

LET'S CONVERT AUSTRALIA

AN APPEAL TO LAYMEN

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A CENTENARY OF ACHIEVEMENT

During the present year we have been celebrating the Centenary of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, and the occasion has been marked by splendid demonstrations of faith, in which the numbers and enthusiasm of the Australian Catholic body have been displayed before the non-Catholic world. It was all very inspiring, wasn't it? Out of small, humble beginnings, a poor Christian community built up the great Church we have inherited, with its network of religious institutions, schools and works of charity, providing for the needs of a vast multitude of people. A great work has been done for God, against heavy odds, in the preservation of our Faith, from generation to generation, amid a world in which the cancer of de-Christianisation has made frightful ravages. To be sure, there have been heavy losses—through “drifting” rather than deliberate apostasy. But we have maintained an impressive strength—thanks largely to the education system for which our people have made such sacrifices. Our places of worship are filled again and again on Sundays, and their numbers are increasing, while other religious bodies complain of depletion. Our youth organisations are strong and vigorous on every level—and our authorities are wide awake to the problem of youth. The average level of lay religious practice and frequentation of the Sacraments is high in comparison with that of most Catholic countries. This Church is vividly conscious of the problem of social justice, and the Christian attitude to social questions is set before the faithful constantly by their Hierarchy as well as by a zealous group of lay leaders.

It is our glory that we remain a Church of plain folk and work people, not hide-bound by social traditions, but alive to the human needs of the new age—ready, even, to advocate revolutionary changes which seem serviceable to the Christian order. Finally, Catholics have an honourable place in the public life of Australia. They have risen to high office in the service of the State; they are prominent in civic as well as business affairs, and they are regarded in general, with substantial goodwill, as a group who have contributed worthily to their country's life in peace and war. Deep-rooted prejudices still exist, of course—particularly those connected with the English-Irish antagonisms of the old world—but the traditional “black legends” of the nineteenth century mean less and less as time goes on; the more pernicious of them are largely confined, now, to the “lunatic fringe” of certain minor Protestant groups—and the attempt of certain virulent propagandists to revive them lately has met with no notable success.

TO KEEP THE FAITH IS NOT ENOUGH

Yes—we have a great deal to be thankful for, and to be encouraged about, we consider our Australian Catholicity simply as a “goodly heritage” which it is our duty to preserve and hand on. But is that our whole duty? Is that all that Christ our Lord wants of His Church in Australia? Are we Catholic lay-folk fulfilling HIS justice, if we are content to practice our religion—even devoutly—and to see that our children are reared Christianly and taught that they must “marry their own?”

Do you remember the parable of our Saviour about the men to whom their master gave a certain number of talents—sums of money—in order that they might be improved by trading? On his return, he found that two of them had made a profit, and praised them. The third had not lost his money: he had just buried it, and handed it back exactly as he received it. But he was condemned as an unprofitable servant. I suggest that there is a grave warning in this, which we Australian Catholics would do well to take to heart. We have increased in numbers: we have built up our Christian institutions and our Christian cultural defences—but at the end of this process, what is the Australian position? Why, the proportion of our numbers to those of the nation is rather less, I believe, than it was a century or so ago. We have kept a considerable part of those born of Catholic parents from drifting away from the Church—but we have done nothing, we have scarcely attempted to do anything, towards arresting the process of religious decadence outside the Catholic body: and we seem to have forgotten altogether—most of us—that the word “Gospel” means “Good News”: news which we are supposed to share with our neighbours so far as we can.

CONVERSION IS OUR BUSINESS

We take it for granted that “born” Catholics ought to remain Catholics—but it troubles us very little that our treasure of Divine Truth should lie hidden away from our non-Catholic friends and acquaintances. We take their status, too, for granted: So-and-So is a “good Presbyterian—another “Some Sort of Anglican”; while yet another “doesn’t believe in anything much.” Occasionally, as we know, individuals from outside do enter the Church—for marriage reasons or others; and these “converts” are often excellent Catholics of notable zeal. But how often does it occur to us that we have any personal responsibility to help on this process of conversion by evangelising social action of our own?

There’s no getting out of it, you know. You and I are the people who have to set about converting Australia, if the job is to be done at all. If we reflect a bit—and read our New Testaments—I don’t think we can have any doubt about our obligation in this matter.

