

THE MISSIONS—YESTERDAY AND T O - M O R R O W

' *L'Eglise, c'est Jésus-Christ, mais Jésus-Christ répandu et communiqué.*' Bossuet's words were quoted by Père Clérissac to reinforce his argument that the purpose of the Redemption embraces mankind as a whole before it affects the individual.¹ This dynamic aspect of the life of the Church springs to mind as the new pontificate opens fresh vistas so soon after our reading of the several attempts to assess the achievements of the previous one. In spiritual as well as temporal affairs the stage would seem to be set for a new epoch. The two troubled decades which followed the Armistice of 1918 appear to be leading to a more realistic because less treaty-bound polity, while the conclusion of the pontificate which spanned that anxious period, and alone among reigns survived it with enhanced prestige, has left the new Pope a simpler if no less heavy task.

Before attempting to trace one aspect of this in the special field of the missions abroad, it will perhaps not be out of place to dwell upon the paradoxical fact that more profound progress has been made within it during the past seventeen years than in as many preceding centuries. Today the Church is indeed universal, there is a Chinese, Indian, and African Catholicity as distinct as the English or the American; and this remarkable achievement, because it has taken place while the Church has been subject to considerable difficulties in lands older in the faith, has passed almost unnoticed, even in well-informed circles. But the fact remains that no Pope has been mourned by so numerous or so varied a Church as was Pius XI, rightly surnamed the Pope of the Missions.

¹ *Le mystère de l'Eglise*, p. 27.

The similes of the yeast and the grain of mustard seed have been the inspiration of missionary labours since the first apostles were fired by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; our history-books vainly attempt to revive the heroic trail which their successors have blazed down the centuries, and nothing but the basest ingratitude will allow us to refuse them their due meed of praise: yet it is arguable that at no time until the post-war era, so prosaic in other respects, has such fundamental progress been made towards the eventual realisation of the precept: 'Go, teach all nations . . .'

*'Le renouveau missionnaire est marqué, à l'heure actuelle, d'un caractère extrêmement frappant et d'une grande portée d'avenir: j'entends sa catholicité intrinsèque, si je puis ainsi dire, par l'accession de toutes les races d'hommes au sacerdoce et à l'épiscopat catholiques, jusqu'ici plus ou moins réservés, non en droit certes mais en fait, à l'unique race blanche.'*²

That this truth is not unnoticed in other quarters was indicated by the *Catholic Herald* (March 3, 1939), which quoted a German journalist's complaints of the practice of publishing photographs of native clergy in the Catholic press.

How much of this change was the effect of colonial and commercial expansion in the nineteenth century, and to what extent it is dependant on the continued domination of a large area of the earth by a few European nations is difficult to say; but it is possible, thanks to the voluminous documentation accumulated at the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda in Rome, to study the steps by which in recent years advantage was taken of every opportunity for the planting of the Church wherever it was unknown. From this literature it is clear that a determined effort was made by the Holy See to profit by unprecedented facilities and

² Père Sertillanges, *Le Miracle de l'Eglise*, p. 232.

that the relatively meagre resources at her disposal have been profitably invested.

The corner-stone of the extension and entrenchment in non-European lands, as elsewhere, has been the cardinal principle that *like must convert like*. The rapid substitution of a native clergy headed by native bishops wherever possible was the most radical alteration, but no less far-reaching was the preoccupation that no branch of native culture should be set aside unless positively incompatible with faith or morals; this discrimination was facilitated by the division of territories into more manageable units with superiors endowed with wide powers.

Such were the leading lines of the progress in the missions. At home there was a parallel growth of a mission-minded generation which, at the instance of the Pope, learned to look upon the duty of placing the truths of the faith at the disposal of nations hitherto unevangelised as 'the first work of the Church.' In countless addresses and letters Pius XI made it clear that the faithful as a whole must share this responsibility with the successor of Peter; and, as news of the developments was spread by the Fides Agency, which had been established for that very purpose, there was a genuine and spontaneous response. Vocations have been multiplied, and the place of prayer in the labour of spreading the faith has been better recognised since Ste Thérèse of Lisieux, whose life was spent in a French Carmel, was held up as a model co-operator; but the largest single factor was the adoption by the Holy See of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith as the official means of linking the ordinary faithful with missionary enterprise.

By transferring from Paris to Rome the direction of this association which for a century had gathered the prayers and alms of countless Catholics, the axis upon which the support of the missions had long revolved was placed on an international and thoroughly democratic basis. The A.P.F. thereby became a 'Pontifical instrument' for the benefit of *all the missions*. Thenceforth, to quote the Motu

Proprio, 'this pious association rests on the authority of the Holy See; it holds the first place among all institutions for the benefit of the missions; it is one, and truly Catholic, being an *association of all the faithful in every nation* for the support of missionaries by the collection of alms, and for the salvation of men by prayer.'

A society no longer voluntary but obligatory, not only national but diocesan and parochial, to be found wherever the Church is established and presided over by the Secretary of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, who is the leading adviser on missionary matters in Rome—such was the revolutionary scheme set in motion seventeen years ago. If it has not come to the attention of all Catholics as yet, it has nevertheless been the principal means of equipping the two hundred new missionary dioceses which have since then been set up.

