

## GIVE WITNESS TO CHRIST

(Acts 1, 8)

In our contacts with persons of other religions we must watch our motives for on those motives depend the value of our acts and their development. Different motives mean different starting points and widely diverging directions. So I start off by establishing a distinction. To associate with non-Catholics on a purely social basis can be a neutral and harmless business. We agree to differ. There is no inner yielding or compromise in us. Likewise it is safe and proper to enter into relations with non-Catholics on the basis of a true ecumenism, that is with our minds fixed on the idea of eventually influencing them towards Catholicism.

But if we are consorting with them on the basis of a mutual religious benefit, I think it is wrong and potentially dangerous to us. It contains the idea that each is in part right and therefore the further idea that each is in part wrong. In this would lie a sinful yielding on the Catholic's side. In his heart he has already betrayed the Church, for it is not true that its doctrine is in part wrong.

The argument is fashionable today that those other religions have something to teach us and that we must listen to them for the purpose of learning. There is the modicum of truth in this that if we want to discuss religion with those outside the Church we must listen to them so that they in turn will listen to us. Likewise we must know what they think in order to be able to comment on it. But that is radically different from our listening to them in order to learn from them. What is it that they have which is true and that we have not? It can be that they have things which are true and commendable. But are not those same things to

be found in the Church? You will recall the suggestion of the Handbook, to the effect that the relation of the Protestant Churches to the Catholic Church is equivalent to that of the moon to the sun: the light that we see on the moon is only a reflection from the sun. The truth that the Protestant Churches present they have received from the Catholic Church, and they have no other. The suggestion that they have, since their original separation from the Catholic Church, worked out a Christianity of their own which can teach the Church something is not, so far as I am able to discern, justified in any sense. One would be inclined to imagine that they should have done something of the kind. For they have possessed scholars and thinking men who sought holiness. One would think that out of their labours would have proceeded at least novel aspects and developments which could amount to a parallel system from which the Church could learn. Such might all the more be expected by reason of the fact that the Protestant Churches laid their whole emphasis on the Scriptures, representing a different approach to that of the Church. One might reason that out of this would proceed lights which would illuminate us.

But in what way has that worked out? If such a process were in existence at all it would have to exhibit itself in a positive way in Protestantism. It would have to be seen as producing new and holy ideas which in turn would work like a leaven in their general body bringing an uplift. Has it been taking place in Protestantism? I cannot see any trace of it.

Take the chief thing for instance in their philosophy, the Scriptures. What has their scholarship ultimately achieved in that department? Destruction I would say, in the sense that they have undermined the Scriptures. What is the use of talking learnedly and fervently about the Scriptures if one really does not believe in them. Many Protestants do not believe

in the full infallibility and inspiration of the Bible, and the great bulk no longer use the Bible as formerly. So that supposition, humanly reasonable, that Protestantism could have produced a sort of true life of its own, parallel with that of the Church, which could teach us something, has not worked out in practice.

But the very reverse has. The tendency through the years in Protestantism has been to lose what they originally inherited. Doctrine after doctrine, originally thought vital to Christianity, has been shed or reduced to empty shells—even Baptism and Holy Communion. And this process of peeling off layers has now gone so far as to make one wonder what is really left. Is there a core of living doctrine at all?

Doctrine is the point. We must not regard as a religion something which would be found in good Communists or pagans equally with Protestants, that is honourable living, a code of doing good to one's neighbour. Perhaps the emergence of noble individuals or sections may be pointed to as demonstrating a holiness in Protestantism itself. For instance, what about Newman, Manning, Dalgairns, Faber, Hope Scott, and many others like them who rose up in Protestantism? This question contains its own answer. Those particular persons came on into the Church. Again comes the question: "What of the similar luminaries who did *not* come over?" My own answer to this, which some would find excessively simply, is that they should have; that they were inconsistent; that they failed by stopping short.

Then what of the more ordinary ones. I have met many learned, cultivated, good Protestants but never did their religious knowledge exceed that which exists in the Church. Unquestionably what they possessed was a leak in from the Church either through the original inheritance or by way of diffusion from the common current of Catholic teaching.