The good Christian, you know, isn’t just a man who keeps a set of ethical rules and codes of religious observance, and receives the Sacraments of his Church with regularity. He is a man who tries to imitate Jesus Christ and follow courageously in His footsteps. The special, vocation to the priesthood, or the “religious life”, or the work of the missions, is only that of a minority; but everyone is called to seek “perfection” in his own sphere of life, and to reflect personally the light and love of Jesus in his particular corner of the world. What does this mean?

Well, to begin with, Our Lord summed up the whole duty of man in terms of the love due to God and his neighbour—the second arising naturally out of the first, since an all-loving Father cannot be loved truly by one who is careless of the human brethren for whom His Divine Son suffered and died. But how can you and I be said to “love our neighbour” in any true sense —let alone loving him as ourselves—if we have not the least real interest in whether he attains his “chief end,” which is the true knowledge, love and service of God with a view to everlasting life?

What sort of Christians are we if we “can’t be bothered” about this vital matter? And if we are bothered—what are we going to do about it? Are we even trying to think what we could do, or just making excuses and “passing the buck”?

Again, Our Lord spoke of “casting fire on earth” and said that He felt “straitened”—shut in—until it could be kindled. You know what His fire was—it was the fire of Divine Love, to be kindled in men’s hearts. . . . If it is in our hearts, it must beat against the obstacles which prevent It from spreading, and strive to burn them away—so that it may catch the hearts of others and make them glow..

THE HOME MISSION

Finally, let me draw your attention to the last command of Christ to His Apostles to “Go Into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.” It has always been held by the Church that the order was given not only to the Apostles, or to their successors, the Bishops and priests, but to the whole body of the faithful. We are, most of us, aware of the lay man’s duty to support the missions to Pagans—and thanks to the constant urgings of the spokesmen of the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Father himself, we have begun to fulfill that duty a little less inadequately than hitherto—though by no means with overwhelming generosity. But what of the “Home Mission” to the neighbours among whom we live? Some of them profess a “nominal Christianity” which is often hardly more than “the perfume of an empty jar”: an increasing number have fallen away even from that, and dwell in a state of complete spiritual “illiteracy” and destitution, with hardly more awareness of God in their daily lives than the beasts that perish. The desert of modern secularism is more terrible, in some respects, than the dark jungle of paganism itself—for it seems at times that no spiritual notion can live there at all, whether *it* be true or false; that superstition and religion are alike alien to it, and that even the husks of despair cannot bring those who dwell there to turn their faces to the House of their Divine Father.

In the old days, it was possible to maintain that it was wise to leave a number of “good Protestants” in their good faith, without troubling their minds about going further. They were baptized, they had a real devotion to Christ as God, a solid idea of the “chief end of man,” and a correct code of Christian ethics. By lightly shaking their confidence in their inherited denomination and its creed we might end in pulling down instead of building up—they might drift into disbelief instead of rising towards a higher level of Christian Faith. There are even yet many of this kind—men and

women whom we should be content to recognise as friends and fellow-servants of Christ, working in a common cause, unless they themselves show signs of being disquieted and ready to be drawn further along the road to the full Faith.

But this positive Protestant Christianity has, alas, long ceased to be typical. Three generations of secular education, with religion pushed into a corner as a matter of inconsiderable importance from the “real life” standpoint, has brought at the end the situation I have already described. The plain man does not deny God—but he leaves Him out of account, because he has never really grasped what He is or why He is important. Whatever scraps of religious truth he has received are associated with childhood and childish ways of thought—they don’t belong to his adult life at all; he has a vague idea that all that sort of nonsense is out of date and “unscientific,” and believed in only by old women and eccentrics who live in a dream-world.

“QUIET DESPERATION”

There should be no need to explain to any Catholic how calamitous this situation is. True, a large number of such people seem to jog along pleasantly enough without faith or the spiritual life which it gives. They are not “wicked” in the ordinary sense of that term—they are good-natured, cheerful and generous; they have a fairly vivid sense of justice and a hatred of cruelty and oppression. The “rule of thumb” of a vague Christian ethic still guides their lives in general, though they tend to be slipshod and easy about moral obligations—particularly regarding sex matters and honest dealing in goods and services. But at the back of all this is what Thoreau called “quiet desperation”—not an active misery, but just an absence of hope. People live on the surface of life, busy in their daily affairs and recreations, setting their minds on some small object to be attained—a promotion, a holiday, a better job, a desired person or thing. They have no main ideal purpose in existence to shape their characters—no motive to draw them on save that of living as long and as comfortably as possible.

