

BLACKFRIARS

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| HOSPITALITY AND CONVERSION | The Editor | 281 |
| PSYCHOTHERAPY AND ETHICS | Victor White, O.P. | 287 |
| AN EXPERIMENT WITH YOUNG DELINQUENTS | M. Kent | 300 |
| AFTERTHOUGHTS ON AFTERCARE | Alfred Grosch | 306 |
| REVIEWS: Politics (Bernard Kelly, Edward Quinn, J. F. T. Prince); Philosophy (Columba Ryan, O.P., Antoninus Finili, O.P., Egbert Cole, O.P., Leo Moore, O.P.) etc. | | 310 |

HOSPITALITY AND CONVERSION

The demand for new methods in the apostolate increases daily as people begin to realise that the Christian Faith can alone re-establish harmony in the world. *The Times*, one day in June, carried a headline: "The Conversion of England," and reported the new technique of publicity for Christianity, which somehow sounds rather sinister. The means provide subjects of speculation, but the need is manifest. The multitude which heard the word of Christ and his apostles in the first century has departed; it would not listen even had it the ears to hear. At first it was good news, the *evangelium*, that broke upon their ears and stirred their hearts. The apostles had the advantage of providing a novelty; they really had something brand new, that was also good; and like anybody with something really good and really new to tell they were on tip-toe to pass it on to all and sundry. The adventure of "putting men wise" to what had happened in Judea was dangerous; it often meant martyrdom; but the word was heard by the multitudes. Now for the average man the preachers of the gospel have nothing to tell but stale news; he has heard it all before, it has not "worked", he thinks he knows all the sentimental vapourings about Christmas and the Cross. So the preacher is restricted to the pulpit in his own church, and he speaks only to the converted who have already heard the word. The multitude passes by outside, unheeding the old old story.

Again when Christendom had spread its branches over most of Europe there was still an opening for the preacher of the gospel. Not only did the infidel press in from the East, to threaten the centre of Christianity, but there were heretics at home, heretics who believed also that they had "news". The apostle of the 13th century had something tangible to grapple with. If a man was an Albigenian he was still some sort of a Christian, and he cared very much about what he believed; so that the preacher was heard, even though they were opponents who listened. Now there remains not the heresy but the last decaying effects of heresy. Nobody cares what his neighbour believes, he is quite at liberty to talk about his creed no matter how crude or primitive, but he must not expect anyone to listen. Anyone who does his best according to his lights is on the broad and royal road to—heaven if he believes in heaven, otherwise to respect and respectability. Mostly men limit their view to this life; wages and social security are the ends of man. How can one preach the good news to the deaf and indifferent? The remnant are left in church to hear the impossible message: "Go ye and preach to all nations."

One practical answer is given to this problem: the good news must be made attractive as our Lord made it attractive by his similitudes and his miracles. We must disabuse people of the notion that this stale news means the pious unreality of sentimental hymns and sanctimonious manners. Christianity can flourish in the dance hall and cinema and it is time we showed the multitude that it also provides social amenities together with social security. It is not merely that if a man prays as he serves the conveyor-belt he will stand a greater chance of a rise in wages; it is also that in his spare time he will find the Christian Club and Canteen a jolly place where he can spend his leisure hours in harmless amusements. The Club and Canteen apostolate is much respected in these days and undoubtedly salvages a good many souls for the Church. But the attempt to make religion attractive in this way runs the risk of adopting the very material and indifferent standards from which the word of the apostle should draw his listeners away. There is a danger of propagating the false Christianity, the this-worldly Christianity of *Going My Way*, if not of Elmer Gantry with its saxophone hymns and its bathing-belles baptisms. At best it will become the religion of humanitarians; doing good to one's neighbour because it pays to be honest. The universal philanthropy which is about the only religion recognised by the multitude to-day has indifferentism and materialism as the two main foundations of its church. When the multitude saw that Christ could produce bread from nothing they wanted to make him King; that was the religion most easily

understood—social security, the religion of riches.