If that is the position, how grave it is that we should be held back by that false supposition from going to the general world of ignorant, perplexed, doubting, negative, and atheistic people whom experience proves to be more than willing to listen, and who are grateful for what we tell them.

Formerly the cry used to be that we should not go to the Protestants because our own knowledge was insufficient. That reason having been shown by the *Peregrinatio pro Christo* and the entire Legion experience to be unfounded, a new reason is discovered but the result is the same: we are assured that they are all right as they are, with their own lights from heaven and their own status to teach! So we are *not* to go to them?

What of the present High Church section among them which claims to possess the Mass and the Sacraments and which is practising most of Catholicism? Some among them even profess an attitude towards the Pope which is indistinguishable from our own. So it is argued: does this not indicate a capacity of Protestantism itself to develop the highest things? Definitely I would say not. In the first place those developments have not been in the channel of Protestantism but contrary to it. They reverse the original and traditional tendency of Protestantism away from the Pope, the Mass, and a sacramental system. That is a swing back towards Catholicism and away from Protestantism.

Nor was it out of true or typical Protestant sources that such developments came. They all represented a penetration into Protestantism of Catholic ideas. They were introduced into Protestantism by Protestant scholars who had gone back to Christian origins and had been given the grace to see that Protestantism was inconsistent with them. Their inspiration did not come to them from inside the Protestant Church but from outside. It came from the Holy Spirit abiding in the

Catholic Church but reaching out to the soul of every man in anxiety to save him. As St. Paul says: "God wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2-4). Those impulses are not Protestant, or Jewish, or Buddhist, or Moslem, or Hindu. They are Catholic impulses which are proceeding from the Holy Spirit who lives in the Catholic Church.

The originator of the High Church idea was Newman. His researches into Christian history convinced him that Protestantism's antagonism to the papacy had led it to extremes, resulting in shipwreck of much essential doctrine. Going back to find a *via media* or golden mean, he thought that the Orthodox Church supplied it, and on that he built his conception of what the Christian Church should be. His Branch Theory held that the Catholic Church was intended to be on a national or territorial basis, with each section under the jurisdiction of a Patriarch. The rule of Faith would be that what they all believed was true, and that doubtful points and higher government would be settled by a Council of the Patriarchs meeting periodically. Into this system he considered the Roman Catholic Church to fall but limited in its jurisdiction to Italy. The Pope would rank as a Patriarch but with a primacy of honour over the others. How this semi-Catholic system, which comprised Bishops, Priests, the Mass and the Sacraments, would be conformed to by the Church of England which did not recognise a priesthood or the Mass he solved by declaring that the Church of England had never lost those powers; that they still remained in that Church in a state of suspended animation; and that it was only necessary to use them in order to revive them. Later he saw the fallacy of that solution and he entered the Church.

His Branch Theory was adopted by a section in England and produced the High Church party. Some Bishops began to ordain sacrificing priests, and those

priests began to say Mass. This in turn led to the controversy concerning the validity of Anglican Orders which was finally ruled on by Leo XIII in his decision that the episcopal succession had been broken in England by the Reformation and that the Anglican Orders were invalid.

Here I would point out that another effective illustration of that leakage of Catholicism into Protestantism is afforded by the modern tendency towards Mary among a very spiritual section of Protestants. This has brought many of them to commendable levels of appreciation of her. There they are, taking part in Congresses about her, writing admirable articles about her of the type which one would find in the Catholic Reviews. But in the end there is a difference. They are definitely learners; they are never leaders. Their thought and devotion has brought a few of them up among the discerning Catholic thinkers but no more. There is no sign among them of original thought, and still less of inspiration. And somehow, as you read them, you always find a reserve. In the middle of something really good, a brick is dropped, a false note is sounded. They have learned what they know from Catholicism but they are not at home with it. Their status is that of alien. In the back of their minds their Protestantism is nagging at them and keeps them uneasy all the time. They will not be free until they cut adrift from it and enter fully as Catholics into the source of all their knowledge of Mary. For note it well: they got none of it from Protestant sources. Perhaps they may think they did, but it was only at secondhand.