That individuals can live like this we know from daily observation—that such a way of living is deadly and devitalising we are beginning to realise through the experience of the secularised civilisation which we share. The instinct of an increasing number of people is to evade any moral effort requiring serious personal inconvenience, for the simple reason that they “don’t see why” they should make such an effort. Their ethical code is built on the sand of feeling and inherited tradition—not on the rock of Faith in a Law of God: if conscience troubles them there are plenty of voices ready to explain it away when the tide of temptation rises high.

Why obey the old moral codes regarding sex-relationships and marriages—as though a parson’s or magistrate’s words could change the character of a “natural” act? Why have more than one or two children, with all the inconvenience and privation and labour which a large family involves? Why not get rid of a life-partner whose presence has become burdensome, by divorce? Why not kill the incurable or the undesired unborn, or these weary of living? These, and similar “why not?” are cropping up over the whole futile field of modern life—and the modern answer—“I don’t see why not” in each case paves the way for a new line of socially destructive action.

That the end of these things is death for our society is now becoming a commonplace, as our rulers wrestle with the desperate problem of how to avert the nemesis impending upon this country through its depleted birth-rate. Meanwhile, the social order built on the assumption of man’s self-sufficiency, having first developed frightful abnormalities through the worship of production and profit for its own sake, and the sacrifice of human living to the appetite for mechanised power, is now torn asunder through the revolt of the victims, who are moved by the same appetites and the same idolatry of material mastery. We drift helplessly in the direction of a system of general servitude and conscription, as the only remedy to the greed, envy and social irresponsibility which arise inevitably in a secular-minded society. The rule of law decays in men’s hearts because they have no sense of any reality save that of material power and well-being. Where a community is whole-heartedly absorbed in these “treasures of earth,” the keen struggles over their distribution—the “war of all against all”—can only be suppressed by a tyranny which imposes jail-discipline on all alike.

SECULARISM POISONS US, TOO

While we know nothing of the secret dealings of God with individual souls, we do know what our Saviour Himself said about the necessity of having His Truth and His Life: so that we cannot but conclude that the spiritual starvation

and malnutrition of vast numbers of our Australian brethren are gravely perilous from the point of view of their eternal welfare. Jesus Christ embraced death for the redemption of these human beings—He had compassion on them and thirsted for their salvation on Calvary. Does the thought of their state of neglected ignorance and apparent gracelessness still leave our withers unwrung? If it does, what sort of “practising” Christians can we really claim to be?

Anyhow, if we are unconcerned for their sake with the peril of these “other sheep,” straying through life unshepherded, careless of their last end, let us not imagine that we of the Faith can escape the desolation which godlessness brings. The secular atmosphere of death creeps into our own ranks—into our own hearts—like a poisonous infection, which it is harder and harder to combat. Our own people’s vision of spiritual reality becomes ghostly, as they move to and fro in a world which accepts God’s absence as normal. Our Christian pattern of culture and living becomes increasingly distorted to fit in comfortably with its materialistic aims and standards. The Christian education we give to our young slips away from them all too frequently when they leave our schools; too many drift into indifference and even apostasy, abandoning their religion lightly the first time its precepts cut seriously across their passions or plans of life.

The remedy for this perilous situation cannot be found merely through seeking to intensify the spiritual life in our own ranks without reference to the Christless external situation. We cannot make Catholics more truly Catholic without making them apostles—and, if the Kingdom of God is not spread, the development of a totalitarian system under secularist influence will soon begin to strangle the institutions upon which we rely for the preservation of our Catholic Faith and traditions, and perhaps to threaten the liberty of Catholic worship itself. These evils may seem dreams to us now, but they have come upon Christians in many countries of the world in the years since 1914. And, of course, if Australia itself is overwhelmed through its secularist sterility and weakness, by the pagan world outside. Our Catholic body will suffer the fate of extinction which befell that of Roman Britain.

THE CLERGY CANNOT DO THIS WORK

That the work of converting Australia must be begun by you and me, and not left to our pastors, should be clear enough to any person of commonsense. The reason has been stated clearly by the late Holy Father himself, in his great Encyclical to the Bishops of the Philippine nation, our neighbours.

