

BLACK FRIARS

A MONTHLY REVIEW

Edited by the English Dominicans

Published at Blackfriars, St Giles, Oxford

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THE MISSION

FRANCE has been in a ferment of apostolic zeal since the beginning of her occupation by Hitler's forces. When peace came the power of this zeal for so many months bottled up by foreign oppression burst forth in many directions. And still a great deal of Catholic literature coming across the channel is concerned with the mission of the Church to heal and to save the multitudes; the mission to Paris, the parochial missions, apostolate of the countryside, of the docks . . . *journées d'étude* on all the subjects relevant to these missions go hand in hand with much activity among the pagan workers and much adaptation too of the accepted etiquette of the Church. To judge by the success of some translations of this literature, such as *France Pagan?* and *Revolution in a City Parish*, the enthusiasm is spreading to this country. And yet we are in no need of encouragement from abroad in certain aspects of this apostolic ardour, as is witnessed by the National Mission which has brought within its grasp nearly every Catholic parish in England. Nevertheless the French and the English missions are very different in character, and it is possible that the natural suspicion of foreign tactics and methods coupled with the sense that we are doing as much as any ourselves may put a brake

on the spread of the French idea in English-speaking countries. It is therefore worth while to point to the differences between the English and the French missions.

The difference is a very simple one. The simple discovery made by Abbé Godin during the occupation that France was a missionary country may seem to be too obvious, but it was that idea which has fired the 'Missions de Paris' and has set Abbé Michonneau working on his parish almost as though it was in the jungle. Abbé Godin saw the paganism of the workers who had all, a few generations back, been born into the Church, as a challenge outside the normal and staid functioning of the Church in a Catholic country. Abbé Michonneau saw that there were in the territorial confines of his domain not only the few believers who at least nominally belonged to the Church but also a great many more who were in practice pagan, and *all* these were members of his flock; he had to minister, as far as he was able, to them all; that was part of his mission as parish priest. These two men, therefore, and the many others who have been inspired by their example, have returned to the original apostolic conception of the mission—the mission of the Church to heal and to make whole all mankind. Saint Paul's challenge, which no living Christian today should be able to read without tears, sounds continually in the ears of all these apostles:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent?

The mission of the Church depends on this sending of the preachers to those who have not had the chance of hearing the gospel. In the first ages of Christianity the question of where the apostle should be sent to was clear enough. The world was full of pagans who had never heard the name of Christ and to whom the gospel was in every sense 'news'. But in the present age, particularly in Europe where Christianity has been the official and accepted religion for so long, the question is not nearly so clear.

In a Catholic country such as France the presumption has been for centuries that every citizen was taken to the font at an early age and had been educated in the principles of the faith during his tender years. There were sinners, of course, and some—many perhaps—fell right away in later years but at least they had all had the chance of hearing the Word; the Church's mission had been fulfilled simply by the parochial clergy with the assistance of an occasional visiting preacher. The sending of the preacher went no further afield than to the parochial pulpit. The visiting preacher

was called a missionary as a special title because he had been sent specially to preach, but he was working under the same assumptions and in the same milieu as the parish priest; and the title of mission had come to be largely restricted to this preaching to those who had already heard the word of God. There were always of course the foreign missions where the apostle was sent to tell those in strange countries the vital 'news' of the Gospel. But at home it was no longer 'news'; everyone had heard it hundreds of times before.

The revolution in the minds of Catholics in France has been the sudden realisation that this state of affairs at home was no longer true. There were thousands, millions even, who had never heard the gospel—even though great numbers of them were under the impression that they had heard the 'news' of Christ and that it had become stale. And to these crowds of pagans no one was being sent to preach. They were being left to their paganism as though they were in some distant country whither no missionary had so far been sent. The Church at home was being treated as a human society holding on rather desperately to its members but they slipped away. The Church was regarded in practice as though it were static, not the dynamic healer and sanctifier of all men, not the person of Christ still on earth going about doing good and drawing all men into the kingdom.