The High Church idea took root to some extent and the Church of England harbours it on equal terms with its low Church section, but the sections themselves have no respect for each other. That such virtual opposites should be found together in the one Church as co-members seems odd to us, but it is more or less taken for granted by the Church of England itself. They

see no peculiarity in it. Evidently their notion and our notion of a Church have little relation to each other. Moreover, the highest legal judgement in England has declared that a Church of England clergyman can teach anything he likes, and that the doctrines of that Church are a compendium of all human experience. More recently Bishop Robinson of Woolwich has taught that God is not a Person at all; that He is only the sum-total of all the natural forces; and accordingly that it is wrong to say that God is love; and that it is folly to pray; and that we should not be using the word "God" which implies the existence of a Person who listens to us and is interested in us. Bishop Robinson insisted that he was not alone; that some of his episcopal confreres agreed completely with him. Actually he was only repeating the same ideas which Bonhoeffer and others had proposed in Germany, and which have attained maturity as the "God is Dead" school. In such circumstances it is incongruous to read the following in one issue of the magazine *Time*: "Protestants do not canonize their religious heroes. If they did, their list of saints would surely include Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the brilliant Lutheran theologian."

If that sort of monstrous thinking can exist in the Church of England which has some sort of tradition and rule in it, then the position of religion outside that Church can be imagined. The High Church section has persevered but cannot be said to have succeeded. It has fatally compromised on what was its first principle, namely that it had preserved the episcopal succession from the Catholic Church and therefore that its Orders were valid. That abandonment of principle has lain in the fact, vouched for by unquestionable authority, that so many of its clergymen have disbelieved in their own Orders and have had themselves ordained by Orthodox Bishops. Thus—apart from the decision of Leo XIII altogether—the whole question of the validity of Anglican Orders is now only academic.

And so I repeat: if that is the position in the Church of England, what is it in the minor Protestant bodies? And what is it in that infinitely wider world of those who nowadays belong to no particular Church body and whose beliefs are nebulous or negligible? It is a shame and a scandal just to leave them as they are. It is still worse to justify that inaction by attaching pious labels to it. The old slogan was that we must not interfere with those in good Faith, and that our sole duty lay in giving them good example. So we did neither of those things, for surely the proof of our belief would consist in our trying to win people to it.

Frequently our reason for not proposing our Faith to others is that of a delicacy on our part, a respect for what we incorrectly imagine to be present in them. But we are never given credit for that delicacy by those outside the Church. They invariably attribute our withdrawal to a want of Faith. I admit my sense of shock at being told by two different persons, one a German and the other Irish, whom I had invited into the Church that never in their lives had they met a Catholic who had given them the impression of really believing. There is the effect produced on others by our non-converting attitude.

But now we are up against something still more serious, the conceding to the non-Catholicisms of a status of their own, just as if they had a Divine mandate to go forth to teach and lay down the conditions of salvation. Where can justification be found for such a supposition which forms an effective denial of the claims of the Catholic Church.

The fact is that the religious position outside the Catholic Church is as bad as it possibly could be. The best of them only concoct a religion of their own from the Bible. The vast majority can hardly be said to have a religion at all. They do not attend Church. Even Baptism is on its way out among them. They would

only attach a human importance to Jesus Christ, and very many among them would contend that He never existed. Their attitude towards God would be equally indecisive. It is only the toss of a coin whether they believe in Him or not. In fact it is quite a modern fashion to rule Him out altogether. In the face of all that riot of confusion and unbelief, how can an excuse be offered for the limiting in any way of the command of the Lord that we go to all men. Even if some individuals have some real Faith, what effect could the approach of legionaries have but to fan that Faith. What Faith dies of is want of exercise. What drives God out is silence about Him. What has cut the ground from under Jesus Christ is the ignoring of His Divinity. What has killed the churches is that they have been breathing forth vagueness and compromises instead of true doctrine; in other words they have delivered no message. Alone in the reversal of all these incorrectnesses is there the hope of better things.

Our Lord presented His doctrine through parables. To point a moral or adorn a tale it is good to provide an example or a picture. This applies particularly in the present instance where it is imperative to show the degree of the spiritual misery which surrounds us. So I now furnish a number of real happenings.