“We cannot ignore . . .” wrote Pius XI, “that to repair all the damage done to modern society, the work of the clergy, no matter how assiduous and willing, is no longer sufficient; for many men, having forgotten or never having known God and His Christ are unresponsive and often hostile to the evangelising work of the priest. Hence, the urgent need that the Apostolate of the Hierarchy shall in some way be extended to and participated in by the laity—who, instructed and spiritually prepared by the clergy, and living the Christian life in its integrity, will be apostles in their own circle, and skilled pioneers opening the way to the Light of Truth and the sanctifying action of grace: in this way co-operating humbly and effectively in the work of the Church.

“The mission, therefore, of these souls is in a certain sense the same as that of the Hierarchy, as that of Christ: to bring other souls to the supernatural life, to develop and defend it. . .”

There are many circles in Australia with which the clergy can never make direct professional contact at all—they cannot join personally, as things are, in the life of the factory, the shop, office and the farm: they cannot talk casually with men engaged in work in these places, as companions in a common task. And even when they are in a position to “put across” their message, their apostolate is frequently less effectual than that of the intelligent and devout layman. People expect to hear religious and moral talk from them—and they discount it in advance, as being a professional “line” for which they are paid. Where what they say impinges upon the social field, it is often strongly resented—“Those fools ought to keep their noses out of politics” is a common reflection: or “What the devil do the clergy mean by interfering in family matters?” For the rest, one of the great successes of secularism has been to bring “the parson” into derision as a foolish sentimentalist out of touch with real life, and wrapped in a web of “dogma” and spiritual illusion—and even the priest to-day often suffers from the same kind of contempt among those who are not a prey to the “cunning Jesuit” prejudice inherited from the Black Legend of the older Protestantism.

CHANGING AUSTRALIA

It is quite different with the layman who knows his Faith, and is prepared to apply its principles openly at all times, both in his action and in the discussion of the problems of this world. He will find many prepared to give him a hearing, if he has anything worth saying. He can often exert a strong influence on people in favour of religious truth and sound human values, and undermine current cant and falsehood by his criticism. He may never make a single convert that he knows of—yet he may be doing a magnificent job in dispelling anti-religious prejudices, throwing a new light on the meaning and aims of life, and winning respect for the Catholic system and its viewpoint. He is, in fact, softening the soil and “thawing out” the frozen secularist temperature of his world. Once we have a considerable number of men and women exercising this type of influence in every sphere of life, we shall soon notice a change in the tone of public thinking. The mass-produced secular humbug which is widely accepted—or acquiesced in—will meet with vigorous criticism: there will be a new note of realism in the discussion of “essential freedoms”, “social justice”, “the standard of living”, “spiritual values” and “democracy”. Politicians will find it less easy to persuade the plain man that the road to servitude is the only way of securing social well-being. Scientists will provoke anger instead of admiration, when they talk learned nonsense about Social Evolution and the New Morality; the peddlers of false nationalism and race-prejudice will be treated with the contempt they merit; the purveyors of dirt, perversion and decadence will not be able to ride away blowing up the trumpet of “cultural freedom”; finally, the sophists of the universities will be listened to less readily when they claim the right to wreck the faith and values of their pupils in the name of “academic liberty.”

Not only, in fact, will there be an increase in the numbers and confidence of Christians themselves, but they will begin to form the way of thought of Australians generally — we shall radiate Christian Sanity into the pagan and semi-pagan mass, instead of being occupied only with counteracting infiltrations into our own Christian community. All this can be achieved in no long time and without any miracle, simply by the determination of a solid body of the laity that they are going to build up their Faith as a dynamic force, and wear it openly in the face of men. And once it is achieved, we shall have made a long step forward in the conversion of Australia.

And now—having spoken of the dangers Involved in neglecting our apostolic task, and of the opportunity of Christianising our country’s way of thought and life which is open to us, let us glance at some of the positive obstacles to the work of conversion—the things which tend to limit and weaken the Church’s influence on Australian life.

