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ENGLAND'S NEED

There are plenty of reformers and prophets for England's material needs. The Beveridge Report is only one of several hundreds of printed works showing what the men of this country lack and how their needs are to be filled. We are shown the wretched lives of those to whom our system has been harsh: the uncertainty of employment, the great number living below subsistence level, the hovels in which many workers live, the long hours and the slender leisure; these things can be painted in vivid colours and provide the mainstay for the enthusiasts for the plans and reports.

There are few who recognise that those material needs are of secondary importance compared with the spiritual ones, and that the needs of Englishmen will never be met so long as we confine our efforts to relieving their physical wants. Pius XII, in his impressive Christmas allocution, has pointed out that the troubles from which we suffer cannot be cured if we leave out religion. This truth is set aside by the majority of social thinkers and planners, and they scoff at the Pope as reactionary and out of touch with reality. But in this country the need is greater than elsewhere. Already our standard of living is the highest in Europe, with the possible exception of the Scandinavian countries, if we base our comparisons on pre-war standards. At the same time, the religious needs here are being overlaid at an alarming speed. The need for spiritual realities is forgotten, and for that reason our planners consider nothing beyond material reconstruction. England can live happily enough without religion, so why waste energy in trying to restore religious sense?

England's needs are spiritual rather than material; and furthermore the supplying of the spiritual need would go a long way towards material recuperation. The obstacles in the way of bringing back the Christian religion to England stand so high that human endeavour could not of itself begin to knock them down. Not only does the gospel lack an army of preachers to do the work, but England is deaf—there are no ears to hear. Englishmen on the whole do not feel the need of any religious reality in their lives; nearly

all are convinced that they have heard it before, this 'stale news' about Christ. The spirit of the Crusade, whatever our religious leaders may urge, plays no very large part in their astonishing courage. The inspiration is seldom Christian.

The words used by the Christian preacher have another meaning for his paganised hearers. The meaning of Christian words—'charity, grace, miracle, mystery'—has changed. The Christian must invent a new vocabulary if he is to convince any of his apathetic hearers of the urgent need of the things of the spirit. In order to overcome this obstacle we seem too often to rely on the policy of the patent medicine purveyor: take this religious medicine and your ills, whatever they may be, will disappear. Men cannot understand religious phrases, but perhaps they may be attracted to Christianity because of its natural advantages, its rational equilibrium, its sound psychology, its just social doctrine, its balanced attitude to Racialism, Nationalism, Totalitarianism. Here is salvation. Come and be saved on this earth; you will understand what is meant by Christ, by faith, by grace, later on, when you have taken regular doses of religion.

Such an attitude obviously fails because others are claiming the same for their own ways of life, more vehemently and without having to drag in religion at all. Besides, conversion to Christianity has never been secured by such means. From John the Baptist onwards, the appeal has always been more violent and uncompromising. The Baptist did not find his way into the salons nor yet the inns of Palestine; nor did he say to those who listened to him: 'You are really on the right track; you are well-meaning and intelligent; all you need is to dot your I's and recognise the Christ, you have already shown your desire to do so by your quest for the truth.' St. Paul once tried that method at Athens—'what therefore you worship without knowing it, that I preach to you'—but he did not find it a very successful method; and even on that occasion he concluded with a call to penance and a reference to the Judge. The Baptist with his rough clothes and emaciated body imperiously demanded repentance, a change of heart—'ye brood of vipers' has little of the suavity of the patent-medicine sellers. Conversion demands detestation of the past manner of living, so that all fruitful preachers have lived and preached Penance, and it is the violent who conquer the kingdom of the spirit. The people who seek material prosperity with all their energies, whether individual or collective, cannot hear the spiritual message of the Gospels until they have been roughly handled.

