace. It seems to me that in practice Grace is regarded merely as a quality, which beautifies the soul – as of course

it does – but not as the dynamism which it also is. This means that insufficient value is given to Grace as a factor in dealing with the difficult or the impossible. So far as I have been able to judge, the common attitude among even very good people is to assess the difficulty of a situation purely according to human rules, and to hold back if it bulks too big. Therefore the real fact that Grace will cover what effort cannot cover, is not in practice given room to operate. As an inevitable consequence we hold back from the really formidable tasks; and of course everything worthwhile enters into this category. If we do not believe a thing can be done, we do not attack it with conviction; and then of course the world remains unconverted and its problems unsolved.

The Church is a miracle-working institution – that is, its forte is to face the impossible and to overcome it. Its mission is to seek out each and every man and give him the saving truth, to convert wickedness, to solve the problems. All this, and more, it can encompass in its stride. But note: in its stride – that is as a body. A handful of people will not accomplish that full work of the Church. A reasonable co-operation is needed. Unquestionably, today, that cooperation in the Church's work is not forthcoming from the laity. That disastrous stagnation must be remedied. The example of even one place can do it.

What the Legion Has Done

Is this all a dream? I say it is not, and I supply you with a sufficiency of evidence to justify my contention. That evidence lies in what has already, at this very early stage – little more than the laying of foundations - been done by the Legion of Mary. I do not refer to the mere expansion of the organisation, considerable though it has been. This

has been infinitely less significant than its achievements in the field of principle. I dare to describe these latter as of capital importance. It has explained and made popular and practical things that might have been described as being only theoretical, so little were they being practised, and yet which represented things vital to the Church's life.

Here are some of them: (a) The irrefutable demonstration of the doctrine that the Church is apostolic in its members – not merely in the more select ones – but in the ordinary folk and even in the sub-normal ones – the illiterate, the afflicted, even the misdemeanant; (b) the mixing of races, classes and supposed incompatibles of all sorts; (c) the relations between the clergy and laity in apostolic work; (d) the popularising of the doctrine of the Mystical Body; (e) the same in respect of the essential role of Our Blessed Lady; (f) the solution of the problem of Catholic Action on the missions; (g) its successful approach to the divinely ordered work of tending the least ones, i.e. the Down and Out classes; (h) the raising of the status of women in apostolic work, i.e. the Legion not only receives women as equal co-workers with men but exalts them and receives their rule cheerfully. In the mission field the Legion is actually playing a part in the uplifting of women analogous to that played by early Christianity; (f) its successful approach to non-Catholics; (j) in general the bringing home to people the central principle that the shepherd must not stay in the modern fold with the one good sheep but must go out after the ninety-nine that are scrambling to destruction. Every soul must be sought out and perseveringly evangelised.

I do not propose the foregoing by way of turning the breeze into legionary sails. I am forced to it by the necessity for providing positive proof that a whole people can be

mobilised to the apostolate just as effectively as a whole people can be mobilised for war. Having thus mentioned the Legion, I will no more return to it.

Educate for Apostleship

Whatever the causes, the schools in the main either do not teach the duty of apostleship at all, or else they propound it in such a way that it is not appreciated or not taken up by their pupils. But perhaps this is because when these leave school, they fall into the defective moulds set by their parents and the general population. There exists a dead weight of inertia. The effort to get this principle of responsibility over to the people is treated as if it were a sort of fad; and there is not a little disrespect and discouragement shown towards the lay apostolic worker. All this would be grave enough if the only consideration were that of personal sanctification, which requires apostleship. But it becomes appalling in the light of the additional point, which I have already stressed as central for our present purposes, i.e. that each one who helps on the principle of apostleship is lending a hand to the maintenance and spread of religion in the world and conversely. So that each one who does not so help runs the risk of hearing those words of condemnation: 'Depart from me,' which resound in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of St Matthew.

There the children sit before you day after day, drinking in what you tell them. Are they imbibing that vital sense of Christian responsibility? Is the idea even being put before them? Usually it is not. Out they will go into a world of ghastly problems – each of which means so many souls rotting or in darkness, but in regard to which they will feel no sense of personal liability.

I give you a couple of those problems: prostitution, Protestantism, the derelict man, the derelict woman. Grievous sores which clamour for solution! Yet whose responsibility are they counted to be? You would be astonished if you could realise how much these things are either totally ignored or else left in the air. Admittedly they are someone's responsibility, but always someone else's. People will talk airily about the Church or the State or the societies – as if these bodies were fairy Godmothers divorced from themselves. If in the end these problems are tackled, it is usually as the result of the personal factor, i.e. an inner urge, and not by reason of anything that was learned at school. In that case education stands in the dock. Along with the lack of responsibility naturally go softness, cowardliness and a generally negative attitude towards evil. The high water mark is to denounce it, to urge the removal of the temptation or occasion. So here again I assert that central principle of ours: To the extent that each one fails to play his or her part in regard to those problems, those problems will remain unsolved and fester further.

Apostleship Does Not Always Follow Knowledge

We may embark on a fatally wrong road if we confuse knowledge with apostleship. The common argument is as follows: 'If we fill this person with religious knowledge, it will radiate itself just as heat imparted to water is automatically diffused through a building.' That is largely a false analogy. Firstly, if you content yourself with heating a boiler without at the same time providing a system of radiators, that heat will not leave the boiler house. Secondly, men do not automatically radiate the knowledge which they possess. This applies particularly

to religious knowledge, because of the presence of shyness or human respect. In fact it has often occurred to me that the more religious knowledge a person has, the less he tends to diffuse it.