RACE AND FAITH

A man I know who has lived for years in India once told me a story about an eminent Englishman who asked an Indian friend “how one could become a Brahmin.” The answer was that if he gave all his goods to the poor and then committed suicide, he might have some hope of being reborn as a Brahmin. In other words, the Brahmin cult is attached to a closed racial caste, and there is no way in for those not born in it. The Jews of Our Lord’s time had, most of them, a similar attitude to their own religious system. It was something for the Chosen Race alone—Gentiles might become “proselytes” of some kind, but they could never attain the full status of the children of Abraham. This race-pride was bitterly outraged both by St. John the Baptist and our Saviour Himself. St. John, you remember, said quite bluntly, that it was of no avail talking about being “children of Abraham” , if they were not loyal to God like the great patriarch. God could, he said, raise a new house of Abraham “from the stones”—as, indeed, He did, in gathering a new spiritual offspring of the Patriarch’s faith from the pagan world. Our Lord had still more wounding things to say—about the virtues of Samaritans and the “faith” of the pagan centurion, and God’s intention to call new people in to sit down at Israel’s feast, while the children first invited were cast out.

All this—one would think—was enough to warn Christians against identifying their creed with a race, nation or culture. Unfortunately, the tendency to confuse religious and clan loyalties is a typical weakness from which even those of our own Faith are not immune.

THE SACRIFICE OF THE CONVERT

This sort of thing has got to be stamped out firmly, if we are ever going to become something greater than a religious-cultural minority standing apart from the main stream of national life and thought. The lay apostle must be

able to rely on the whole Catholic community for active sympathy and help in making converts fully and immediately “at home” in the household of the Faith, and in securing for them the active assistance which they often need.

If there is any distinction, actually, it should be made rather in *favour of* than *against* the convert class as authentic Catholics. After all, there is no personal credit in being born of Catholic parents, baptized as a child and reared Christianly. But the man or woman who is born in the desert of infidelity, or in heresy, and struggles to the gate of the City of God, has very frequently made heavy sacrifices, and fought a bitter fight for the Faith. Even today, adult conversion commonly means loss of friends and bitter experiences—sometimes it involves a tragic break with family and loved ones, and ruinous disaster to one’s career, or to social and economic prospects. In fact, the convert has suffered some degree of external martyrdom, as well as the fierce internal crisis involved in a change going to the very roots of human life. Those who have engaged in convert work are soon made aware that the world’s hatred, prophesied by Our Lord, to those who choose Him, is very real and vivid in Australia to-day; that the Faith is still a, sign of contradiction, dividing parents from children, husbands from wives, friends from friends.

These people have won the citizenship of Christ’s kingdom “at a great price”; they have had to labour painfully with adult minds and hearts to grasp the truth which has been familiar to most of us since childhood—and often not grasped in a real, personal sense because it is so familiar. Is it not absurd that some foolish Catholics should be found to ignore their achievement—and the power of grace which has made it possible—treating them as “naturalised” strangers in the house of their Father? Let us have an end to nonsense about “born Catholics” and “inborn Faith”. No one is born anything but a fallen child of Adam: the grace of faith is acquired through baptism—and it is the same grace, whether conferred upon a three weeks’ old baby or on an adult of twenty-five or forty or ninety.

“PURE IGNORANCE, MADAM”

Having dealt with this matter of Catholic “racialism” I want to pass on to a still graver matter—that of the Catholic ignorance which hampers the lay apostolate. Our Christian system of education has, of course, given our people generally a knowledge of the basic truths of the Faith itself, as set forth in the Catechism; they “know what they worship”, and have a clear idea of the laws of God and duties of religious observance to which they are bound. But while all this might serve well enough for simple folk living in a Catholic civilisation, it is certainly not adequate to the needs of a layfolk placed, as we are, in the midst of an infidel world. We have to repel its attacks, and the subtle “infiltration” of its Spirit: above all, we have to conquer it for Christ; and for this, we need some understanding of the “case for religion” from the rational standpoint, and of the evidences for the Christian revelation.

