

BLACKFRIARS

CATHOLIC ACTION AND STUDY

A SUGGESTION

A NECESSITY is defined as something that cannot not be; and in approaching Catholic Action study is a necessity. As a recent writer in *Blackfriars* expressed it: 'The first stages of Catholic Action tend more to the study than to the street.'

The question which immediately suggests itself is whether there is adequate provision made for the Catholic layman to encourage and help him to 'get down to' this study. It is in the belief that there is not, and that some facilities should be forthcoming, that this scheme is suggested. But first let us be satisfied that not enough is being done. There exist two (National) societies for the purpose of promoting study, namely the Catholic Evidence Guild and the Catholic Social Guild. The avowed object of the former is to train apostolic men and women to expound the truths of the Faith from public platforms. This inevitably restricts their numbers, as but few are fitted for such work. The other society's aim and object is the study and dissemination of Catholic social principles. In the manner of the Schools we feel that we must add a third—a society, or better (in view of Occam's razor), some organization subject to the various diocesan Catholic Action Boards, whose object would be to provide classes in the fundamentals of the Catholic religion.

The scheme is best outlined under the divisions of the seven 'circumstances' of human action:

WHO? It will be open to all Catholic laymen who wish to acquire a better knowledge of their Faith, and an intellectual basis for their beliefs.

WHAT? The lectures, twenty-four in all, would be divided into three sections or three terms. The first to deal with natural religion, the second with revealed religion, and the third with the history of the Church. In detail they might be as follows:

Natural Religion.

- (1) General introduction to course and to metaphysics.

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- (2) Existence of God, i. (Order).
- (3) Existence of God, ii. (Contingency).
- (4) Attributes of God.
- (5) Problem of Evil.
- (6) The Rational Soul, i. (Existence).
- (7) The Rational Soul, ii. (Properties).

Conclusion: Man's duties to God, his neighbour, and himself.

Revealed Religion.

- (1) Validity of the New Testament as an historical work.
- (2) Christ claimed to be God.
- (3) Christ justified that claim by His Resurrection.
- (4) Christ's Mission.
- (5) Christ founded a Church with four marks.
- (6) Catholic Church is One and Holy.
- (7) Catholic Church is Catholic and Apostolic.

Conclusion: The Infant church.

History of the Church.

- (1) Pentecost to Constantine.
- (2) Constantine to Gregory the Great.
- (3) The Dark Ages.
- (4) The Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries.
- (5) The Renaissance and Decline of Religion.
- (6) The Reformation and its effects.
- (7) The Counter-Reformation to the present day.

Conclusion: A general sketch of movements, political and philosophical, both inside and outside the Church, in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, ending with Communism.

WHERE? It is too much to expect that the numbers who will avail themselves of this new scheme will be so great as to warrant a class in every large parish. It would seem to be better, then, to use some method of combination already existing—and this we have in the form of deaneries. An example to illustrate this: in Liverpool and its environs there are six deaneries comprising some seventy parishes. A start could be made in the six central parishes in each deanery, and ultimately, if the numbers justified it, extended to individual parishes.

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WHY? Primarily to provide an opportunity for those who wish to know more about their Faith, its dogmas and its history. Our Holy Father has described Catholic Action as 'The part taken by the Catholic laity in the apostolic mission of the Church with the object of defending the principles of Faith and Morals and of spreading a sane and beneficial social action so as to restore Catholic Life in the home and in Society.' How can this be achieved if the laity are not given the opportunity of acquiring some more systematic and more detailed ideas than those contained in the Catechism?¹ But the utility of these classes does not finish here; they will serve as nurseries for the two major societies already mentioned, the C.E.G. and the C.S.G. From the parochial class the student would pass on to a more central class for some specialized study, and a whole network of 'primary' study-circles would spring up, all of them feeding the 'secondary' central circles.

How? No hard and fast rules can be made for the method to be followed in the meetings, for most teachers have their own idiosyncrasies. All that can be done is to provide a few suggestions: that the lecture part of the meeting be not too long, and that the students be urged and encouraged to ask questions, for when the disciple asks a question it shows that his mind is *ready* for the answer.

WHEN? The Worker's Educational Association, with its years of experience in Adult Education, has found that the ideal number of classes for a year's course is twenty-four. So there would be twenty-four meetings spread over a period of about eight months—that is, weekly meetings with allowances for holidays and other contingencies.

WITH WHOSE HELP? Had they more time, priests, of course, would be the most suitable tutors for these classes. But where it is not possible to obtain a priest-

¹ *The Catholic Catechism* drawn up by Cardinal Gasparri (Sheed & Ward) would be of notable value here.

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leader, we must invoke the aid of a band of men and women who seem specially fitted for this work—Diocesan catechists. These layfolk (after the fashion of those referred to in the *Code*, can. 1333, §1.) are examined by delegates of the Ordinary, who licenses them to give catechetical instruction to the faithful, or to converts. Without going into the question of text-books and reading, we can note *en passant* that there are many suitable pamphlets published by the C.T.S. and other bodies, e.g., the Jesuits at Loyola Hall, Lancashire.

The scheme has been examined in its various aspects, but there remains one important point to be made with regard to the spiritual effects of such an enterprise. In the first place it will increase the student's knowledge of God and His ways—and to know God is to love Him. Again the whole spiritual life of the individual will be put on a more intellectual basis, leading him on, maybe, to the higher forms of prayer; for what is contemplation but the illumined admiration and appreciation of a divine truth. Liken the time of conjoint study and prayer to St. Paul's years in Arabia, to Our Lord's hidden life, or to any other period of preparation that you will, so long as you admit that for healthy Catholic Action we must have the twin gifts of the Holy Spirit—Knowledge and Piety. Armed with these the Catholic laity shall sally forth to defend the principles of faith and morals, and to restore a sane Christian ideology which the world has forgotten.

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