Those, however, who are officially deputed to preach the Gospel

are almost wholly occupied with those already within the Church. They are Pastors rather than Apostles, and necessarily so. The priesthood brings with it the 'prophetical' office and duty of breaking the word to the people. The people are of two sorts, those with the faith and those without it; and this means that the priest must face two ways, as Pastor to his converted flock, as Apostle to those as yet in need of hearing the word and accepting it. He has need to preach penance to both; but to the pagan, deaf to spiritual words, the Apostle must preach with greater vehemence and severity.

In periods of crisis the existing priesthood finds its energies entirely occupied with the flock of the faithful. The pastors of the Church have almost more than they can do to preserve their own from the hostile forces in which they live and which produce the conflict between ideals creating the crisis. That was the case in the thirteenth century, and that was why a new type of priest was brought from God's store, a man who could devote his energies to preaching to the unconverted, the priest who was scarcely a pastor but wholly an apostle—the friar, white, grey or black.

In England to-day the time of crisis has produced a similar situation. Some have complained that the Church's preachers are in the main occupied in preaching to the converted. It is inevitable. Priests are few, and their first concern is to preserve what remains of the household of the faithful. After that they might give their time to the Englishmen outside the Church, but parochial duties are heavier than those not so burdened can visualise. For the most part they are so burdensome and unending that even to continue the spiritual nature of their office parochial clergy have to turn to others, such as religious, who are not ground down by such tiresome labours. In this way many of those whose vocation is apostolic rather than pastoral find themselves preaching to the converted.

It is, however, impossible to preserve the *status quo* in this manner. If there are no patrols, no shock troops, no vanguard sallying into enemy territory, the main compact body will be constantly surprised by every attack. A truer simile of the situation of the Church in England would be that of a bulb exposed to the bleak dry air of a materialist paganism, instead of being surrounded by the warm mould of an army of preachers, moistened by the constant flow of converts brought into the fold by their words. Rapidly Catholics are realising that it is impossible to preserve what is already alive within unless at the same time they strive to bring in nourishment from outside; that congregations will dwindle, overcome by the spirit of this world, unless there is a strong movement engaged in converting the heathen.

It will be argued that the need for the Apostolate in England has been vividly realised and energetically supplied by the laity in the many and varied lay movements headed by Catholic Action. But it must never be forgotten that the lay apostolate co-operates with and works under the direction of the official apostles. The lay apostolate cannot stand alone. A situation in which the clergy are all occupied with pastoral work, leaving the apostolic to the laity, would completely atrophy the latter's apostolic undertakings. There must be clerical apostles for there to be lay apostles.

The conclusion therefore is plain. England's need is spiritual; she needs preachers who will turn the attention of her sons and daughters from the pursuit of purely material prosperity, and lead them to turn from the wrath to come and do penance with a sincere heart. There are innumerable groups and individuals who are anxious to see this done and are acting as apostles as far as they are able. But most of these are layfolk who require direction and leadership from ordained ministers of Christ. England therefore needs a 'new order,' a new order inspired not by Beveridge Reports or Atlantic Charters, but by ordained 'baptists,' men of penance preaching a change of mind such as the Baptist preached in the desert, and canalising the vast forces of zealous apostles scattered right across the country.

God usually calls forth a new army to meet a new aggression at a time of crisis. Such spiritual armies as already exist have as much as they can manage to preserve the old and traditional. We can do nothing to hasten the divine call and institution, but we can wait with confidence, like the few faithful Jews in the years preceding the birth of our Lord, looking for the salvation of England. England's need will be supplied by apostolic men living in community; not reeds shaken by the winds of passing fashions of thought, not men clothed in soft garments, but men who can speak the truth with violence so that England may once again open her ears to the Word of God.

Pius XII suggested such thoughts in his Christmas address to the Cardinals. Having spoken of their rôles as priests and counsellors, 'to-day,' he went on, 'there opens for the Church a period comparable to that hour when Christ came forward to meet the ancient paganism. It is an hour of grave danger, in which too there are great promises and possibilities of good. May God raise up in the ranks of the Church and of the laity generous and stout hearts that they may bear to the world, erring indeed but thirsting for union and brotherhood, that manner of personal and social conduct which came from Christ.'