The need of apologetic training for the layfolk has been recognised by our authorities as implicit in the notion of the Catholic lay apostolate—and it is being undertaken, now, as a normal part of the secondary course in Catholic schools. The ordinary boy or girl can at least learn enough at school to know that there is a solidly rational “case” for Catholicism; so that his confidence in his Faith is increased in face of the world. Those who are interested and active will soon become capable of holding their own in most discussions with non-Catholics of their own circles. But it is important that the business should not be left to schools and organised bodies alone—that the plain man and woman should consider it part of their “job” as Catholics to keep on polishing up their own Catholic culture, and improving their evangelical efficiency. The effort which this demands is not an enormous one: the Catholic Truth Society provides plenty of useful reading material, which can be got hold of without expense or difficulty, and carried in the pocket or purse to be read at odd moments. The steady reader of their pamphlets will find that in a short time he has gathered a rich fund of information on a large variety of religious and religious-social topics, and has learned how to answer some of the most typical modern criticisms and objections.

How can a good God allow evil or damnation? What has science to say about religion? How can we be certain we have souls? Can pagans and Protestants be saved—and on what terms? Isn’t the whole idea of Redemption absurd and unjust? How can we be sure Christ rose from the dead? What’s the case for Papal Infallibility—and what is it, anyhow? Do miracles really happen nowadays? Isn’t modern Catholic worship idolatrous? Isn’t the Catholic code of sexuality outdated, absurd and cruel?

Here are a miscellaneous collection of everyday questions about which the lay apostle ought to know something—and about which he can usually pick up sufficient information for practical purposes, if he has formed the

habit of Catholic Truth Society inquiry. There will always be some matters upon which he will find himself “stumped” in discussion for a moment—but he should never be content to leave them: he should seize the first opportunity to remedy such defects in his knowledge, as soon as they become apparent.

THE CHRISTIAN SOCIAL PROGRAMME

Then there are the social aspects of Catholic teaching — the relation of Christian morals to the “Plan of Society” and the way men live and work. The leaders of the Australian Church have devoted an enormous amount of attention, in these last years, to social questions of all kinds; to the criticism of modern Capitalism. Socialism and Communism, and to the presentation “of solutions” to modern problems of industry, agriculture and credit based on principles of Christian humanism. Yet we still have people barn-storming about the Church “having no positive program,” nothing to offer to the victims of modern capitalism and social justice; and complaining that her attitude is one of negative anti-Communism, as though the Popes had never spoken, and the enormous body of practical Christian social doctrine were non-existent.

Why is this? Mainly, I think, because the Catholic laity have failed to pay attention to what is written and said on these subjects, and have shown little interest in “promoting” the Christian order by becoming apologists for it in an intelligent way. Here, it isn’t a question of talking about religion directly—but of pointing our neighbours towards a way of life which is both practicable, and satisfying to the real aspirations of man, and thereby arousing their sympathy and respect for Catholicism as the ally of true human living and social sanity.

Not only have we failed to “put across” our Christian-humanist social doctrine to any notable extent—despite its correspondence to the “real will” of the common man, but the social thought of Catholics themselves remains secular and not Catholic for the most part. Catholic politicians and “party men” are still found whose public actions, views and programs are completely unrelated to the implications of their Christian Faith, and who pay not the slightest heed to the utterances of the Hierarchy or the Pope himself on any social question. It is not simply that they have not troubled to inform themselves and “Christianise” their thinking, but that they obviously act upon the absurd liberalistic assumption which gives “The Church” a mere corner of “freedom of worship” in a national community whose social system is to be framed without regard to anything except the human opinions and theories of the time. “The law of God”, said a Russian judge, “does not exist on Soviet territory.” To judge by the irresponsible conduct of some of our Christian statesmen and partisans, one would think that they thought Australia—as a secular State—was also outside the sphere of Divine authority.

It is clear that we shall have no effective Christian statesmanship until the Christian social “idea” is no longer overlaid by a too socialist or any other ideology, but is sufficiently current in public thinking to produce a real influence on party policies. In other words, it is no good growling about the defects of our politicians until we have begun to desecularise the outlook of our Catholic “rank and file”, so as to make constructive, radical social thinking a vital force in this community, as well as Christian anti-Communism.