A group of us have for years past been taking our holidays on the bicycle in Ireland. We have been moving side by side with the tourists, except that they have been travelling more rapidly than we. Mostly they would be British and American, but there are also Germans and French. Sometimes a stop at a beauty spot gives opportunity for a conversation. But usually it is in the places where we stay that we really talk. The people we thus meet are of a good type. We always try to introduce the topic of religion and we do not find it difficult. Where we manage to get on to the subject we invariably make progress. I do not

think it could possibly be alleged that we have ever done harm. As we do not avail of the higher priced accommodation, it is to be presumed that we encounter the ordinary people, typical of the population. Our advances are never resented but rather accepted as evidence of a kindly interest. Of course, our manner is deferential and we would try to be helpful to them in regard to their routes and what to see. Usually we attract thanks to ourselves.

Having thus set the stage, I now place the actors on it. The episodes which I chronicle are not items from our "Case Book" of Divine Pattern, because we have not met them again and therefore cannot say if they have exhibited any pattern or development. But the point at stake here is not what may happen but the ease with which persons can be contacted and the degree of their spiritual need.

First Episode. At a panoramic view-spot we spoke to a lady who had alighted from an expensive car. In five minutes we were talking religion and she told us that she had no belief whatever. Strange to say, one of us knew the place in England from which she came and was able to talk with a sort of intimacy to her. We would say that deep stirring was accomplished in her out of which anything could happen.

Episode No. 2. We stopped at a pier for our outdoor lunch. Half a dozen fishermen were out. Finally they were all in but one. He came to us and asked for help to haul up his boat. He offered us fish which we did not accept. Two of us got into chat with him. He told a peculiar tale. He was the only Protestant left in the entire peninsula. He realised that this put him in a very isolated state but he had not considered becoming a Catholic; now he would give some thought to it. He had a Rosary which he had acquired in strange circumstances. He was out fishing one day and just managed to get to a swimmer who was drowning. He pulled her in, revived her, and brought her to land.

She said to him: "But for you I would now be dead. Perhaps it will be of interest to you that I am a nun. I will pray for you every day of my life and I give you my Rosary as a keepsake." Through the years he had kept that Rosary. He was willing to say it in the future if he knew how. We subsequently sent him an illustrated book on the subject. We will follow up this item which may later figure as a case of Divine Pattern.

Episode No. 3. As we got off our bicycles at our hotel, a Manchester man got out of his car. We stayed there two nights; so did he. As we mounted our machines to depart, he entered his car—quite a bit of coincidence! In the interval we had chatted with him. Without any beating about the bush he informed us that his own particular section of Protestantism meant exactly nothing to him and that his inspection of other sections left him similarly cold. Our question as to whether he had ever thought of the Catholic Church brought the peculiar answer that he should look into it. I say peculiar, because he showed that in his mind was a definite distinction between Catholicism and the Protestant Churches. He gave us a promise that he would examine into Catholicism when he got home.

Episode No. 4. A pair making their first visit to Ireland were in the same guest house as ourselves. They were indefinite about their route which would mean that they would miss much of the beauty. We helped them very efficaciously for we knew every inch of that territory, and as well we were able to specify cheap and good accommodation. Apparently they did not expect such attention for they were quite taken off their feet. Then religion was touched on; they were charming people but they had none. At 2 a.m. all dismissed to bed; a tremendous session had taken place. They promised to carry the matter further when they got home.

Episode No. 5. Scene: a paradise of flowers beside a river. The growers were an English couple who came to Ireland some years ago. Attracted by the flowers, we remained to try to gather celestial honey. The pair were total, almost aggressive, unbelievers in God but quite willing to discuss the matter. We had to break off as we had a schedule, but we sent them literature of a type we thought would be effective. Again note: they were easy to approach and they thanked us for our interest. The woman was not baptised.

