

The Nun's Role in the Mystical Body

I am going to talk to the Sisters gathered at the conference in an optimistic way on the fantastic subject of the converting of the world and of their relation to it. This seems to involve a contradiction. For how can one be optimistic if the prospect is hopeless? But you will see.

Years ago I wrote an article entitled 'The Mystical Body must Function as a Whole'. The analogy with the human body is an accurate one. For the perfect working of both, all the parts must combine harmoniously. To the extent that this is not the case the output is lessened, the ideal is not achieved.

This applies to the extreme extent in the Mystical Body where a principle purpose is the perfect functioning of each part for its own sake. That is, the sanctification of the individual soul is the primary divine purpose, the entire output of the entire body being perhaps the secondary one.

In that inspection of mine I took the broad categories of the hierarchy, the clergy and the laity, and I laboured

the obvious, namely that no one by itself constitutes the Mystical Body, or can substitute for the whole. The co-operation of the three is essential. If all unite in an effort, the full power of the Lord is enabled to issue so that no limits can be imposed on what may follow. Things exceeding nature must be expected, impossibilities will be surmounted.

Surely that formula of united action is easily conformed to? But no. The terms are not so often fulfilled. A hierarchy may be on fire but the priests less so, and the laity may be left out altogether. Seldom enough, is the threefold combination found. Most campaigns for souls are flawed in that way so that the mighty and the miraculous do not proceed.

Moreover, something additional has to be specified as a vital ingredient, namely the presence of Our Lady who is the heart of the Mystical Body. If her proper place is denied to her for any reason, the harmony of the Mystical Body is violated. The Holy Spirit will not preside over the enterprise, for he only works in union with her. Later, I will touch on some instances in history where I regard that unity of the Mystical Body to have been forthcoming with the result that solutions emerged which could only be regarded as divine.

Repairing an Omission in My Formula for Conquest

The holding of last years' kindred event to this one, cast a sort of bomb into the threefold division of the Mystical Body on which I was basing my formula of conquest. I have had to ask myself: where do the nuns and the religious brothers enter in? I did not include them specifically but of course I should have. Decidedly they are of too distinctive and noble a character, vastly too

important, and more numerous than the clergy. Therefore they cannot be passed over, nor can it be assumed that they are comprised in one of the other three categories. You are not cleric and you are not the laity.

Perhaps it may be said: 'What does their classification matter? Those classes are in the Mystical Body and is that not sufficient?' I reply that for the purpose of my contention it matters in the highest degree. I have been suggesting conditions in which the full power of the Mystical Body is likely to manifest itself. I have based this on the active participation of the three main sections of the Church. If in fact a fourth section should be included, it would gravely impair my argument. Because the mobilising of the Mystical Body is a visible transaction and one must be able to see who is included. If by not seeing we fail to mobilise an essential class, then that formula of conquest is not conformed to; the Mystical Body is not functioning as a whole.

Apart from the principle at stake, there is a vital psychology which will assert itself. If you, that is the nuns, do not know that you belong to that ultimate category of responsibility in the Church, you will not feel any sense of duty in regard to it. And is not this, what is happening? No one is in practice crediting you with any responsibility for organising the lay apostolate or even taking an active part in a direct campaign to souls for the purpose of evangelising them and converting them.

The Nun's Role in the Approach to Souls is to organise and Direct

Up to the times of Pius X and Pius XI the laity was not instructed as to their apostolic duty and hence they did not assume it. Would not the same apply to you? Actually

I would fear that not knowing the fullness of your position, you do not aim at it. If it is difficult to achieve a clearly seen vocation, what chance is there of fulfilling a misunderstood one?

The retort will of course be forthcoming that you have your own particular apostolate, assigned by your congregations, such as teaching and nursing in the main. But then lay teachers and nurses are not regarded as fulfilling their apostolic obligation by those professional duties. There is moreover, the practical problem that frequently those particular duties can absorb one to the extent of excluding the thought of the soul. It certainly does it in the case of many lay teachers and nurses. To what extent does the religious state counteract that tendency? Not altogether, judging by the appearance in at least a proportion of the consecrated ones. But even if this were not actually the case, it would not mean that the nuns and brothers were playing a sufficient part in the apostolate to which I am here giving the meaning of, the direct search for souls.

Your correct place in the apostolate should rise high above the rank and file one; you should be organisers and directors. But emphatically you do not even in thought promote yourselves into that role. Regard this closely. Is it not a sheer anomaly in view of your quite special and leading position in the Church? It is almost unthinkable that such a section in the Mystical Body should not be active to its full extent in discharging the function expected from it by the Head. Or to put it in a different way, you are not imitating the Blessed Virgin to the ultimate extent in her mothering of souls. Some sentences in the Legion handbook would have their complete application here: 'Each part of the Mystical Body has its own special

purpose and work. Some parts are noble and others less so; but all are dependent one upon the other, and the same life animates them all. All are put to loss by the failure of one as all profit by the excellence of one' (handbook, page 140).

