

WHEAT AMONG THE COCKLE

PERHAPS the most deceptive aspect of this new unrest among the European people is the superficial *newness* of it. Men are not prepared to recognize the age-old undefeated forces of good and evil, God and the devil, in the new complexity of twentieth century life. They will not realize that the new paganism is saying to-day what intellectual fools have said in all the ages, and that the new Christianity is stealing its very essence from the old, the true, the everlasting Church of Christ. And perhaps the most alarming aspect of it is the subtle encroachment of this sophisticated blindness upon the Catholic field of vision. Now, more than ever before, the need for Catholic Action and the opportunities for its promotion are evident on every hand. The bulwarks of the Faith need strengthening with the strength that comes only from unity of thought and purpose, staunch co-operation between the laity and clergy, and unstinted perseverance in the propagation of God's revealed Word. Without that strength to stem the flood of anti-Christian feeling which is especially directed against the Catholic Church, there is small prospect of preventing the decline and fall of what was once the whole of Christendom.

Yet it is growing daily more evident that Catholic unity is in danger of being undermined by false sentiment and misplaced sympathy arising purely from this blind unwillingness to recognize old truths in a new setting. It is incompatible with human nature and the Divine spark within us that any new regime should be completely evil. Even the deepest-dyed schismatics have conserved much that is sound and noble of Christian philosophy, but that does not ameliorate the folly or condone the intellectual pride of their tenets. There are atheists to-day of quite outstanding moral character, and Christian communities outside the pale of the Church that hold the welfare of mankind most dear to them, but one cannot envisage any practical compromise between these people and the living Church. Yet that is precisely what some Catholics seem to have in mind. Their argument,

so far as one can see, is this: that sooner or later the Christian forces of the world will be at war for very life against the forces of pagan materialism, and therefore any humanitarian creed, however far removed from allegiance to the Holy See, should be acclaimed and recognized for the good that it undoubtedly contains.

It would seem necessary to remind such careless philosophers of two indisputable tenets of their faith. First, that the Church Eternal does not depend for its security upon the chance co-operation of well-intentioned heretics; and second, that what good there is in all human principles belongs already to the Church. Once these two fundamental truths have been established in the minds of Catholics the course of Catholic Action becomes more obvious. No reasonable person will deny the advantages of sympathy between existing Christian bodies, or the value of recruiting from the pagan ranks men of sincere humanitarian purpose, but such an alliance shall not be accomplished by betrayal of our trust or sacrifice of our unique position as guardians of the truth.

Our only approach to better understanding with our non-Catholic neighbours is unhappily beset with misconceptions and unthinking bigotry that are not easily dispelled, and remedial action rests with individuals rather than with the cumbersome mechanism of widespread propaganda. That is why unity of outlook is so essential.

The first consideration, then, of those who hope for a united front of militant Christianity is to know their Faith and spread it quietly and discreetly among their fellows. The need for discretion is of paramount importance. A national organization like the Catholic Truth Society can safely place its full resources on the market, confident that it is catering for every taste. The lone evangelist must be more careful. His policy must vary with the mental attitude of those he wishes to convince. It must be his prime purpose to observe and encourage the good in others, rather than expose their folly and weakness. He must seek to show them where their outlook coincides with Catholic dogma, and arouse in them the interest that is the first step towards conviction. Above all things he must not attempt too much. The complete and

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satisfactory refutation of one single misconception is far more likely to be effective than a rapidly ill-conceived resumé of the catechism.

Moreover, it is not enough that he should know his Faith. He must examine the other point of view with sympathy and understanding, and be prepared to recognize not only its fallacies but the premises underlying them. That is one reason why so many converts write. They feel themselves more competent to appreciate and therefore to refute the claims of other creeds than Catholics who, baptized in infancy, have held no other view. An Anglican professor, recently paying tribute to a Catholic friend, said this of him: "He never offered his opinion until he had thoroughly seen through mine."

One of the most deadly of non-Catholic delusions about the Church is that she is buried in mediæval traditions and takes no cognizance of modern affairs. This fabrication is fostered largely by those die-hard antagonists who find more material for castigating the Church of the Middle Ages than the Church as she appears to-day. It is obviously hopeless to discuss political economy in terms of Catholic doctrine with people whose only answer is a leering gibe about Pope Joan or Mediæval Monastic Intemperance. Nevertheless it has this advantage, that where it is possible to disabuse more tolerant minds of these fantastic inventions, their natural reaction is to probe more deeply into present-day Catholic outlook.

The pendulum of modern political opinion swings violently between Left and Right, but probably in this country the greater bulk of public sentiment favours a middle course, and it is this middle segment of the people that is most open to persuasion in one direction or the other. A sense of social injustice among people who have never heard of *Rerum Novarum* or *Quadragesimo Anno* is enough to turn the scale in favour of Communism. The Catholic advocate must get there first. The world must be made to realize that Catholics are alive to social problems and hold the key to their ultimate solution. But before that can happen Catholics must be quite certain in themselves that they *are* familiar with

conditions in the world to-day, and competent to criticize existing or suggested measures of reform. No knowledge of our Faith can be complete without a working acquaintance with the great encyclicals of recent years. If we are unfamiliar with the writings of our Pope, is it reasonable to expect the outside world to know of them? The average Catholic has been accused of apathy towards the grave injustices of life because he is assured of all Eternity and regards misfortune in the light of mortification. That accusation is not ill-founded, and the Catholic whom it justly fits will find little in the Holy Father's works to countenance his attitude. His especial care for his own soul may avail him nothing if he lacks in Christian charity towards his neighbour.

While Catholic Action is thus more fruitful when established on a basis of personal contact and individual enterprise, it is then essentially a slow business, and much can be done to enliven interest and dispel popular prejudice through the media of Press and public platform. There need be no blatant propaganda. The more quietly it is accomplished the more lasting and effective will be its result. Hence it is once again a case for individual action, this time by Catholics who command a wider field of public interest and play a recognized part in public life. Indeed much *has* been done in this respect already, but there is a great deal still to do. Fear and hatred of the Papacy have made the business doubly difficult for any organization under acknowledged Catholic auspices. Few non-Catholics read the Catholic Press, and any aggressively Catholic contribution to a secular paper at once arouses a storm of controversy that effectively sidetracks the original issue. The Catholic orator, playwright, journalist or politician has recourse to caution, expressing his views on questions of the moment in conformity with Christian doctrine and leaving his public to draw the inference. Provided its exponent is known to be a Catholic, such guarded promulgation of the Faith has better prospects of success in the end than the blunt, uncompromising measures of direct attack.

Catholic Action, whatever form it takes, can only hope to

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influence a certain section of the people—those who are not already so biassed and bigoted that they are immune to all persuasion—and it is those more tolerant minds that are most likely to react to the personal method of approach. Once their curiosity and interest are aroused, the entire resources of the great Catholic organizations are at their disposal to dispel the final doubts and clinch the bargain. It is altogether too much to expect that wholesale conversions may be accomplished in this way, but since the essential objects of the campaign are rather to secure alliance without compromise, to expound the good of every creed in terms of Catholic doctrine, to upset the fallacies from which these alien creeds take origin, and to ensure a uniformity of Catholic opinion on all questions of social, racial and international importance, it is a policy well worth the trouble of adapting to the daily routine of our private lives.

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