

J. O. C.

'ANOTHER *movement*,' one can hear the weary parish priest exclaim. There are so many movements, societies, guilds, and so on, in Catholic parishes that the sensible thing would seem to be to eliminate some of them rather than to introduce new ones. That is a rational point of view, and largely necessary. But it is clear that the process of selection must be made on the grounds of whether this or that society fulfils an essential and indispensable function or not. The J.O.C. which as yet is only in embryo in England claims that its work is indispensable, and since this view has the strong backing of the Pope, it seems worth while to devote a little attention to it.

The radical change in the social system which is the dominating feature of our time compels the attention of religion. The exact details of the future society may be left for imaginative minds to describe. But there are two points about it that may be predicted without undue rashness. The first is that it will be a society in which the working class will have come into its own; the achievement will be difficult; there will be set-backs; but sooner or later it is inevitable that just as the middle class may be taken as the typical, the representative class of the last century, so the workers will become typical and representative of ours. The second point concerns the spiritual character of this new society. We can make some judgment with regard to this by observing the youth of this generation; for the youth of to-day are the citizens of to-morrow. Doubtless conditions here in this respect are less extreme than on the Continent; nevertheless, it is not an imprudent assertion to say that the mass of young workers of both sexes are already very largely secularized. This is not a condemnatory remark; any condemnation for this state of things should be applied to the godless capitalism which has provoked it. It is simply a statement of fact; of the fact that for these millions of young workers the standards and values

of Christianity have ceased to hold any meaning. The tremendous significance of this will be understood. It is not exactly a Christian State that the young workers are preparing to build.

Hence the J.O.C., the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (Young Workers' Christian Movement), exists in order to prepare a Christian generation for the future out of the young workers of the present. It thus fulfils a vital function. It does not claim to do everything. It does not even claim to 'solve' the social problem. It is a movement dealing with a special problem. It is limited by age and class; the age limits are 14-25; and the class is exclusively the working class. For its special problem and within these limits it does claim to offer a solution of universal validity—*i.e.*, its principles and methods, although naturally requiring adaptation to each country's peculiar needs, apply everywhere to the young workers in industrial civilization.

Given a pagan society, how can it be made Christian? It is not simply a question of individuals who have lost faith and whose problem is therefore solved by individual conversions. It is more complicated than that. It implies that the whole background of life, all the assumptions of daily life, all the institutions, the entire environment has ceased to be Christian. For such a situation there is only one remedy; to plant in that environment Christian institutions composed of active apostolic Christians operating as a corporate body who, by the attraction of their mode of life, will gradually transform it.

To prevent misunderstanding, it is better to say at once that the J.O.C. is in no sense an 'uplift movement.' It has no intention of turning the workers into comfortable members of the middle class. It is a movement, 'by the workers, amongst the workers, and for the workers.' 'What the working class movement stands for,' writes Mr. R. H. Tawney,¹ 'what makes it of permanent significance, and not merely the clamour of a mob for comfort and amusements, is obviously the ideal of social solidarity, as a corrective to the

¹ *Equality*, p. 36.

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exaggerated emphasis on individual advancement through the acquisition of wealth. It is a faith in the possibility of a society in which a higher value will be set on human beings and a lower value on money and economic power, when money and power do not serve human ends.' Very much of this ideal applies to the J.O.C. It is an attempt to restore to the workers as workers a sense of their dignity not only as human beings, but also as Christians and the adopted sons of God. It is therefore a work that can only be done by the workers themselves acting within their own organization upon their own environment. Like all Catholic Action (the J.O.C. is essentially a spiritual and not a political movement), it is an apostolate of the laity. The priest, of course, has his part to play; but it is not that of a dictator. He cannot penetrate into the workers' environment; he cannot enter the factories. He has to remain in the background and be the educator of the lay apostles; he has to teach and inspire them with that dogmatic life and create in them that authentic mysticism of the Mystical Body of Christ which alone can conquer the new racial and communist mysticisms. This he does by personal direction and by systematic doctrinal retreats.

Numberless working boys and girls leave school at the age of fourteen, with a variable amount of religious instruction not closely related to the actualities of life. They have no apprenticeship; they drift into a job with no special relation to their capacities; and pass their life drifting into others. At the beginning of the period when they most need education in every direction, they are suddenly deprived of it for life. They are plunged abruptly into a totally strange world to find their way about alone. Is it any wonder that their incipient Christian life finds itself rapidly stifled? Is the leakage really so great a mystery? When the J.O.C. began in Belgium, it discovered that ninety-five per cent. of the workers were outside the Catholic Church.

