

The Life of the Spirit

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THE RE-CONVERSION OF SCOTLAND

By

PETER F. ANSON.

Scotland, more rapidly than England, is drifting into a confused but not yet convinced paganism. Calvin and Knox are fading into the background as religious heroes. Christ Himself may soon be a mere name to the multitudes unless there is a movement of re-conversion in our midst. About ten years ago the Church of Scotland published a Report which had the courage to admit that no more than 36 per cent. of the total population of this country was affiliated to organised religious bodies. It also revealed that about 150,000 children of school age were not connected with any church or Sunday school. At the present time it would probably be more correct to state that less than 25 per cent. of the people of Scotland are even nominal members of any Christian denomination. This is how Dr. George F. MacLeod, the Leader of the Presbyterian Iona Community sums up the religious situation in Scotland: "We have rejected an earlier discipline and discarded its Reformation alternative, and have left our youth with nothing."

The Kirk, as a whole, has lost its authority over the people, although Scotland is still a Presbyterian nation so far as its established Church. Its membership is declining, while, on the other hand, the Catholic population tends to increase—through natural rather than by supernatural reasons. The statistics of birth-rate among Scoto-Irish families in the industrial Lowlands prove this fact. To-day about 13 per cent. of the total population of Scotland is Catholic. No statistics of conversions are allowed to be published as in England. If the number of annual conversions could be revealed they would probably be far less in proportion to the Catholic population than in England.

The Church is certainly increasing numerically, but its growth is due rather to the birthrate than to any organised effort of evangelisation. Can we be satisfied with this method? Has not the time come to consider our responsibilities towards the thousands of Scotsmen who are ignorant of the elements of Christianity and whose children are growing up more or less pagan in outlook? At the same time, ought we not to do more to encourage a minority outside the Catholic Church which realises that the outward disciplines of Calvinism have broken down and which is groping in the dark towards new disciplines to replace them?

Paradoxical as it may sound, it is rather unfortunate that the Church in Scotland managed to survive the Penal Times! The Church endured such intense and often bitter persecution for over three centuries that when, at last, the Emancipation Act of 1829 brought comparative freedom of action and worship, the "Loyal Remnant" asked nothing more than to be left in peace. The handful of Scottish Catholics were exhausted. They would have been alarmed if given the label of "proselytisers." Then came the Irish immigration. Thousands of starving families sought refuge in the industrial districts of the Lowlands in the hope of finding work. Their heroic priests had more than enough to do in ministering to their flocks, caring for the sick and dying, fighting the evils of drink and poverty, to have time to think of the spiritual welfare of non-Catholic Scotsmen. Even if one of them had felt a vocation to become a 19th century Columba or Ninian, he could not abandon his immediate responsibilities to his co-religionists.

Scotland never grew familiar as did parts of England with itinerant missionaries, such as Father Dominic Barberi, the Passionist. The second Spring, such as it was, brought no vast influx of converts, rich and poor, to swell the ranks of the Church. It is interesting to compare the religious situation in Scandinavian countries with Scotland. In Norway, Sweden and Denmark, Catholicism was completely extinguished after the Reformation. In these Lutheran lands the Faith had to be built up again from bed-rock. There was no Loyal Remnant. There has never been any considerable body of foreign Catholics, other than Poles. Like the Irish in Scotland, but less numerous, they migrated to Scandinavia because of unemployment at home. The Church is still hardly "out of the catacombs." Penal laws still hamper its activities, especially in Sweden. Nevertheless one is invariably conscious of a live missionary mentality among the priests and layfolk. The Church is organised on missionary lines; it exists to spread knowledge of the Faith, by preaching and by indirect methods—one might say, by every possible method.

Now it is just the other way round in Scotland. In recent

years widely scattered and sparsely populated "missions" in certain dioceses have been erected into "parishes" in accordance with Canon Law; an indication that the ecclesiastical authorities no longer regard Scotland as a "missionary" country. Our priests are looked upon more as "curators" of the Faith than "home missionaries." We raise vast sums every year for *foreign* missions, but is there ever a collection for *home* missions? We maintain two colleges to train missionaries to pagans beyond the seas, but we have no similar institution for the education of missionaries to the pagans within our midst, although it may be pointed out that the main object of Blairs College is still stated to be the education and training of "those who may feel called to dedicate themselves to God, and the salvation of souls as Clergymen on the Scottish Mission"! But times have changed, and just how far are these future "clergymen" encouraged to think of themselves as missionaries to the heathen, and inspired with the aim of the "salvation of souls" outside the visible Church?