If therefore such a distinctive section of the Mystical Body is falling short of its intended role, then the whole Mystical Body is being thereby put to loss. The current announcement that Rome is drawing up a new Chapter for Nuns is proof that the Church considers that there is some degree of failure.

Shameful Abandonment of Evangelisation in Favour of Social Work

Has the remedying of the world's inequalities and the attainment of an ideal social order become the premier goal, pushing into a negligible place the old one of seeking first the Kingdom of God and his justice – to which is appended the promise that then all the secondary things shall be added in?

This fanatical absorption in the temporal to the detriment of the first things, seems to carry with it the presumption that the purpose specified by Our Lord on Mount Olivet as the main one, is making satisfactory progress; that is the gathering of all into the Church. Whereas the contrary is so much the case; that one could imagine that the Ascension Commandment had been cancelled. For unless a radical change sets in, the hope of converting the world has become purely chimerical. We are not gaining on the world. It is gaining on us at a rate of one per cent per annum. As the present proportion of Catholics in the world's population is about 16%, we would be reduced to about 5% by the end of this century without any suggestion that then an

improvement would set in. Humanly speaking this would promise extinction. Is it human despair that has produced the new method; that is the switch over to social science and liberation as the way to evangelisation?

It is certainly not as if conversion has shown itself to be impossible. Because in whole countries – one can dare to say everywhere in the world – the attempt to convert has not been made. Souls have not even been approached as ordered by the Lord. Those of you who have been away on the *Peregrinatio* know how easy it is to approach them. The reason for standing off from them would seem to be that Catholics are very much of the belief that one religion is as good as another. For everywhere the attempt is genuinely made, it meets with success.

Take up a single issue of *Maria Legionis* and it will be seen that this is true, and the realisation is driving us on to frantic efforts. For the reasoning seems to emerge that the world is convertible if a sufficiency of effort is put forth; and further that such a sufficiency is realisable.

The Legion's Proficiency in Conversion

But a further thought is the exciting one that at the present time the Legion is the main ingredient in the flow of conversions. The outlook in many places is actually hopeful, such as India, Ceylon [Sri Lanka], and many countries in the populous Far East, and in the Continent of Africa. Souls are being brought to practice at a great rate in other places, notably in South America.

A fact of supreme importance is beginning to appear, namely that Islam is not in reality the unconvertible and even unapproachable force which it has been universally assumed to be. Considering that it is claiming to possess as many members as the Church and to be growing rapidly, it

represents a tactical gain of immensity that the Legion of Mary has been able to make successful approach to them in every place where they exist. In India and Africa a fair number of converts have been secured. Our PPC teams have shown that there is little difficulty in establishing friendly contact on the basis of religious discussion.

Turning the Tide: Dramatic Instances

As the Legion itself grows in numbers and as other sections waken up to the possibilities and join in, all this will gain such acceleration as to reverse definitely that diminishing Catholic proportion.

Admittedly the mere reversal of that melancholy decline, though a triumph, would still leave the conversion of the world in a realm of astronomical years. But we have not to reconcile ourselves to that. I have a theory which I think is borne out by very many events in history. It is that if the Church labours heroically and unitedly for a certain time at a really hopeless task, even though with small success, God suddenly grants a new order of circumstances more favourable to the religious position. I present some dramatic cases.

Take that of the early Church which incurred the enmity of the greatest power on earth, the Roman Empire, a phase which lasted for nearly three hundred years. It seemed to pose an impenetrable barrier to the Church. But the unimaginable happened. The Emperor Constantine became a Christian and the Empire became the Church's propagator.

Then there is what I may call the partial case of Japan which, after hundreds of years of implacable opposition to the Church, came to the resolution in the 1930s to Catholicise the country. It took the first steps in that

direction, but the joyful prospect was aborted by the outbreak of World War II.

Another is the most strange case of China under Mao Tse-tung. After discovering that the Legion was exercising such an influence as to suggest that China was on the verge of an era of mass conversion, the government offered to make Catholicism the Church of China. It drew up a Constitution for that Church. But it did it in such a doubting spirit, interposing so many safeguards against a foreign domination as to interfere with the due autonomy of the Church, so that the Constitution had to be rejected. But certainly that is not the final act in the drama. What so drastic a regime as that of Mao was prepared to grant, will undoubtedly be improved on by some future administration. And so the day will dawn when that land of uncountable millions will not only reopen to the Church but will offer favourable circumstances.

Another instance would be Mexico after its conquest by Cortes. The Spaniards ardently sought to convert it and made every effort but the outraged people stood firm against. But then occurred the manifestation of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Within a few years the eight million inhabitants were in the Church.