There is another way of breaking down the barrier between the indifferent hearer and the apostle of Christ's word. That is the way of poverty, breaking away forcibly from all the false standards of the world. And yet not forsaking the world. Remaining with it to save it but challenging its standards. It is possible to adopt an apostolate of poverty against the rich lusts of the non-Christian in two ways. Firstly one can sell all one possesses and follow our Lord in the literal sense. This does not represent a merely personal issue, in which a man may be led by the logic of his following of Christ to seek complete detachment; it is also a social step, it involves the whole society in which such a man lives. In particular it forces the issue for many besides himself. The indifferent and the luke warm cannot remain such in face of this act of folly. They must either open or close their hearts when the Christian vagabond presents himself and asks hospitality in the name of Christ. The poor man will either force hospitality from those who possess worldly goods, or he will be ejected by force. In either case indifference has evaporated, and they have either listened or turned away. Such was the method of S. Francis and of S. Benedict Joseph. The method is not unknown to-day but it receives little encouragement. The apostle thus stands in the place of Christ and in his begging Christ is accepted or rejected, following Christ's own principle: As long as you have done it to the least of my brethren you have done it to me.

But the method can be reversed and we can perform something of the same work by extending hospitality to the poor and the outcast. This demands equally the spirit of poverty, but without the extreme literalness of "improvidence". This spirit is of course a *sine qua non* of the life of an apostle, whose work is hindered and even altogether impeded by an attachment to things such as possessions or class or education. These are barriers that prevent his approaching every individual with the freedom implied in "all things to all men." These barriers must be broken down by detachment and the introduction of the freedom of poverty. But in particular the apostle may live a life that can be shared by all comers, so that all he has is at their disposal. The stranger and the vagabond may enter his home, feed at his table, sleep under his roof and be clothed in his garments. In this way Christ is received in the vagabond and his Kingdom extended through the vagabond. This is not the decking-up of the Club-canteen Christianity, but the simple sharing of Catholic home life in a manner already outlined in the previous issue of *BLACKFRIARS* in the review of Mr. Anson's "Harbour Head" (cf. July, page 247).

In order to understand what is implied in the apostolate of a House of Hospitality we must turn to the Hospitality of God. For He has thrown open his house to all and sundry. He has invited the poor, the maimed and the lame to share a common life with those who are already of his household. They are cleansed by the water of baptism or by penance on entering the house of the Lord and at once are set down to a common meal in order that they may rest together in grace and prayer and so come to the final hospitality of heaven. It is particularly the common table that sets the standard for all hospitality work. As the altar forms the central feature of the church so that without it the church would be only a hall, so the common sacrificial meal holds the central place in the life of the House of God. No distinction is made there between the educated and the illiterate, rich and poor, black and white. All come shoulder to shoulder to receive the same supreme Gift, the Bread of Life, the common food. There are no classes. The standards and gradations of the world must be prevented from interfering here, because they are all to live by the same life, to take on the same form "No longer I but Christ liveth in me". By this spiritual nourishment old and open wounds are healed and the most degraded and forsaken is rehabilitated.

The Holy Eucharist should be the model for the work of receiving all comers under the roof of the apostle. No questions are asked; no distinctions made. The spirit of poverty of course does not destroy or annul the virtue of prudence; but it helps to raise that virtue into the wider context of Wisdom which sees all in the One, which would gather all to the One Father. The model of the sacrificial-meal may be worked out in detail—the guests are brought in and cleansed, housed, fed and clothed. But there is more than a simile or parable here; there must be a direct link between the altar and the House. The Eucharist brings about sacramentally, that is by objective causality, actual charity within the soul; and that act of charity embraces God and in him the whole world. It is the breath of the Apostolate, because there is not a single created human being that falls outside the love thus generated by the feeding on Christ's body. At the altar all are concentrated on God who feeds them; their common life is a life directed to him. But shortly afterwards they are dismissed and sent out into the world: *Ite—missa est*: "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and the feeble and the blind and the lame . . . compel them to come in that my house may be filled." They go out taking with them the common life of charity. There must be not merely benevolence, however noble that 'will to good' may be. For benevolence does not imply a common life between