Do we pray enough for the re-Christianising of our country? Sixty years ago the first Plenary Council of the Scottish Hierarchy was held at Fort Augustus. The bishops ordered that the Rosary and prayers were to be recited on the first Sunday of every month for the conversion of Scotland, if possible with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. For more than half a century, congregations, large and small, have invoked Our Lady Help of Christians, St. Andrew and St. Margaret to pray for Scotland. But do these invocations really mean much to most of us on the first Sunday of the month? Just how far do they lead on to positive Catholic Action with the same object in view? Fifty-two years ago the Benedictine monks of Fort Augustus established the *League of St. Andrew* with the purpose of praying for Scotland. The League aimed at doing for this country what the *Guild of Ransom* was doing for England. It was approved by the Hierarchy and blessed by Pope Leo XIII. For a few years it published an excellent magazine—*St. Andrew's Cross*—full of interesting articles dealing with religious life in Scotland. To-day the League appears to be more or less moribund, and for a long time past no efforts have been made to enrol new members. The List of Intentions, issued every year by the English promoters of the *Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity* omits any specific reference to separated Christians north of the Tweed, an apparent indication, so it would seem, of indifference.

A curious manifestation of the ingrained suspicion towards praying for those outside the Church among Scoto-Irish Catholics may be found in the omission of the Prayers for the King after the chief Mass on Sunday! It is only in the diocese of Aberdeen that they are obligatory.

Nevertheless the secondary object of the *Catholic Truth Society of Scotland* is "to afford and multiply for non-Catholics opportunities for learning the truth about Catholic Faith and Practice." During the first few years after its foundation this society published a series of excellent pamphlets with this aim in view. The pity is that most of them are long since out of print, and that latterly the output of literature has been almost negligible. Our church book racks are filled with pamphlets issued in England and Ireland, and there is a great lack of information needed by non-Catholic Scotsmen. One cannot help wondering what is being done by the *Caledonian Catholic Association* towards "the restoration of Our Holy Faith to Scotland," which is the primary aim of this body. We lack any organisation similar to the *Bellarmino Society* in England which answers attacks on the Catholic Faith appearing in the Press, produces leaflets providing simple and accurate answers to non-Catholic difficulties about the Faith, and answers private enquiries on Catholic doctrine. That such a society is needed I can vouch from the frequent letters received from non-Catholics, especially Presbyterian ministers.

Considering that the Christian Scientists can maintain public Reading Rooms in Edinburgh and Glasgow, surely we could support Catholic Central Libraries in these cities? Would it be unwise to revive the *Catholic Evidence Guild*? Does the possibility of stirring up Protestant antagonism come before the duty of teaching the elements of Christianity to the "man in the street"? Or is it that we lack the right type of speakers for this out-door apostolate? One wonders if the time has not arrived to establish a *Catholic Missionary Society* in Scotland akin to that which has done such splendid pioneer work towards the re-conversion of England. It is hardly to be expected that busy parish priests should launch into unfamiliar methods of apostolate. We need new "machinery" to "produce the goods"! The Friars Minor, the Jesuits, the Passionists, the Vincentians and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate are far too pre-occupied in saving souls in the parishes under their charge to go out into the highways and by-ways of Scotland to preach the Gospel. Nevertheless it is the primitive method of Franciscan evangelisation which is most called for to "bring the Gospel into close contact with real life, by striving to bring Christ nearer to the heart. To achieve this end St. Francis made use at the outset of simple but searching heart to heart talks, based on direct personal observation. Then, as his hearers grew in number, he began to speak in parables and enlarge on the incidents of every day life like his Divine Master. Finally he seized on anything calculated to arouse and hold the attention of his hearers, either introducing words from the dialect of the district, or making use of gestures, smiles, sobs and songs—even living tableaux, as at Greccio." (Padre Antonio

Gemelli, O.F.M. *The Franciscan Message to the World*. p. 32.)

It is the visual method of apostolate which must be revived, for it is by the visual methods of the cinema that most of the younger generation of Scots—for good or evil—derive their ideas of life, not from the spoken or written word, unless from the popular Sunday papers. In the re-conversion of Scotland we must make full use of films and drama—plays acted in schools, halls and elsewhere. The fact that the authorities of the Church of Scotland are opening a Youth Centre in Edinburgh specially devoted to drama and films is a witness both to the decline of the traditional Calvinist antagonism to the theatre, and that Presbyterians are waking up to the need of new apostolic methods.

What about the intellectual apostolate? How urgent this is can be realised by the startling fact that, so far as can be ascertained, only one book written by a Scottish priest has been published during the past ten years, i.e., *A Last Medley of Memories*, by the late Sir David Oswald Hunter Blair, Titular Abbot of Dunfermline (Edward Arnold, 1936).

None of the forty or so Doctors of Divinity whose names appear in the Catholic Directory appear to have imparted the fruits of their learning to a wider public than those who have listened to their sermons, except in very occasional articles to theological reviews. We seldom find clerical contributors to Catholic or secular magazines. There are no regular Catholic radio speakers. It is curious that the great literary tradition begun by Bishop Hay (1729-1811) and his coadjutor, Bishop John Geddes (1735-1799) should not have been followed up by the secular clergy in the north of Scotland. A few priests of a later generation did devote themselves to historical research, but the results of their labours remained unpublished. To-day even this tradition seems to have died out. Down in the south-west it has taken priests a hundred years or more to weld Catholics into a homogeneous Church without leaving much time or opportunity for establishing a literary tradition. When one thinks of the lonely lives of so many priests in the more remote parts of the Highlands one cannot help regretting that they were not trained in the art of writing during their years in college. Had they been encouraged they would have found an infinite outlet for missionary zeal, and, incidentally, might have added to their incomes!

