

A CATHOLIC GROUP MOVEMENT?

THERE probably never was a time in the history of the Church when it was not true to say that the great thing needed was a well-instructed laity. To say that the need to-day is for teaching is trite, yet there is a sense in which it is perhaps unprecedentedly urgent that there should be teaching, and more and better teaching of the Faith than there ever was before. For there certainly never was a time when there was so much and such unescapable teaching going on about everything *but* the Faith, and against the Faith. The competition for human attention is so clamorous that many minds are simply stunned by it and rush headlong into the thing that gives them the best emotional outlet without ever stopping to think at all.

It is not easy to make people think in these days, because of a habit of superficiality and unreceptiveness which is partly the result of an instinctive mental self-defence in this welter of conflicting propaganda. The sermon has largely lost its appeal and its power, not because people are hardened but because their minds are so full of the clamour and racket that they have lost the power of attention. The people with a definite need may hear in Church or on a C.E.G. pitch something that answers to their need, but the majority, who are not making any particular demand of their religion, may never develop the knowledge they acquired at school or when they were instructed. It is admirable to train outdoor speakers, and admirable that they should speak in the street, but it is not by this means that the ordinary Catholic will learn more of his Faith and be made ready to answer those questions which incessantly come to him from non-Catholics; and that answering of questions, informally, and talking to people who want to discuss religion because it interests them, is the most valuable form of apostolate for the present day.

The Group movement, with its knowledge of the psychology of propaganda, recognises this fact in its method of

arousing interest simply through 'testimonies' and never through sermons. Sermons may never strike a responsive note in the hearer, and he may remain as impervious to them as he is to an unceasing wireless; it just goes over him. But the personal statement almost always calls out a responsive interest. Similar experience, different experience, anyhow the attention is caught, the hearer wants to contribute and develop the theme. This, though not as applied by the Groups, is sound psychology, and the Church might do well to take note of its immense appeal to-day. You can isolate people from the strife of tongues and put almost what you like into their minds if you can once catch their personal attention and make them feel that they have something themselves to give about the subject.

May it not be that there is something in this much misused principle of the Group movement which the Church itself might apply? Why should we not have groups for the teaching of Christian doctrine and practice—groups where the learner may talk and ask and find out for himself and contribute; groups led not necessarily by priests or nuns, but by trained lay leaders, men and women—with a priest always available in case of difficulty; groups where Catholics could together learn and teach and discuss their problems and profit by the experience of others, and into which non-Catholics seeking information might very well be brought?

There are indeed so-called study circles among Catholics, but they seem largely to lack direction and method. A study group meeting is not one in which someone reads a paper and the others discuss it, or a meeting where a chapter of a book is made a basis for unprepared questions and discussion. It is a meeting where the leader knows perfectly well beforehand what is to be the impression left by it, what is to be led up to: where all the members have the same background through some previous reading; where special topics have been carefully prepared beforehand by all or by some; and where all are expected to contribute something and to take part.

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The chief feature of the ordered study group is the clear cut scheme in the mind of the leader, who must always be in complete command of the situation, even though he, or she, may not talk very much. For this reason it may really be called a method of teaching, which can be widely used by means of carefully prepared outlines and suggestions for leaders on any given book, whereby any reasonably intelligent person who will take the trouble to prepare can quite safely lead a circle on a subject about which he may not be an expert.

The value of this when it comes to teaching the Catholic Faith can readily be seen. Say the group is to study some aspect of the Mass, its meaning, history, ceremonial or liturgy. The leader knows the point to be driven home each time and takes care that whatever else happens the group gets there. The members read something in common and read what else they can, finding out points for themselves, noticing things, seeing how they would answer difficult questions, all the time learning and giving, and also getting to know the minds and difficulties of other Catholics, or non-Catholics, and learning also, by talking, to formulate their own difficulties or ideas, as well as to state the great matters which all are studying.

Apply the same plan for any important point of doctrine or practice, would it not develop a lively personal interest in the Faith and also in other people? Make people feel that they are being intelligent about something and their enthusiasm for it knows no bounds. Bring them into personal contact with others on some subject about which they are interested, and a valuable fellowship is created. Let enthusiastic and intelligent people see that they can exercise the apostolate of teaching, by learning to lead groups themselves, and they will find out members among their own acquaintance.

A group need not be more than six, it should not be more than ten as a rule. It should meet regularly for a fixed period and then decide whether it will re-arrange itself or go on again. A group is not a society and should

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not become exclusive and permanent. It is a method, which can be used by anyone, whether chiefly concerned with doctrine or morals or spirituality or social service or missions. The essential thing is that it should be based on a well understood and well documented system of leadership. Groups should not be formed without the knowledge of some responsible authority whose help can be summoned if necessary, and outlines for leaders should be prepared by experts and passed by authority. Given these safeguards a widespread use of such groups might do much to produce and maintain that enthusiastic and instructed laity on which the well-being of the Church so greatly depends.

M. A. BOUSFIELD.

ROUGH DRAFT OF OUTLINES FOR STUDY GROUP

based on Fr. M. C. D'Arcy's

The Mass and Redemption

Ch. I. *Aim.* To get a general grasp of the inclusive meaning of the Redemption.

In discussing this chapter it would be better not to say very much about the Mass, that will come later—but to keep to consideration of the completeness and balance of the Faith, forming a background for subsequent discussion. In any ordinary circle there are likely to be members who have not realised as freely as they might the inter-relation and oneness of the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, Coming of the Spirit, the Body of Christ and the implications of being 'in Christ.' Without being detailed we must try to end with some clear outline thoughts about this.

Topics. Take the first three statements about the Redemption, pp. 1, 2 and 4, which may be called, Modernist, Evangelical and High Church. Ask three members each to consider one of these and say briefly how they would deal with the holder of them. This will need some thought, for it would be no use, e.g. to start talking to the Modernist about the supernatural which he flatly denies. We must start from what he does believe—that somehow Christ leads men to God. The circle in general can put any questions which occur to them. The point is not to establish the different points of view, but simply to show up their inadequacy. The leader should be ready to put