The Philippines affords a case of a land lost to practice but in a single generation brought back to it by a really unified effort of the Mystical Body. Now it is the seat of a prodigious ambition of ours; that is a lead on to the conquest of Asia. Fr Aedan McGrath is out there at the moment in the pursuance of this purpose.

Miracles Help

A further example of the readiness of God to supplement inadequate human possibility would lie in Lourdes. From

the beginning of the Church one of the supports given to belief had been the working of miracles. Our Lord proved his claims by scattering them prodigally. Then the Church continued this feature through the miracle-working saints. About two hundred years ago atheism availed of the wondrous new world of expanding science to cast doubt on miracles. It alleged that they were no more than part of the as yet un-clarified region of science. As it was not practicable for an investigating entourage to accompany a saint, that argument was disastrously effective. The divine response was the perfect one of opening what we might with respect describe as a miracle-factory in Lourdes. It was then possible to establish there a scientific department which subjected claimed miracles to intensive scrutiny. Thus was the miraculous more than restored to its important role in Christianity. At the same time a new challenge was offered to the world under the auspices of Our Lady

Perhaps an even greater challenge has all the time been contained in the biblical phrase that they wrapped Jesus in a winding sheet and laid him in the tomb. As each succeeding age has produced more science, it has sought to use it against Catholic faith. But step by step God has so to speak unfolded that winding sheet and progressively shown forth all its hidden wonders as a complete confirmation of everything that is given to us in the four gospels. I am of course referring to the revelations which science itself has to draw from the periodic investigations of the Holy Shroud. Each new scientific discovery, which was expected to show up the Shroud as an imposture, has done the opposite by producing new evidence of its genuineness. Perhaps the very latest is the most confounding. It is the finding in the photography

of the Shroud of a Roman coin which was manufactured in Our Lord's time. We might be tempted to view this newest wonder as 'a keeping of the best wine to the last'. But the past has made us realise that the divine resources are inexhaustible and that the future will produce more marvels as they are needed.

Nuns as *Incolae*

I have tried to sketch out the problem of conversion as I see it. It is inconceivably great but not greater than God who has ordered it to be done. I have shown the ways he comes to the aid of the willing workers. I have already mentioned the fact that Fr McGrath is in the Philippines. He is there as the initial step towards the development of our *Incola Mariae* system. An incola is a legionary who for a term of not less than six months goes to some place of religious necessity, giving most free time to working for souls through the Legion. Already many have undertaken this service. The attempt to convert Iceland is based on a team consisting of a priest, a nun and about twelve *Incolae*. Therefore it is, even though on a small scale, a perfect exemplification of our new four-fold category of operation, the bishop being enthusiastic in his participation. This experience shows the possibilities of the *Incola* system. Of course an *Incola* should be a first-class legionary able to organise the Legion and even to animate a place which has no priest and to have things ready for the periodic visit of a priest. But should not every nun, if possessed of sufficient knowledge of the Legion, be a ready-made *Incola* of superior quality?

Have I been over-praising the Legion? I have not that intention. I would be afraid to do so. I give no more than I think to be due. The Legion is only an orderly but

complete and well-proportioned assembly of the common ingredients of the Catholic Church. Perhaps that correct assembly represents an achievement because it must not be taken for granted that a correct model of the Church is as readily available as the design of an aeroplane. A lot of the alleged patterns of the Church are sheer travesties lacking its most important elements, for instance, the parodies that would exhibit the Church without apostleship or without the Blessed Virgin.

But are such mockeries possible? Yes, not only possible but common. How many items that we would deem to be vital are being jettisoned by the present-day progressives in the Church? For example the angels, indulgences, the sacraments or the saints. The Legion holds firmly on to history by venerating all of them, finding them indeed of great value in its work, for example the Miraculous Medal.

I think it is not too much to claim that the Legion teaches its members all the important as well as the secondary doctrines of the Church, much of which is not ordinarily placed before the faithful. Among these I would mention the Mystical Body, the Blessed Virgin, apostleship and conversion.

It is for this comprehensive reason that the Legion has been taken up by providence as reflecting its idea. Pope John XXIII has put it just in that way. He has declared that the Legion presents the true face of the Catholic Church. Could a loftier praise be uttered by so high an authority in regard to a lay society?

Legion Produces Vocations

Incidentally I point to the fact that universally the Legion generates vocations. More attention to its gift in that direction would solve the problem.

These days will you aim at enlisting your full support behind the Legion as an efficacious means for converting the world and at the same time achieving the fullness of your own role. The difficulty which will present itself to your mind is that you have no time for anything so considerable. But that is just where the Legion enters in. It can turn you into a force in the world by a comparatively modest expenditure of your time. The Legion is a mechanism which multiplies you.