Finally, there is the liturgical apostolate—an important method in the re-Christianising of Scotland. The sixteenth century Reformers made a clean sweep of the traditional modes of worship. The forms they substituted, austere and beautiful in their own way, may have satisfied the devotional needs of the people for over three hundred years. To-day, Scotland has ceased to be puritan in life and experiments are being made in the most un-Calvinist forms of public worship. With the best of inten-

tions, but with little logic, eager young ministers adorn their Communion tables with vases of flowers. Some are bold enough to place a cross on the table. Others get no further than coloured book markers and pulpit "falls." "Open Bibles"—which nobody ever reads—are the latest novelty. The result is a bad imitation of the main externals of Low Church Anglicanism. A more intelligent, though numerically small, group of ministers is anxious to study the fundamentals of Catholic worship, realising that it is waste of time to play with the trappings.

It thrills them to discover that there is a movement in the Catholic Church which, so it would seem, is aiming at what they are trying to do—to make the people take a more active part in worship. These men strive to restore the Communion Service as the main act of worship on Sunday mornings, which was Calvin's ideal. Some of them, not content with the three alternative Communion rites authorised in the new *Book of Common Order* (1940), tinker with rites which they feel are richer and more devotional. There is a much more common observance of the Christian festivals, which were abolished entirely by John Knox.

One would like to be able to offer these seekers after truth the chance to assist at Catholic worship at its best, and in its most traditional forms, but opportunities are few and far between in Scotland. We have not yet recovered normal Catholic worship. We are still influenced by traditions derived from the Penal Times background of both the native Scottish and emigrant Irish sections which make up the Church in this land. This involved a necessary suppression of all but the bare essentials. In only a few churches in Scotland is there High Mass or a Missa Cantata on Sundays. The dialogue form of Low Mass is unknown, so far as we are aware. Out of the 484 churches and chapels in Scotland, there is only one—the Benedictine Abbey at Fort Augustus—where the Divine Office is publicly celebrated, or where it is possible to assist at Vespers on Sundays and feast days. However with the arrival of the Cistercians in East Lothian and the return of the Benedictines to Pluscarden Priory, Morayshire, sooner or later, there will be two more centres of the liturgical apostolate in this country.

Such centres might become the setting for Retreats for non-Catholics, conducted on liturgical lines. There is evidence of a small but increasing group of ministers of the Church of Scotland who would welcome such Retreats. These men want to learn more about Catholic worship and spirituality. Up to the present we have done little to encourage them. Some are interested in Catholic social work and trying to adapt it. It may surprise readers of this magazine to hear that a Presbyterian group of *Young Christian Workers*, with rules based on those of the Belgian

"*Jocistes*," was established in Edinburgh before any Catholic Y.C.W. had been formed in Scotland.

"The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few," such is the best way to describe the present state of affairs regarding the re-Christianising of Scotland. The existing labourers, i.e., the clergy, secular and regular, have more than enough to do (in most places) in ministering to those of the Household of Faith; they cannot spare time for the "Other Sheep" which are outside the Fold of Christ. The re-conversion of Scotland will be a slow and laborious task. As Bishop Graham reminds us in his C.T.S. pamphlet, *The Church in Scotland*: "Mountains of prejudice have to be levelled and dense forests of ignorance to be cleared before the Catholic Faith can penetrate into a Scotsman's interior." The magnitude of the task is quite enough to scare most of us from even taking the first steps to level those mountains and to clear those forests! "Pray ye, therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send labourers into His harvest" . . . "And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."

A SCOTTISH TYPE OF SANCTITY

By

MARGARET T. MONRO.

The great difficulty in discussing a Scottish type of sanctity is the exiguous character of the evidence. In the period of the Celtic Church saints are as thick as blackberries. But at this distance of time one cannot distinguish the incoming Irish Gaels from the native Picts and Britons. We cannot show that the communities deriving from SS Ninian, Drostan and Mungo fostered a type of holiness in any way different from that of Iona. The general impression is of similarity.

And when the great age of the Celts is over, how few names remain even for consideration! Saint Margaret, half-Hungarian, half-Saxon, belong to Scotland only by the geographical accident of her marriage and the warmth with which the people took her to their hearts. Then come two names from the Scottish calendar, unrecognised elsewhere. The first is King David I., Margaret's son, founder of Holyrood and other abbeys, cannily strung along the Border in the hopes that an invader might respect church property; he was also a defender of the poor. The other, Blessed Gilbert of Moray, was a Bishop of Caithness (d. 1245) who did a valuable piece of civilising work in the North. The people were in a panic before ill-understood royal efforts to unify and consolidate the kingdom. Both his predecessors had been assassinated, and Blessed Gilbert led off by pleading for the