the giver and the receiver. Charity is friendship, where there is mutual sharing in the good things of life. Between the guests and the host there exist natural bonds which can be made the vehicles of the supernatural bond of grace, the common life of God. The pain and misery of the outcast is shared in sympathy, his lack of the necessities of life is shared in the spirit of poverty. And then the food, the lodging, the clothes and the cleansing, all these may be sacraments, things of nature shared on the basis of friendship so that the flame of divine friendship, of charity, may spring forth, the spark from the apostle, fostered at the Lord's altar table, setting fire to these natural bonds. This does not lower the standards to make religion attractive to the world. It takes the world in its worst aspects and shows how the unattractive side may be transformed by the gospel and become the seed bed of Grace, the flower of Christendom.

In other words the natural home, the natural meal and common natural life, these make the house of hospitality the ante-room to the church preparing for the common love and life of the Eucharist. That is the apostolate of hospitality.

In America Houses of Hospitality have become a great means of preaching to those who otherwise could not hear. In England one was started in connection with *The Catholic Worker*, but had to be closed on account of the war. Another was started just before the war in connection with the officially constituted "Apostolate of Christ the Worker" in North West London, and it has so far survived, mainly through the indefatigability of one person, the assaults of war conditions. It is hoped that this movement will spread and that more such Houses will spring up in many parts of England as they have in the United States. But the houses cannot come to be without men and women exercising hospitality, living the common life of the Church to the full in order thus to welcome the multitude as it comes in individual units to the door. Such work cannot be taken up as an alternative job, it offers no career, it is not an answer to unemployment. It demands a gift of self equal and in some ways greater than the gift a man or woman makes in entering an enclosed contemplative order. It demands a life lived in the spirit of the three vows, with real poverty as a standard. A whole time worker will share all he has with the poor he houses. Nothing will be more his than theirs. If he has nothing to begin with he will depend on alms with his guests; if he has some possessions they will be at the disposal of all comers. And above all it is important that there should be more than one helper running such a house. Several living together in the common life begun

at the altar and continued round the dining table, praying together, perhaps saying the Little Office in a common chapel. For such a work must be fed constantly by prayer and poverty. Perhaps a nucleus of Tertiaries could be formed as the link between the life round the altar and that round the hospitable table.

At least it should be realised that devoted labour of that sort is badly needed, even if it be only for part of a day once a week. Still more are whole time workers looked for. They are wanted at St. Joseph's House, 129 Malden Road, N.W.5, but in other places too—for there are several centres waiting for those with a vocation to fulfil. If this seems a tiny speck of light against the dark background of a Europe rapidly turning pagan through sheer indifference, it is a light which even the indifferent can recognise. It can achieve much if it grows over here as it has already grown in the United States, and it does show that the only way of remaining in "the world" in order to save it is the way of poverty, which short circuits all problems of industrialism and social theory.

THE EDITOR.

WHY CRIME? Some causes and remedies from the psychological standpoint. By Claud Mullins. (Methuen, 6s.).

Mr. Mullins' new book, like his last, discusses crime, and finds that that discussion leads outside most of the apparent limits of the subject. Here, as previously, a catholic is likely to feel that Mr. Mullins is swayed more by the findings of medical psychology than by what the Christian revelation has to say about the nature of man; and one wonders upon what principle he guides his selections from authors whose views, in the last resort, are wholly incompatible. But what is made abundantly clear, not only by Mr. Mullins' psychological learning but even more by his experience as a magistrate, is the impossibility of overstressing the importance of parental influence, for good or evil, upon children. In his zeal to find remedies for crime, Mr. Mullins adopts a favourable line towards such things as eugenic sterilisation and—with many reservations—divorce; but all his evidence in fact goes to show that it is only through a total acceptance of the traditional Christian morality that the effects he desires can be achieved. That morality is based upon human responsibility; and Mr. Mullins' books would be valuable if they did nothing more than prove that there is no substitute. But they do more, not only by making practical suggestions, some of which are of great wisdom and humanity, but by attempting to bring legal practice into relation with the realities of human problems and distress.

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