BLACKFRIARS

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THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

In the month of December, 1939, His Eminence Cardinal Hinsley stirred England with a broadcast address, which he called 'The Sword of the Spirit.' The address was published and had an immense circulation. In the month of August, 1940, His Eminence inspired the Catholic laity, and, one imagines, a great part of the clergy also, by launching the movement which he likewise called 'The Sword of the Spirit.' This movement, like the addresses from which it takes its title, may be said to be, or at any rate is intended to be, the response of the soul and mind and will of the Catholic body in England to the spiritual and intellectual and moral necessities of the time. These necessities were, for those who had eyes to see, plain and evident enough in time of peace. They became clamant with the outbreak of war.

England had inherited from the Middle Ages with all their traditions an admirable series of Christian institutions—for example, the great Cathedrals, the great Universities, and the Common Law[1]—and the whole body of theological and philosophical and moral principles that gave life to these institutions and to the civilisation that they served. During the century that followed (shall we say?) Catholic Emancipation, the life of England and the institutions that served it at first gradually and then more

[1] Contrast, just for fun, the institutions of the post-Reformation period: The Bank of England, the Stock Exchange and the National Debt.

and more rapidly ceased to be Christian. Take one example: In the year 1829, I believe it to be true that each of the Fellows in each of the Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge was not only expected to be a Christian, but was also required to be a celibate and in Orders. Now, it is not necessary (is it?) for any of the Fellows in any of the Colleges to be celibate or in Orders, or even a Christian; and (we are told) few enough are. Again, in the year 1829 there was no judge or lawyer in England who would not have assured you that 'Christianity is part of the law of England.' In the year 1917 it was decided by the House of Lords, by a majority of four against one, that Christianity was no longer part of the Law of England.[2]

To those whose minds were attentive to these changes, it was more and more apparent in the years before the war that if the fabric of English civilization were to survive, it would be necessary for the few Catholic pillars in the edifice to bear almost the whole weight of the building. In fact, whether we recognised it or not, the movement of history was beginning to cast on the Catholic body the whole burden of maintaining the tradition of Christian civilization in this country. The hope of the more serious minds was that the Catholic body would come to recognize that the weight was being (or had been) in this way cast upon them; and would, with open eyes and humble hearts, accept the burden and the duty.

The outbreak of the war precipitated a spiritual crisis. England was fighting 'for freedom and justice and the tradition of Christian civilization.' Her reserves of that tradition were a wasting asset. The tradition had to be renewed, refreshed, reinforced. Only Catholicism could do it. Cardinal Hinsley began to appear on platforms and at public meetings in the company of and immediately

[2] In 1829 also there was no lawyer in England who would have denied or even doubted that indissolubility was a legal quality of every English marriage. It is no longer so.

behind the Prime Minister. In December, 1939, he unsheathed for the nation the Sword of the Spirit.

And now, in the movement bearing that name, he has called the Catholic laity to his aid; and the clergy, too, as is shown by the number of those who have been nominated or elected to the Executive Committee. It was and is indeed imperative to have the assistance of the clergy. For who else are to teach us to pray; and, where need is, to pray on our behalf? And where else are to be found the theological and philosophical and moral principles that are needed for the transfusion that is to be made into the institutions that are, so to say, the limbs and the organs of English civilization?

The movement, then, is a movement of prayer and study and action. It operates thus on three planes: on the plane of prayer, of regular prayer, with provision for recurring days of recollection and retreat; on the plane of study; of what we may call sacred study, which is properly the affair of the clergy; and of what we may call profane study, which is properly the affair of the laity; and of action, by way, one supposes, of example, and by pamphlets, meetings, and propaganda, which is to be controlled and guided by an Executive Committee.

Already a series of popular pamphlets are in the press; and 'drawing-room' meetings are being held in London and elsewhere. A special series of lectures are being arranged by the Aquinas Society in aid of the Movement. A special High Mass is to be celebrated *Coram Cardinali* at Westminster Cathedral on October 6th, and mass meetings are being arranged.

Of the Executive Committee the elected Chairman is Mr. Paul Kelly, a well-known and much-loved member of the Catenian Society and of the Catholic Social Guild (of which he is Treasurer), and of one or more of the City Companies. Of the intellectual Policy Group the Chairman is Mr. Christopher Dawson, who has succeeded during the last ten or fifteen years, by the sheer force of his

learning, in imposing his thought on the Universities not only of Europe, but of the whole world. Associated with him will be the best Catholic scholars in sacred and profane science of Oxford (where Christopher Dawson is happily again in residence) and of Cambridge and other Universities; and certain non-Catholic experts and scholars in history and law and economics and social study also. One may fairly hope that out of the 'den' of Christopher Dawson and the discussions that are held there will emerge a body of principles and conclusions that will be of immediate value to the Executive Committee in its proper work. One must not fail to mention that the Honorary Secretary of the Movement is, by the express wish of Cardinal Hinsley, a distinguished graduate of Oxford, and already perhaps the best known alike in Catholic and non-Catholic circles of the younger generation of English women, Miss Barbara Ward.

The Movement has been launched and has met with an eager welcome. All the three English Metropolitans and not a few individual bishops have given it their blessing, and promises of cordial support; and even a little invaluable criticism. Some criticism has also been offered in the Press, which augurs well for the future. The response of the laity has been encouraging and even enthusiastic. The Movement evidently answers a real need. Already, there are indications of a quickening of the pulse of life in Catholic societies all over the country. For it is no part of the intention of the new movement to displace or annihilate existing societies, but rather to co-operate with them, breathing in new life; in a word, to raise at once the spiritual and intellectual and moral potential of the Catholic body; and to put all its immense reserves of spiritual strength into the service of the national cause.

If the Movement is given a fair chance, with a fair measure of loyalty to the leaders, Cardinal Hinsley and Christopher Dawson, in their respective fields, even an old campaigner, grown a little cynical in the service, may be

forgiven for reviving new hopes: of great service to the Church, and, through a Church united in loyalty, to a nation re-united and re-integrated to its own principles and its own past.

RICHARD O'SULLIVAN.

IN PRAISE OF STANDARDS

SOME men profess to look first at examples, some at the exemplar. The difference of air about the two has often been commented on; that they get along together for the most part as well as they do is due to the fact that the former do admit the existence of an exemplar, and that the latter do concern themselves with the production and improvement of the examples. The first standpoint has been subtly expressed in the lines

Though Plato no doubt was a corker, yet our philosophee
Is that we must be ready for dinner when dinner is ready for we;

whereas the others would be chiefly concerned to adapt the dinner hour to their own needs. They will still be able to go amicably in to dinner because both will at least agree that dinner is desirable. They will agree on the existence of standards, wherever they are to be found, and a world to be conformed to them and indeed demanding their embodiment. And to that extent, a wide one, they present us with the classical ideal. For the classical world, now or two thousand years ago, is a world which recognises standards, standards of thought and action, to be discovered, recognised, accepted, and imposed both on individual and communal life. That ideal is not particularly non-Christian, not particularly Christian; it transcends these categories. And like other ideas which transcend categories, it is realised as the same yet very differently in