The relation of this missionary expansion to the marked deepening of spiritual life in those countries where the Church is yet free to live her life was touched upon by the late Pope in his last address to the National Directors of the A.P.F., who were gathered round him at the end of May, 1938. After stating that the one bright prospect in a world darkened by war-clouds was the 'portentous flowering in the missions,' His Holiness attributed it to the re-awakening of a missionary zeal fed by the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and other pious exercises fostered by the swelling ranks of Catholic Action. All who were present at the memorable audience carried away an impression of almost prophetic vision, for the dying pontiff confidently foreshadowed a luminous future in the mission-field. It is a happy reflection that he who was dubbed 'the Africanist,' when a lad, by reason of his enthusiasm for the Dark Continent, should have witnessed in the last ten years alone the doubling of the total of African Catholics, who now reach the 7,000,000 mark. Another source of satisfaction was the success of the thirty-five native bishops in China and India, as also the rapid development of native

seminaries on all sides which will soon house some 20,000 students; but most comforting was the rising tide of missionary vocations in the home lands, for although much has been begun there is still an immense task awaiting the generations to come.

In order to obtain anything like an idea of its magnitude it is unfortunately necessary to resort to figures of astronomical proportions. It is reckoned that the Catholics alive to-day number 350,000,000, while the rest of humanity is about five times that figure; from this it is obvious that so long as there is any parity between the rate of reproduction, there are five times as many non-Catholics born into the world than there are in Catholic homes. Numerically at least, losing ground each year to the tune of millions of souls. Even if we adopt the criterion of the establishment of the regular life of the Church in hitherto pagan lands we find that, quite apart from the vast expanse of the U.S.S.R., the faith has no foothold in Islam: Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, North Africa are closed to us. Japan raises a few hundred converts per annum, China some tens of thousands, India likewise, while practically none come from Siam or Java, which alone count more inhabitants than the British Isles. Some sense of proportion may be given to all these figures by the statement that the latter total will in all probability be surpassed by the increase of population in India alone during the next ten years, while the increase during the same period in Japan will equal the present population of Australia and New Zealand. Of these millions only the merest fraction will become Catholic at the present rate of progress.

No purpose is served by glossing over the real facts. The day is perhaps already past when the European missionary stood a chance of benefiting from the protection of his consul. To-day his one hope is to dissociate himself as much as possible from the background which is, so often with justice, suspect in the eyes of his potential converts. As one bishop put it recently in India: 'If we want the

people whom we have come to evangelise to listen to us we must first Indianise ourselves fully. To-day nothing less will satisfy public opinion.'

This is no more than many a missionary has done in the past, but it pre-supposes a deep understanding as well as unbounded devotion; so it is as well that the number of vocations is on the increase, at least in England where hundreds of would-be missionaries are in training to-day.

The collection of information for the forthcoming centenary celebrations of the A.P.F., of which more will be heard as midsummer approaches, has provided us with an opportunity to assess the contribution which England is making to the missionary programme to-day. The past has been briefly reviewed by Mgr. Telford, the National Director of all three pontifical mission-aid societies, in a recent pamphlet, which, together with one on the missionary society of Mill Hill, provide an explanation of the *status quo*.³

With the encouragement of H.E. Cardinal Hinsley, who was himself the Apostolic Delegate for British Africa for several years before he came to Westminster, there have grown up of late a number of missionary training colleges all over the country, so that Cardinal Vaughan's foundation at Mill Hill is no longer the only seminary devoted to that work, though it is still the leading one, as was proved by the giant ordination of last summer, when some forty-five missionaries were raised to the priesthood together in the Cathedral built by their founder at Westminster. This rapid growth has been dictated by the requirements of the various societies and congregations, over whose missions the British flag flies, and who therefore feel the need of English vocations. We rejoice that there are plenty of these, which fact will in due course help to internationalise

³ *England and the Missions, 1839-1939*, and *The Story of the Mill Hill Missionaries*. (Catholic Truth Society; 2d, each.)

the personnel and break down the national complexion of individual stations and convincingly establish the supra-national aspect of the missions.

But the very fact of the multiplication of training colleges raises in one sense a difficult problem, for unless there is a corresponding growth in the number of mission-minded Catholics the support necessary for the adequate training of young men and girls, as well as their requirements when they leave home and country, will not be forthcoming. This particularly is the case to-day, and the problem threatens to become aggravated as more and more refugees from Germany and elsewhere help to swell the volume of appeals on behalf of the missions. The rapid increase of small magazines in favour of this or that society or mission, which has been noticed by all whose names appear in directories, already threatens to defeat their primary purpose unless steps are taken to regularise their circulation, much of which already gravitates towards the waste-paper basket, all too frequently.

The real danger is that these repeated appeals to the pocket will ultimately make it impossible for the majority of people to disconnect the missions from monetary levies. This tendency has already done much harm, and it is to be devoutly hoped that some arrangement will be arrived at between the editors of these publications for a division of labour which can but result in their mutual benefit in the long run. If instead of numberless popular magazines, all of which repeat much the same type of story, some hierarchy of mission literature could be established, an informed public opinion such as exists in other countries could be created. We look forward to the day when as well as the popular illustrated monthlies of large circulation there will be a learned quarterly, another specifically devotional, as well as special publications for priests, children, students and others. The germ of such a planned mission-press already exists, and all that it needs is good-will, vision and co-operation among the handful of persons concerned,

Once its importance is appreciated it will only be a question of time before it is set going.

This necessary step will supply the unquestionable demand there is on all sides for something more than the conventional story from the missions. The seminaries have led the way with study circles, while the secondary schools run them close, but perhaps the most interesting development is the keenness shown by vigorous sections of Catholic Action. These eager young people see the importance of being well-informed not only in local affairs but in their further repercussions. They clamour for statistics, diagrams and films, but in all these the supply is far exceeded by the demand. It is hoped that the discussions which will be raised by the missionary exhibition arranged to take place in the grounds of Westminster Cathedral in June may help to find a solution for many of these matters, much as the famous Vatican Missionary Exhibition of 1925 did for the whole Catholic world. If it does no more than redress the balance by putting almsgiving for the missions in its proper place, *i.e.* secondary to prayer and personal service, it will have contributed much towards making the next generation mission-minded in deed as well as in principle.

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