

# The Spirit in the World—III

## —Ad Lucem

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There is a growing appreciation among the Catholic laity that their task in the world is the doing of God's work in and through the work of the world. In other words Christ's life must be actualised by the members of his body through a full participation in the life of the world. The constant narrowing of distance, wider horizons and the increasing independence of former dependant peoples are giving world-wide dimensions not only to problems of politics, economics and sociology, but also to the life of the Church.

Nearly thirty years ago the founders of *Ad Lucem* were already thinking along these lines. They saw the needs of the under-developed countries of the world, which includes two-thirds of its peoples, and they wanted desperately to help these areas in some way. This was long before current international thinking had begun; long before the idea of the United Nations Organization, and the world's consciousness of the poverty of the under-developed countries. They knew that they could give no more than they possessed, and on examination this came to two things, namely, professional service and the knowledge of their Christian faith. So they set out to combine these ideas in *Ad Lucem*.

They were not many in the beginning—just seven students of the Catholic University of Lille in France. The year was 1932, and they had recently returned with their chaplain, the Abbé Robert Prévost, from the first missionary Congress of the students of France which had been held in Vincennes. The association which these seven formed was the beginning of *Ad Lucem*. It was soon welcomed by intellectuals from China, Japan, Viet-nam, Madagascar and Dahomey, present in France at the time, and missionary bishops added their encouragement. Other towns followed Lille's example and 'groups of formation' began to appear. Cardinal Liénart of Lille gave his active support and has been the ecclesiastical patron of the movement since its foundation. Doctor Louis Ajoulat, one of the original founders, is today its Director.

*Ad Lucem* is not a secular institute. Its aim is the independence of its members who have developed their personalities through living good

Catholic lives and who give a witness to their faith. Action is the keynote of the movement. This action is primarily that of the profession of the member, and, secondarily, forms of specific Catholic Action which are approved by the bishop in the diocese of the member's activity. Preparation, then, is general and concerns itself chiefly with a doctrinal and cultural formation. It is principally a missionary movement and so the training undertaken is along the lines likely to benefit future missionary lay-folk. In this connection scripture is studied through the teachings of the Church and an effort is made to obtain some understanding of the cultural patterns and the problems of the missionary church. Members see their mission as a personal one and appreciate that it will be only through the possession of a deep spiritual life that their work can be of value, as it will be chiefly through influence that they will be able to assist the Church. This work can be at several levels, but it will be mainly in the exercise of their professional duties that they may hope to be most effective; and so great emphasis is placed upon competence, for it is realised that it is only by competence that they will be able to reflect the perfection in Christ whom they strive to imitate. In this way it is hoped that their presence in any society will assist in the easing of social pressure, the influencing of it, in order to make it propitious for the flourishing of Christian life, and the using it to create an atmosphere and background in which men can develop their human qualities. Thus whether as doctor, teacher, engineer, lawyer, scientist, or any other profession, they aim at professional competence and Christian witness combined, placing themselves under the direction of the bishop of their diocese for any other Christian Action which they may be called upon to pursue. In other words *Ad Lucem* aims at helping in the spread of the word of God through the proper function of the layman, which is the work of the world.

Members join 'Formation Groups' before becoming committed to service in an overseas country. A person usually belongs to one of these groups for about two years before undertaking work in an underdeveloped country. There is no stereotyped form of preparation, as each group is autonomous, and the chaplains and leaders plan their programmes according to the particular needs of the groups. But close liaison is kept with the Paris headquarters of the movement, from which guidance may be sought about difficulties. The aim is a formation which has both spiritual and cultural elements, the former involving doctrinal study since the spiritual life of the Catholic lay person must rest upon knowledge of Catholic doctrine. The latter varies and

there is no hard and fast rule governing it. What is done in one group is not necessarily duplicated in others. To give some idea, however, of what cultural formation is within the movement, I shall say briefly what has been the programme of the London Group.

An area of Africa was chosen for study. This happened to be Central Africa and East Africa, mainly because of the political and economic changes which were foreshadowed. Both Africans and Europeans who knew these areas and were familiar with their problems were invited to speak to the group. Next members heard talks on Islam and Communism in Africa, followed by an examination of the elements of the New Nationalism in Africa. After this African religions were looked at from the anthropological point of view by an anthropologist specializing in African religions. This brought the group's knowledge of Africa forward, facilitating an understanding of the events which have been taking place in the Congo. In fact, jointly with the Oxford Group a week-end conference was devoted to the Congo. This was followed by another in London which studied Catholic life on an international scale. Lately the group has been looking at the larger picture of nakedness and hunger in the world and representatives of the United Nations Organization have been invited to give talks on their activities. Doctors who have worked in Africa have also given talks, and so have teachers and educationists and priests. At present the group is considering the problem of communication of European ideas to the African and Asian mind.

All this has, of course, tended to give members a much more balanced view of the world and has undoubtedly helped to remove prejudices and to dispel errors based on preconceived notions, thus assisting in the promotion of the spirit of internationalism and catholicity. Groups themselves are often international in their composition.

Though the English groups have been in existence for only just over three years, there are already some members overseas. Two Oxford members are in Australia, two London members are in Africa, and a third is in Korea. In a year or so many who at present belong to these groups, namely Oxford, London and Reading, will have gone to an under-developed country; and so it is hoped that they will be replaced at home, and what is now a trickle into the groups will later become a flood; for there is a great deal of work to be done in the mission countries of the world.

Another aspect of the English Groups is the interest which they take in overseas students here in Britain. At Oxford three houses are maintained

by *Ad Lucem* for both British and Overseas students on a fifty-fifty basis, the idea being to bring students from the commonwealth countries and British students together under the same roof. The London Group itself meets on the premises of the International Chaplaincy.

The best way of appreciating the character of *Ad Lucem* is participation in the summer-camp. This is an annual event and forms an important part of the training of an *Ad Lucem* member. Thus every member is encouraged to attend one or two of them before taking up an appointment overseas. These camps are usually held during the summer holidays somewhere in France. They are very popular with all the groups and everyone looks forward to these two weeks together of prayer, study and recreation.

And so *ad lucem per caritatem*.<sup>1</sup>

## Our Lord's Tears and St Catherine's

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'Jesus, in the days of his earthly life, with a loud cry and tears, offered up prayers and supplications to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his reverent submission'. (Heb. 5. 7). Thus writes St Paul of the prayer and agony of Christ in the garden.

Notice that St Paul does not say that Jesus prayed to be saved from death, but to 'him who was able to save him from death'. For what, then, did he pray, if not to be saved from death? St Catherine of Siena gives an answer to this question which at first surprised her spiritual director, Blessed Raymond of Capua. But after hearing Catherine's further explanation, Raymond could say only: 'I kept silent, and simply admired the grace and wisdom she had received from God'. (Raymond of Capua, *St Catherine of Siena* New York: p. 147).

St Catherine explains that Jesus, 'far from dreading his passion and death, on the contrary wished to advance the moment', so that another

<sup>1</sup>Anyone who wishes for further information should write to the leader of the London Group at 41 Holland Park, London, W.11.