

THE UNIVERSITY APOSTOLATE

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IT is safe to say that the new conception of the University Apostolate, outlined in papal pronouncements and in the deliberations of Pax Romana, the international organisation for Catholic graduates and undergraduates of the universities of the world, constitutes one of the most important aspects of Catholic Action in our age. This article does not concern the Catholic Universities but solely those of the ancient secularised or the modern 'red-brick' variety which share the same fundamental problems. For they lack the integrity—to use Newman's own expression—which the Church alone can give them. There is no need to diagnose the problem more fully than that, for in this age of introspection it is generally recognised. There is an ever-increasing concern, for example, over the dangers of specialisation. There is a general recognition of the fact that true university education is in danger of being lost in the pursuit of technicalism. The high-blown pride of secularisation has broken under it and there is a chastened search for the right solution.

The Church therefore has a tremendous opportunity in the middle years of this century, for her role is no longer a merely defensive one. As Cardinal Pizzardo said at Mariastein in 1949: 'Pax Romana today can no longer limit itself—after the manner of old-fashioned Catholic Action—to protecting Catholic university people against the dangers of their environment; it must on the contrary develop in them a spirit of apostolate and conquest.' The present Pope, speaking to the men of Italian Catholic Action in September 1947, said: 'Not only defence but conquest. . . . He who limits himself to being always on the defensive, slowly loses ground. . . . Do not isolate yourselves. . . . Imitate the Christians of the first centuries! Only thus, through ever-renewed action and penetration in the pagan world can the Church grow and make progress.' And Cardinal Suhard, the late Archbishop of Paris, outlined this new approach in his now world-famous pastoral letters. It is summed up in those catch-phrases: the apostolate of 'like to like' and of 'community to community'.

In the old days the apostolic milieu was conceived as being, generally speaking, outside the normal orbit of the would-be

apostle. Beggars preached before kings and the society lady went down to the slums. In the new approach we see a recognition of the fact that the christianisation of a milieu will be more easily and permanently achieved from inside the milieu itself. It is the factory worker who can transform the factory; the civil servant who can transform the office; and the student who can transform the University. That is what is meant by the apostolate of like to like. But in addition there must be the apostolate of community to community. The individual does not stand alone. He either represents or stands together with the whole life of the Church in that place and vis-à-vis that place. In other words, the milieu is a social reality and it must be encountered by another social reality, namely the Church. The body of Catholic students in a University, in communion as they are with the Holy See and under the direction of their chaplain, constitute the Church which is in that University. So the social milieu is confronted by, and leavened by, the Christian milieu which is the Catholic Church in that place.

In attempting to apply these principles of approach to the University apostolate in this country we at once encounter difficulties which spring from historical factors. Indeed, if we face the situation squarely we are bound to admit that in our own country these obstacles are created by our own somewhat inculpable attitude as a Catholic community rather than by opposition from outside. Outside, indeed, the fields are white unto harvest. Generally speaking, it is only since 1895, when the opposition to Catholic participation in English University life was officially removed, that we have once more begun to become an intellectual force in this country. I exclude the very important exception of Newman and the Oxford and Cambridge converts, since they represent only one of the four strands discernible in our nineteenth-century Catholic life. (I refer, of course, to the 'old' Catholics who had preserved the Faith throughout, the *émigrés*, the converts and the Irish.) And there is still a general unawareness on the part of the Catholic community at large that we do now *de facto* make an important intellectual contribution to the nation's life; and, that, by virtue of our Faith, with all its glorious and unique and incontrovertible intellectual heritage, a splendid opportunity lies open before us. We are at any rate in the position to dispose large numbers of our fellow-countrymen intellectually for the gift of Faith.

Our Bishops have seen to it that every University and University College in these islands has a Catholic chaplain. In the case of Oxford and Cambridge there are long-established chaplaincy centres as well. And this is now true of London, Liverpool, Manchester, Cardiff and Leeds. There are at least seven whole-time and fifteen part-time chaplains (i.e., priests who are engaged in parochial or other pastoral work at the same time). It is believed that these facilities will go on increasing. And the chaplains themselves regard their work apostolically and not merely defensively. Too often the Catholics of this country think of education—into which they put so much effort and indeed heroism up to the school-leaving age—as ceasing abruptly at the age of fifteen and fail to realise the importance of that university training which should be its very crown. Catholic knowledge must be in proportion to secular knowledge: otherwise an alarming dichotomy will undoubtedly be established with the most unfortunate results. More and more young people, who will shortly be leaders of the country's life in their many different spheres, are now being afforded the benefit of higher education. Their Catholic equipment, spiritually and intellectually considered, must be parallel to it. And if it is, the power of their apostolate will be limitless. As the likelihood of a Catholic University seems remote, the secular universities must be penetrated and transformed in the same way as the factories and the offices, and it would be a wonderful thing if the Catholic community as a whole could be made aware of the extraordinary results which would follow if by its prayers and alms and by its very attitude of mind it set about facilitating the University apostolate.

In BLACKFRIARS (July–August 1951), Professor A. H. Armstrong of Liverpool wrote an article on 'Catholics and the University', a personal view, which summed up the whole situation most admirably. 'Experience has shown', he wrote, 'that for the proper functioning of the Catholic community in a neutral university a physical centre, the chaplaincy, and a full-time and properly qualified chaplain with a good understanding of the milieu are necessary.' Other conditions are necessary also: 'that the work of the chaplaincy should in general be conceived apostolically and positively, not negatively and defensively; that a deep spiritual life, soundly based on the Liturgy and the study of Scripture and theologically informed, should be built up in the group.' This idea

is admirably developed in a pamphlet, reprinted from *Cruix*, entitled 'The Nature and Aims of a University Catholic Society', by Father Vincent Wilkin, S.J., the Liverpool chaplain. Based on the theology of the Mystical Body, he elaborates the theme of the apostolate of community to community, the Church to the University in the spiritual, intellectual and temporal spheres. Many of the Chaplains have worked out the principles of the university apostolate on these and kindred lines, and the response is encouraging. There are two remaining considerations, the development of which would greatly facilitate the whole approach. In the first place, it would be desirable to have a much closer relationship between the Catholic members of the Senior Common Rooms and the life of the Church in the University. There is a stable contribution of unlimited possibilities in all three spheres, spiritual, intellectual and temporal. And, necessarily in a lesser degree—because of home and parochial ties and other responsibilities—the whole Catholic graduate body could contribute much more fully also. Secondly, it would be good to see a greater sensitiveness to the possibilities of the apostolate through the Faculties. The medicals, the economists, the historians, the scientists, and those who are reading other subjects also are constantly encountering problems which should be solved for them by Catholics expert in their respective fields. Papers read by such authorities will not only vindicate the Catholic viewpoint where there is one, but can exercise a useful apostolate outside the Catholic milieu. They have the double effect of deepening Faith and removing prejudice. It would probably be a good thing if every Catholic Society programme were to be drawn up in liaison with Catholic members of the different faculties. And this is an idea which has the highest sanctions, since it is pressed by Pax Romana.

In conclusion: since the Catholics in a University constitute together with their appointed chaplain the Church which is in that University, the whole of their life must spring from the University Mass, the liturgical worship of their entity. And just as the ancient Universities of Oxford and Cambridge grew up around their great Churches of St Mary, and safeguarded the purity and humility of their learning through their devotion to the Virgin Mother, we should bring her, too, as *Sedes Sapientiae* and *Regina Apostolorum* into the heart of the red-brick universities.