Episode No. 6. Scene: our guest house. We had gone out to an evening Mass at a distance. This, and a subsequent chat with the priest who had worked with the Legion in Africa, left us late which proved providential. For when we got home, we found a cup of tea being dispensed and this threw us in with two Scottish ladies, one a Catholic the other a Protestant. They were close friends who worked and holidayed together. One of our number had done peregrination in Scotland and described his work in the Northern Highlands. This in turn led on to our question to the non-Catholic: "What section do you belong to?" She answered: "I might describe myself as a sort of Methodist." Our comment was that she did not seem very enthusiastic. Some further gentle questioning showed that she had no positive views. And yet the Catholic friend admitted that she had never made the slightest effort to lead her towards the Church. Such was the position shown that finally one of our number addressed her in the following terms: "Oh you are living in a very deprived state. You simply must enter the Catholic Church. It will set you a course and revolutionise your life. Please do not delay." A pause of a minute. Then, turning to her friend, the lady said: "You had better start teaching me your stuff." Subsequent conversation showed this to be a real resolution.

Episode No. 7. We were looking for a way down to the sea. A young woman brought us through her land

and showed us where there was a sparkling well and a good place for our meal. We insisted that she stay with us and share in what we had. She turned out to be one of the few Protestants in that part of the country. She told us that she was named after the Blessed Virgin but she never before heard that the latter was her mother. She knew the Blessed Virgin was the mother of Catholics. She eagerly took a miraculous medal and asked to be instructed in the manner of talking to Mary. She said she had ailments and many other things thus to talk about. She has since written to us asking for a replacement of the medal which she had lost. We have done this and also sent her literature.

It will be noted that two of the above cases were Irish, which shows that we have our eyes open for more than the visitors. The same law would apply. My purpose has been to demonstrate the ease of approach and the amount that can be done in the briefest contact.

Now look at the persons comprised in that list. They were in "good faith" after their own fashion. They were nice people; they would not harm anyone. All but one of them were probably baptised. But they had no real religion. From the Catholic point of view they were in a deplorable state, living on the lowest rung of the spiritual ladder. It is hard to believe that anyone would regard such persons as being "all right in their own way," to be left deliberately alone to continue in that way. But so it is. And yet they require what you can give them far more than the hungry need food, the thirsty need drink, the naked clothing—to quote some of the classifications of need specified by St. Matthew in Chapter 25. Are not those spiritually depressed infinitely worse off than the materially deprived whom nowadays everyone rushes to help. I think it would be reasonably accurate to say that the only persons who give the appearance of definite belief are the members

of those fantastic sects which have been styled the "lunatic fringe" of religion. Yet the present current in world-wide Catholicism is to stand off from conversion. It is incomprehensible.

As an epilogue I reduce to a bare composite the dialogues which would take place after our initial approaches. Sometimes what grows out of this covers much ground and ends in a definite promise to investigate Catholicism.

*Question:* "Would it be too personal a question to ask what is your religion?"

*Answer:* "Well, I am supposed to be Church of England" (or other Church).

*Question:* "That does not sound as if it is an important element in your life."

*Answer:* "I cannot say that it is."

*Question:* "You would have no conviction about its teachings?"

*Answer:* "No, in fact I hardly know what they are."

*Question:* "Did the thought ever come to your mind of becoming a Catholic?"

*Answer:* "I do not think it ever did."

*Question:* "To our way of thinking you are living a deprived life. Do you not owe it to yourself to have a look at Catholicism? It means an awful lot to us."

*Answer:* (Very often, perhaps usually, and never merely as a polite putting of us off): "Perhaps I should do so."

Where in all that sort of thing is there a justification for holding back on grounds of respecting existing faith? Such an alleged respect would be in reality an abandonment of the mission of the Church. To set it in its proper context: Could we imagine St. Peter retorting to Our Lord on Mount Olivet: "But, Lord, should we not refrain from interfering with the honest faith which in some form or another must exist among all those people?" Would not Our Lord reply to him in the same phrase which once before He had used

to condemn an improper remark: "Get thee behind Me, Satan, thou art a scandal to me; for thou dost not mind the things of God but of men" (Matthew 16, 23).

But of course no voice was raised on Olivet to merit such a rebuke! Neither let any of us by our objections merit that same rebuke. Let us get ahead with our legionary campaign of seeking out every man to impart to him the truth. This is only a legionary aim because it is part of the peremptory Christian commission that we give witness to Christ in our own country, and in the next countries, and right out even to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Witnessing to Christ has traditionally meant the preaching of the Gospel in the teeth of stress or persecution or death. So much so that "witness" and "martyr" originally had the same signification. It was only as time went on that martyrdom took on the special sense of dying for the faith.