THE RIGHT APPROACH

You may recall that St. Paul opened his first discourse at Athens by congratulating the pagan citizens on their “religiousness”—and that he made use of a shrine to the “Unknown God” as a means of gaining their attention. He didn’t abuse Apollo or Athena; he said “let me tell you something about this Unknown True God whom you yourselves worship—and ‘who has made His revelation to mankind.’” Here we have a perfect example of the right approach, which is of such great importance to the lay apostle. Begin by seeing, and appreciating, the common ground between yourself, as a Catholic and those you wish to influence. Don’t demonstrate the silliness of their false Ideas, or mock at their ignorance, or take an irritatingly superior tone, or aim at “scoring points” in controversy. You’re not out for a verbal victory—you’re out to move the mind and heart of a fellow human being. The first stage, therefore, is to listen and watch rather than rush into the fray. You may find your friend has a strong sense of social justice, or that he is obsessed by the fear of war, or the need of better education. He may be a firm Christian believer, but prejudiced against Catholicism as undemocratic, or superstitious, or identified with “social reaction” and intolerance. Again, he may be a zealous patriot who feels that our religion is alien and hostile to British Australianism. Whatever his attitude,

your own approach must be designed so as to make the utmost use of the truths and values you share with him, while undermining and dispersing his prejudices and illusions. The Puritan has to be shown that all that is true in his creed is to be found in Catholic asceticism—but that it is completed in the light of a truer understanding of human nature. The patriot must be made to see the Church as the consecrator of national loyalties, and the foe only of nationalist idolatry. The zealot for justice must be brought to understand that without the faith in man's immortality the very idea of his personal value must perish and the fight for "justice" become meaningless.

"Feeling of edges" and denunciation are wholly out of place. In dealing with men sincerely in error—when it is necessary to launch an attack upon some opposing creed or system of thought or institution it should be done without a touch of heat or a word of contempt, letting Truth speak for itself against its enemies. There are far too many Catholics who have a habit of thinking and talking of non-Catholic clergy and religious layfolk in contemptuous terms. We are so impatient with what we deem their follies and illusions that we have no perception of the positive and solid Christian elements in their thought and life. We shall be surprised, perhaps, in the next world, to find how many of these souls we presume to despise are among God's true heroes: for a zeal and devotion is often found among them which puts the "household of the Faith" to shame. Meanwhile, our contemptuous, distrustful aloofness towards them not only hinders conversions; it also prevents the formation of the "common front" which this country needs—the front of all religions believers against the advancing tide of secularism and the servile state.

That we are, in general, grossly ignorant about the religious beliefs of our non-Catholic neighbours will soon become apparent to any Catholic who talks to a convert from some other Christian body; and this ignorance is yet another thing that the intelligent layman should set himself to remedy. There is no use flogging dead horses in our controversy, or assuming the existence of beliefs which are not held, or seldom held, by Protestants of the present time: it means waste of time and failure of contact. Instead of hastening to reply fiercely to every petty attack, every pin-prick of "black legend" bigotry, we should be better employed in the constructive task of understanding the Anglican mind, the Presbyterian mind and the Methodist mind, as they exist in Australia to-day. Their mistakes about us do not excuse our misunderstanding of them, which is a serious disadvantage from every point of view.

WORDS AND DEEDS

It is foolish and false to pretend that intelligent controversy is of no value in spreading Catholicism; and those who profess that "argument is useless" are, for the most part, simply seeking an excuse to cover up their own sloth or lack of courage. The need and duty of "showing forth" the Faith against unbelievers is asserted vigorously by St. Thomas Aquinas as well as by Leo XIII, who declares that it is base for a Catholic to "recoil" or keep silence when the Faith is challenged, and that such behaviour is an insult to God. For the rest, the controversial aggressiveness of the Communist apostles shows that they, at least, have no doubts about the usefulness of argument for making converts, and their belief in it has been very fully justified by the results they have achieved. A mere word-battle can be useless, and indeed, harmful, if waged so as to engender heat rather than light; but this is by no means true of disputation conducted with intelligence, tact and charity.

Yet, when all is said and done, the best argument of all for Catholicism should be in the lives of those who profess it. It was used with effect by the first apologists, who appealed with confidence to the moral contrast between the Christian and pagan communities of their time. It is not possible, unfortunately, to speak with this kind of confidence to-day; on the contrary, this modern apologist finds himself hard put to it to explain why the members of the Catholic community fail to stand out as in any way conspicuously superior to their Protestant or pagan neighbours in social virtue. There is a common impression outside the Church that we are more lax about drunkenness and gambling than our fellow-citizens, and it is frequently declared that we provide an undue proportion of criminal delinquents.

