

A TERESIAN INSTITUTE¹



IN response to the crying need of the present day a large number of new religious associations have sprung up during the last few years. On one hand the appeal of the interior life in the midst of a materialistic and superficial world, and on the other the urgent need of apostolic work, have brought into being a new type of society adapted to modern circumstances. We describe here a Spanish institution, the Teresian Institute, which has already existed for thirty-seven years and which can be seen today as a flourishing member of the apostolate.

The Teresian Institute was founded in 1911 at a time when atheistic secularism had invaded the field of education. In Spain, as in other Catholic countries, the motto of the anticlericals was 'Dechristianisation by the best means to hand, the schoolmaster'.

A young priest, a canon of Our Lady de Covadonga in Asturias, D. Pedro Poveda Castroverde, now known by the more popular name of Fr Poveda, saw the danger. He possessed the ardent soul of an apostle and was a born teacher. He resolved to start a crusade to help Catholic education but he was baffled by the apathy of Catholics themselves. However he managed to bring together a group of keen young people in 1911 and opened at Oviedo an 'Academy' for the members of teachers' training colleges.

In the course of the next two years he opened two similar academies, one at Linares and the other at Jaen. These academies, centres for the religious and intellectual formation of Catholic teachers, aimed above all at giving them a solid Christian learning. Then in 1915 a house was opened in Madrid for the senior pupils of teachers' training colleges, especially those beginning university courses.

Numbers of young girls were attracted by Fr Poveda's ideal. He began to plan the foundations of an association in which they would be able to live 'the perfect life'. Prayer and study, faith and science, piety and action; such was the programme. He began to draw up statutes.

He realised that the wearing of a religious habit was a serious obstacle in the apostolate of the modern world. So he suggested a new idea which received its first diocesan approval from the bishop of Jaen in 1917. The work filled an obvious need and

¹ Translated, by a Discalced Carmelite tertiary, from *La Vie Spirituelle*

foundations increased as four hundred years earlier did those of St Teresa under whose protection Fr Poveda had placed his Institute. From 1914 to 1925 Madrid, Seville, Leon, Alicante, Barcelona, Teruel and Avila saw the establishment, poor in material resources but rich in hopes, of secondary schools for future teachers and houses for university and training college students.

On 11th January, 1924, Pius XI gave the Teresian Institute a Brief by which he approved in perpetuity the work as it was shown to be in the statues presented to the Holy See and as it had been commended in the unanimous welcome given it by the bishops and government of Spain.

Since then the Teresian Institute has never looked back. In 1928 an expedition was sent to South America. The Institute is now established in Chile, Bolivia, Peru, the Argentine and Uruguay. A hostel for university students and various Catholic federations of students and university graduates are today grouped around the first foundation, St Teresa's high school, at Santiago the capital of Chile. In the other South American countries the Institute is responsible for the hostels for university students and pupils of teachers' training colleges run by the State; these last are at La Paz, Sucre and Huarez.

In Spain the terrible civil war caused immense losses. But fortified by the death of its founder who was martyred by the Reds on 28th July, 1936, the Institute now numbers in the first days of its resurrection sixty houses, university hostels, secondary schools recognised by the State, or groups of scholars entrusted to the Institute by the State. Many members who have passed their various examinations hold important positions as university professors, teachers in lycées and training colleges, inspectors of primary schools, school mistresses and heads of study groups, thus diffusing the christian spirit through secular education.

With the idea of maintaining a more unbroken contact with the centre of the Church and of receiving the Holy Father's instructions more directly, the Institute founded in Rome in 1934 a very flourishing university hostel. From Rome it went to Palermo where a hostel and centre for Catholic undergraduates have been founded.

More recent are the foundations at Oporto in Portugal and that of St Isabella in Spanish Guiana where several schools for the poor have been in the hands of the Institute since 1942.

To sum up, a total of sixty houses is scattered through nine different countries. The Teresian Institute numbers more than a thousand members all possessing a university degree or coming from a teachers' training college. In America, Italy and Portugal

numbers of young people are coming to it attracted by its ideal. In Madrid one house holds more than forty Teresians who are pursuing higher studies, while another group, in the House of Formation, spends a year in the development of its members' spiritual life.

The Church has given many marks of her approval and esteem to the Institute. In Spain she has entrusted to its care three teachers' training colleges for religious. In South America and Italy many bishops are asking for its help. A similar appeal comes from China, and a group of Teresians is actively preparing in London for future missions to countries where the English language is spoken.

If one examines the Teresian Institute closely, one is pleased to see that its internal structure and essentials although so pronouncedly modern are planned in perfect accordance with the Church's tradition.

Consider indeed the courage of Fr Poveda. When he drew up the first statutes in 1918, women were still quite unemancipated. Enlightened by God he nevertheless saw the needs of the age. 'You have neither habit nor veil, you don't live in a convent', he said, 'but in spite of that your spirit ought to be just as elevated as that of a true religious'.

According to its statutes the Teresian Institute is an institute of women whose members consecrate themselves to the practice of charity in the Christian education of women in so far as they are unable to obtain it in State schools. Its patron is St Teresa of Jesus. Its members have neither habit nor uniform; nothing distinguishes them outwardly.

The Institute undertakes, when receiving members, to give them the spiritual formation necessary for their type of life and to minister to their material needs. The Teresian on her side promises to obey her superiors, to live in perfect chastity and the practice of poverty according to the spirit of the Institute. She binds herself to the Institute by the promise, at first temporary but later permanent, to live in its midst. By preference she lives in the houses of the Institute, but she may live alone but always under the control of obedience if the apostolate entrusted to her requires her to live at a distance. She binds herself to a life of perfection by private vows temporary or perpetual. Her rule imposes on her an interior life which increases in intensity as her life of study and the apostolate become more active. Interior and exterior mortification should be the basis and foundation of her virtue. In short, she ought to tend towards the realisation of the highest degree of

religious perfection, and the double spirit of prayer and action characteristic of the great St Teresa should be found in her also. The Blessed Virgin is her great model. 'She is thought of in the Institute as Mother, Mistress and Superior'. The Teresian lives in union with Mary, spreading devotion to her by every means in her power and considering her always as the ideal of all feminine education.

Study is one of the principal obligations of the Teresian, her second aim, the salvation of souls, is realised in fact through her work as a teacher. Apart from prayer, which takes first place in all apostolic work, the Institute draws its strength from the solid intellectual formation of its members. As a spiritual daughter of St Teresa who gave her life for the Church, the Institute puts before everything else the service of the Church in the field of education. It offers itself as an instrument by which the Church can exercise her right to teach and educate. It gives preference to the work entrusted to it by the Church herself, and considers that its first duty is to respect, and make others respect, the Sovereign Pontiff and the bishops.

Teaching in state schools is one of the chief works of the Institute. But its members can teach equally well in *Institutions Libres*. It has its own centres of culture and study, differing according to the needs of the time and the places where it is established. Around these centres various activities are developed which are the means by which the apostolate is carried out. And so associations of old pupils have arisen, of co-operators, young missionary groups, associations of graduates, classes of working women, centres of Catholic Action, St Vincent de Paul groups. The young student is sure of finding sympathy, understanding, advice and protection in the houses of the Institute.

The importance of the press in everyday life has led the Institute to undertake publications. From the very first years of its foundation in 1911 a review called *The Teresian Institute Review* has been publishing monthly articles on religion, art, history, science, outlines for study courses, suggestions for teachers and reviews of new books. The pupils publish a smaller leaflet in which they can try out their literary ability. The members of the Institute publish, apart from these, numerous works, scholastic studies, doctorate theses, school text-books, etc.