

oneness in Christ so far transcends the divisions imposed by the business of daily living. Thus spirituality becomes not an optional extra, but the very spring and source of life itself.

This sense of a deepened responsibility of our adult awareness of the *unum necessarium* is achieved within the Church's ordinary framework. But it can be immensely stimulated by parochial retreats, themselves based on the traditional pattern of the Mass and the Sacraments. Such retreats, revealing the place of the sacramental principle at all levels of mortal life, from birth to death, in sickness and in health, are the best of all initiations to that total spiritual life to which Christians are committed in virtue of their baptism. As always, the Church provides the end—and the means for attaining it.

DEVOTION FOR EVERY MAN

BY

C. J. WOOLLEN



CHRIST'S message, being for every man, is for the large body of unthinking as well as the more intellectual. In these days it must be admitted that the average man is not disposed to reason much; he prefers to accept mental fare that is given him without examining too closely its quality.

He does not necessarily accept the conclusions of others, but that is because he has not troubled to make judgments about them. His mental attitude is more that of one who is willing to be entertained as an observer at an intellectual feast, and with a pronounced respect for the dictum of the expert. There is a general mental laziness making for mass-passivity, which provides the grand opportunity for the demagogue and dictator.

The unresponsiveness of the man in the street to a message that demands mental exercise on his part has led us, in our campaign for the conversion of others to the Faith, to appeal more particularly to the intellectual. Our whole approach has been carried too far on to the intellectual plane. We tend to overlook that our real aim is to draw our fellow-countrymen into the life of the spirit, and we are inclined to waste energy in engaging in a battle of wits with the few disposed to argue. True, we always have at the back of our minds the intention to bring to those with whom we engage the solid gift of faith, but we seem not to have formed a technique for doing the work of conversion on a grand scale. If we have, in this country, forty million or more souls to convert,

will there be as many as forty thousand whom routine apologetic methods attract?

It might be thought that in these days of wider educational opportunity there would be greater scope for the Catholic apologist. In some ways there is, and there is much work for him to do. The mistake is made if we expect to find a large body of philosophically minded ready to hear him. Modern educational methods tend to instil large doses of information rather than to make the pupil think. We have to remember, moreover, that, religious instruction being generally lacking or inadequate, the devotional habit of mind is not developed, so that anything 'religious' has to contend with prejudice from the start.

Yet the fact remains that we cannot instil devotion without first giving the soul a knowledge of God. It is necessary to know God before we can love him, as the catechism and sound psychology teach. The gibe against the Church that in the Middle Ages she laid store only by religious education is founded on ignorance of the actual educational facilities in the ages of Faith. But it does express a recognition of the insistence by the Church on the truth that education is truly first and foremost religious education.

The fact of the simplicity of most of the Church's children in all ages is empirical proof that there is no need for those who love God to be intellectual giants. In the words of Matt Talbot, the saintly Irish labourer, 'the kingdom of heaven was promised not to the sensible and the educated but to such as have the spirit of little children'. The nature of worship itself, moreover, shows that intense love of God can be founded on a small content of knowledge. Too often the school religious syllabus is represented as being a formidable affair, and there is some danger in emphasising the intellectual element in religious training as if it were the one thing necessary. Practice is founded on knowledge, but knowledge grows with practice. Love of God implies knowledge but to have knowledge is not necessarily to have love. To have in mind always that 'the greatest of these is charity' is to ensure the right emphasis in religious training.

It is certain that the majority, even of practising Catholics, are not theologians; nor can we expect that folk whom we aim at bringing into the Church should become any more so. The increasing number of people content to go through life without using their reasoning powers on things worth while makes conversion out of the question if the need for much theological knowledge is put in the forefront of our campaign. A non-Catholic old lady, who went daily to Mass and to every other public church service,

was said by a priest not to have the mental capacity to receive proper instruction. But he would have no hesitation in receiving her should she be in danger of death. Nevertheless it seems a pity that the good woman should be deprived of sacramental grace and the fuller life of the spirit if her dispositions justify it, even though her want of understanding results in her grasp of Catholic doctrine being weak.

The proverbial applewoman may have a kind of intuitive knowledge which she is unable to express in terms acceptable to the theologian. But, while we allow for this, we may not presume it. We do well to bear it in mind only that the proper proportion be kept between doctrinal and devotional instruction.

There is always difficulty in finding simple words in which to express profound truths. Theological accuracy must be observed, and when there is a departure from technical terms, the tendency is towards inaccuracy. Nevertheless, the theologian must learn to translate Catholic truth into language understood by the people. His greatest task will be to speak a tongue simple enough to be understood by the multitude of unbelievers who know hardly anything about God.

This calls for the gift almost of a Curé d'Ars, who could speak only little halting sentences that it would seem anyone could say; yet they had the power of moving hearts and bringing people to repentance. And the Curé himself confessed that he learned theology more at the prie-dieu than in the schools. But it is one thing to call to repentance those who believe in hell; another thing altogether to preach to those who have no clear idea of why they are alive. An effective approach to those whom we would convert seems almost to call for even greater gifts than the Curé possessed.

We gain, no doubt, in spiritual power if we remember that the implanting in the hearts of the love of God is the direct object of any apostolic work for conversion. The knowledge of Catholic truth imbibed by those to whom we teach it is unfruitful unless it issues in love and worship. An appeal to the intellect is useless unless its object be to touch the heart. It may be possible to instil instalments of knowledge the cumulative effect of which is to stir the will, but the ideal will be to encourage also habits of devotion that will lead the hearer to obtain the gift of conversion.

Immediate conversions are rare; the vision granted to St Paul, or the call to a Nathanael, are not of the kind that are often paralleled. And on a superficial view we may think that most conversions are the result of the convert having received some sort of instruction over a long time, and being convinced by arguments

continually repeated, or a course of private study. But in practice the Church assumes the desire for reconciliation as prior to intensive instruction. Whatever the knowledge of Catholic truth in the mind of the person seeking to be received, he or she is put under a course of instruction. The method by which people are treated to lectures on Catholic doctrine to stimulate their interest is in some sense a reversal of the official practice of the Church.

It would seem that the man in the street requires to be approached in a simpler way. The grace of God is prior to conversion, and prayer is prior to securing that grace. We must grant that a preliminary grace still is needed even that a man may pray. The approach to every man must include a strong spur to devotion.

How is this to be achieved? It may be that divine Providence will effect it by sending some great calamity. Famine may well send people to their knees to pray for the elementary need of food. During the war a Catholic prayer campaign made great progress in air-raid shelters. At Fatima tens of thousands prayed when they thought the end of the world was coming. In coal mine disasters people go down on their knees.

It has been thought that in times of calamity the simple exposition of the Passion of Christ may bring people to God and his Church. The sufferings of Christ, the God-Man, explain the sufferings of humanity. They are the link between a suffering people and God. 'We preach Christ crucified', said St Paul (1 Cor. 1, 23); to the Jews 'a stumbling-block', and to the Gentiles 'foolishness'. 'But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.' That is to say, the prospective convert needs the grace of God that he may grasp the difference between the natural and the supernatural.

The most efficacious approach to the plain man will be one that finds simple methods of putting before him man's elevation above nature by grace. It may be done by explaining the mystery of human suffering. It will be advanced by exhortations to prayer. It may well involve promoting devotion to the Holy Ghost, whose 'kindly light' leads converts in their search for the true Faith. Certain it is that all who work for the conversion of our non-Catholic countrymen must themselves have such a devotion as to make others enthusiastic to share the life of grace which stamps them as ambassadors of the Love of God.