The J.O.C. exists to change this condition of things. The world into which the young worker is flung is a pagan world; we must enable him to create a Christian world. His daily life in all its details and values is right outside reli-

gion; we must teach him to reclaim all that life for Christ. All his actions from the most exalted to the most humble, from the purely personal to those involving relationship with others, will thus become religious actions, acts of worship and homage through Christ to God. To quote the words of the founder and Chaplain General of the J.O.C., 'We are in process of remaking little Christian communities possessing the fervour of the first centuries of the Church, in which the Christian life is lived integrally. All these young workers are truly active members, militants of the Church militant.' And as the Christian life thus becomes integrally realized, individually and corporately, the social rights that necessarily belong to the man and the Christian manifest themselves, and the J.O.C. stands out as the representative and defender of the just claims of the whole working class.

The organization is based on local sections which are united into regional federations, and these again are grouped into a national federation. The aim of each section is to throw out one social service after another, and in this way create a milieu in which every aspect of life is catered for. So that in his organization the young worker has the means for an *integral formation*—religious, intellectual, moral, professional, artistic, and physical—and the years which otherwise would have been wasted and whose waste involves the misdirection of his life, are utilised for an education that is profound and lasting and entirely realistic.

The J.O.C. is not a dream; it exists. It is triumphant. Beginning in Belgium some ten years ago with three or four young workers, guided by the vision and the apostolic ardour of the Abbé Cardyn, it now numbers, in that country alone, 100,000 members; in France there are 70,000; and in several other countries in Europe and the East it is under way. The movement is divided into two organizations, the J.O.C. for the young workers and the J.O.C.F. for the working girls; but their spirit is identical and their co-operation very close. The method is first to make the young workers realize and become conscious of their situation. By a series of enquiries carefully detailed they come

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to *see* their lives and environment in a detached objective way; seeing it they are led to estimate their problems and needs—*i.e.*, to *judge* their situation, and, judging it, they realize that *something must be changed*, and hence they *act*. Thus the idea of the study circle is transformed; it is no longer a reading lesson or a lecture; it is the result of active observation, and is itself a means and impetus to action: it has become dynamic.

Beginning in this simple realistic way the J.O.C. has become one of the most important institutions of the Catholic Church in the modern world. It is of universal validity. The Pope wishes it to be realized for all working class youth. In England it is just beginning. It must be adapted to English conditions and mentality, but of our urgent need of its principles and methods there can be no serious doubt.

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SAFEGUARDING CATHOLIC YOUTH

Another very valuable movement has recently appeared bearing the approval of the late Cardinal Bourne and of his Council. It is a movement to encourage the Spiritual Life of Catholic Youth by the practice of Retreats. The Society of Junior Catholic Retreatants, as it is called, aims to form a nucleus of earnest aspirants after Christian perfection amongst those who are to be the fathers of the next generation and to this end the Movement confines itself to those boys who are already leading a normally good Catholic life, leaving the important task of reforming the wayward and difficult characters to other organisations. In the view of the promoters this limitation of membership is of the utmost importance at a time when the Christian Family is being menaced by the spread of immoral teaching and practices. The fathers of to-morrow must be assisted by means of a deeper spiritual life to live continently, even in the married state, and to seek poverty of spirit. In this way will the Faith of the people be preserved and the organic growth of the Church through the Christian Family assisted.

Besides the Annual Retreat, there is demanded of its members a promise (which is in no sense a vow) to receive Holy Communion at least once a week, to recite certain brief prayers

morning and evening, and to make five minutes meditation every day. (In this connection it may be noted that leaflets on ' How to make Mental Prayer ' will be supplied gratis by the Director of Retreats, Blackfriars, Woodchester, Stroud, Glos.). Youths from the age of thirteen to the age of twenty are catered for, and there is also a senior group for those of twenty or over.

This Society of Junior Catholic Retreatants is already an established thing and it is encouraging to see the interest and enthusiasm of those boys who have been given the opportunity of membership. There can be no doubt that priests and others concerned will readily see the enormous value of this movement and will combine with the promoters to effect its universal adoption. To this end it is important to establish retreat centres wherever possible and an appeal is made to Superiors of religious houses and other institutions able to provide suitable accommodation to assist in this way. Further, in order that the needy may not be deprived of this spiritual benefit, a fund is to be provided to enable poor boys to attend the Retreats. The charitable will see herein an obvious and excellent way of furthering this apostolate in the cause of Catholic Youth. Those who are interested in any capacity in this movement should address themselves to : The Director of Retreats, Blackfriars, Woodchester, Stroud, Glos.—[Ed.]