Therefore I am convinced – and I would pray you to meditate on this fundamental point – that the imparting of Christian doctrine is not an automatic way of evangelisation. It is only like the heating of the boiler in that central heating plant. A radiator system has to be added to provide for the diffusion. In the apostolic field, that radiator system must be supplied by definite apostolic machinery, which assigns work, checks up on it and generally presses knowledge and conviction into practical channels. This idea was the theme of Pius XI's pontificate. He insisted that it was not enough to teach people Christian doctrine and to tell them that true Christianity required the waging of an apostolate; it was necessary to organise the apostolate just as much as it was necessary to organise for war. This is the core of the Pope's conception of Catholic Action.

Apostleship Does Not Always Demand Great Knowledge

A second erroneous opinion is the one that people must be fairly well versed to be capable of the apostolate. This would lay waste to the Church; for even if it were possible to muster all the well-versed, they are few in number – which only brings one back again to the repudiating of the Christian principle that everyone is baptised unto apostleship.

The cry 'no one gives what he does not possess' sounds plausible. But it misleads if it suggests that the only thing at stake is the conveying of knowledge. Of course to convey

knowledge requires the possession of knowledge. But such teaching constitutes only a small proportion of general apostleship. In the main the latter consists of incitement to good, the imparting of conviction, the expounding of elementary facts, all of which are well within the capacity of every man.

Prayer Must Not Belittle Action

Prayer should never be put before children in such a way as to appear to exclude or belittle action, or to suggest that action is *not* prayer. It sounds well to say that prayer is the remedy for all things. But do not let people thereby infer that their only responsibility to the world of suffering and arid souls is the saying of a few prayers. That would be an easy exchange for the long toil and agony wherewith we must really discharge our apostolic responsibility. We must both pray and work. The true philosophy in this matter is expressed in those vivid words of St Thomas More: 'Give me the Grace, O Lord, to labour for the things for which I pray.'

Apostleship and Mary's Mediation

Another barrier to large accomplishment lies in a defective attitude towards Our Blessed Lady, who is described by the Church as the Mother of Divine Grace, the Mediatrix of all Graces. Which means that she discharges in the order of Grace a function analogous to that filled in nature by the law of gravity. In other words, no operation of Grace, either a going to God or a coming from God, takes place other than by her. As declared at a recent session of the Congregation of Rites, this mediation of Our Lady is nowadays taught by every theologian in the Church. Having made this arrangement, God likewise requires that we acknowledge

it by understanding it and by our worship. If we do not, then the flow of Grace is constricted – perhaps to a trickle as compared with a torrent. Is this pivotal place of Our Lady appreciated or put into practice? Is it being delivered by education to its charges? In the main, I would say no. It may be re-joined that the Catechism is being taught to them. But the Catechism is only like bare bones – on to which you have to fill flesh.

Our Lady must not be taught in such a way as merely to suggest that we *may* be devout to her. Christianity is a religion in which we *must* be devout to her. Moreover, we must not place her merely in the category of the saints – even though as the chief one among them. That is not Our Lady's category; she is the helpmate of Christ and like unto him, as the Book of Genesis says of Eve in relation to Adam. Furthermore, her intercession is not merely efficacious and expedient. It is essential and universal.

Obviously this must form another first principle of education. If an inadequate comprehension of Our Lady is given to people, they are being thereby deprived of something which is essential to them. They are being more or less deprived of their mother; for Mary can be fully a mother to them only to the extent that they appreciate her role. Volume of prayers does not make up for lack of this vital ingredient of appreciation.

Many used to argue that this was a select doctrine understandable only by select people. The contrary has been asserted in the session of the Congregation of Rites, already mentioned.

The Acid Test Of Education

Your overcrowded curriculum will naturally occur to you as a prime difficulty in the way of doing all you want for

your pupils. Similarly the fact that parents are insistent on scholastic attainment – apparently at any price! But what I have in mind is not at all the increasing of the Christian Doctrine session. I do not believe that would affect things. What is at stake is spirit, not knowledge. The trouble is that education is imparting doctrine, but not spirit nor the sense of religious mission. It is giving knowledge without the sense of responsibility and duty to other souls – which is like having a motorcar with no fuel for it. But if that spirit is communicated, then there is no incompatibility or jostling between scholarship and apostleship. In fact, they feed and thrive on each other. The better the spirit of a student, the more he or she is going to get out of a course of study – apart from the fact that it would be impious for us not to believe that in such a case God will – as he did in the case of Judith – contribute splendour.

The acid test of education is the turning out of Christian soldiers; that is apostles. To the degree that education does not accomplish this, you should deem it to have failed. You are not intended to be mere educators. You are not even Catholic educators, i.e. with a word ‘Catholic’ as a mere adjective. For you ‘Catholic’ must be no adjective, but life itself. To you, education must mean the medium whereby you seek to mould every child into another Christ, who will Christianise the world and who will, if needs be, suffer and die in the performance of that mission.

It debases true education to devote it to turning out the conventional Catholic whose ultimate potential in the world is indicated by the figure 1 – that is, the saving of himself – whereas if we think in terms of world service, that potential must be many, very many times that figure 1.