It is not my task, here, to deal with these accusations—which are largely untrue or exaggerated, and are made without due attention to social factors affecting the industrial poor in all countries. But at least our light, as a Christian community, can hardly be said to shine very brightly before the eyes of Australia. We arouse neither the admiration, nor the hatred, nor the fear that we should arouse if we were less "conformed to the world" of secular-pagan materialism by which we are surrounded. People are not really worried by our "Christian revolution" as they are by the Communists. We are such "clubbable" fellows, aren't we? So ready to avoid unpleasantness by not drawing

attention to our beliefs unduly—so ready to go along with everyone else in the practical affairs of life, and to accept the compromises, on principle which make things pleasant and smooth. “All for love, and the world well lost” does not exactly, present our way of looking at our life as followers of Christ.

APOSTOLATE OF THE CORPORAL WORKS

All of which leads me to mention one more thing that each one of us can do, and ought to do, by way of apostolic action—and that is to reflect Christ’s light on our neighbour by active, constant, even foolish generosity and kindness towards him. Even in the cases—all too frequent to-day—where all interest in spiritual truth or need of God seem to have perished, the hard crust of insensibility can often be pierced by one who is prepared to practice human love in a sacrificial way—to take trouble to serve strangers where nothing whatever is to be gained either of recompense, or prestige or even gratitude. The corporal works of mercy—these are weapons of apostolic victory which can scarcely fall.

The lay apostle cannot hope, in most cases, to discern visible results for which he knows himself to be responsible. He may never be certain that he has achieved even one conversion—yet some small word, or deed of his may have incalculable spiritual importance in the life of another soul. It may be the first crack in the Ice of indifference or prejudice, or set him thinking on new and fruitful lines: or without ever coming into the visible Church, he may be led to a new faith and love for Christ our Lord. Our concern is not with measuring our personal success—we only know that if we offer our work to Him, He will see to the fruits that in and through Him our failures can achieve an ultimate undreamed-of victory; and that without Him we can do nothing at all, though we speak with the tongues of men and angels.

BEGIN NOW!

There are many of us, of course, who could be, and ought to be, members of some organised Catholic Action Auxiliary, whose activities concern our special sphere. In the cities and towns of our country, the Legion of Mary—with members of either sex—is engaged both in convert instruction work and the personal services of charity of a number of kinds. The Catholic Evidence Guild is the direct preaching of the Faith to non-Catholic on street corners and elsewhere: and the labourers are all too few for this magnificent and fruitful work. I should like to commend these two bodies, especially to my Catholic readers, since they provide training for the lay apostolate as well as giving work to the trained zealot.

But if, for any reason, you cannot become a member of “organised” Catholic Action, that does not mean that you are justified in standing aside from the lay apostolate. You can train yourself, with the advice of your confessor or parish priest—and, as I have shown, the works of essential information you need are not too difficult to procure. For the rest, you can cultivate the habit of watching for real apostolic opportunities, so that you may use them to “get across” some message, no matter how small, which will help Christ’s work in this mission field of Australia, and advance the cause of Christian social humanism. As you improve your apologetic knowledge and understanding, you will find your interest in the work grow, until it becomes second nature to you to play the part of an apostle, and to radiate a Catholic influence on the life of any circle you frequent.

ABOVE ALL—PRAY FOR AUSTRALIA

I have left to the very end the greatest, most vital work of the lay apostolate, without which all other work is vain—mere “Martha-business” and activism, and not true Action for Christ. The life of every successful evangelist—beginning with Our Lord Himself, is first and foremost a life of fervent prayer: and Jesus Christ Himself has told us of the wonders that the prayer of Faith can achieve—of its irresistible power before the throne of God. In the modern apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes and at Fatima, it is to be observed that the Mother of God spoke almost entirely upon two topics, the need to pray, and the need of penance to expiate sin; and we may be sure that we shall get nowhere if we neglect her directions—above all, her appeal to say the Rosary, often, and fervently. At the Centenary celebrations, this country was dedicated to the care of her Immaculate Heart—that Heart which was pierced sevenfold by the agony of her Son, as she shared His passion on Calvary. Let us use our Rosaries, then, as golden fetters of prayer,

to bind Australia more closely to the feet of this, her gracious Patron, our glorious Queen and Mother; while we offer our Masses and Communion to her Divine Son, so that this land may have life abundantly, and be enlightened with the Truth which makes men free.