Now it is here that we find the difference between the 'revolutionary' French attitude and the staid and traditional English approach. The nation-wide mission in England was addressed primarily to those who had already heard the gospel, those who had been baptised and received the other sacraments. The parish clergy are worried at the 'leakage'; great efforts are made to hold the people from falling away and to gather back into the Church those who have already fallen. Of course, our Lord speaks of the energy and care which must be given to finding and bringing back the one sheep which was 'lost', and no Christian could do anything but admire and encourage the wonderful efforts which have been spent in regaining the many lapsed Catholics during these missions. But it sometimes seems a very hopeless task to press back into the Church the uninterested lapsed Catholic who no longer cares for anything to do with religion, is 'happily' indifferent and would rather not be bothered by the priest. A scolding, an impassioned pleading, an explanation may bring a few back for a while but every natural circumstance is against their remaining for long at 'their duties'.

It has been estimated that only seven million people in England practise any form of Christianity. Of these some two or three

millions are Catholic and another two are Anglican, and the rest presumably nonconformist. If this is true, and it must approximate to the facts to judge by the ordinary experience of everyday life, it means that there must be nearly forty million people who are in fact practising pagans. Only one in every six people has sufficient faith in the gospel of Christ to do anything positive about it. And the rest? . . . Of course the degrees of indifference, of antagonism to Christianity, of positive acceptance of pagan standards are infinitely varied, but they make up between them a great people who know not Christ, a people to whom the gospel is not preached. Many of them, if not most, are indifferent and apathetic but we cannot condemn them for that unless they have had the chance of being enkindled by the fire of God's love and by the realisation that Christ is risen. If they have spurned the true Christ and not merely a false impersonation of him then the responsibility does lie with them; but until that happens the responsibility for their well-being rests with the Catholics all of whom have a mission to preach the gospel in some form or another.

It is at least arguable that if Catholics in the English-speaking world adopted this truly missionary attitude the problem of the 'leakage' would solve itself. Instead of clinging desperately to what they have they would look upon the whole world as theirs, and their responsibility. They would allow the fire of Christ's kindling to burn unceasingly, and this would be more likely to awaken the sluggish Christians who have heard but cannot be bothered to listen. These will be more likely to return if they see the conversion of their heathen neighbours around them and if they see that their fellow Christians really believe what they profess with their lips.

The question of the means to be used in preaching to the modern pagan is a wide and difficult one into which we will not enter here. But the methods used in France are not necessarily best suited to the need of another country. And while for this reason many react rather coolly towards French experiments, they should remember that the universal lesson which is to be learnt from the Christian 'revolution' in that country is one of an attitude of mind. The means will become clear when the nature of the mission has been accepted. So long as we are ready to treat the Church as static we shall rely a great deal on Catholic clubs and various institutions designed to keep Catholics together and away from the pagan world in which they live. But then we should be fighting a losing battle. If we turn round to recognise the mission *ad extra*, to see the teeming millions who are asking to have the Word of God put before them, asking by the sheer fact of their ignorance and discomfort, we shall find that ways and means spring to hand, not necessarily

the way of preaching by word of mouth from the height of a soap box, but certainly by some form of intensive prayer and liturgical life, of reaching out to all kinds of action. The Church sends every Catholic into the mission field to spread the kingdom; the mission flags when we assume, sitting in our comfortable pew in church, that the kingdom has already been established.

THE EDITOR.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE POST-CHRISTIAN

A CULTURED priest of my acquaintance has remarked to me more than once that the penny Catechism, with all its virtues, is out of date. Many of its precise definitions and carefully chosen texts are aimed at a Bible Protestantism which hardly anyone believes in. On the other hand, difficulties which the modern convert is apt to raise are not met, and the standard 'companions' to the Catechism do not always help. Similar objections apply, I believe, to a great deal of recent apologetic writing. Brilliant and compelling as it can be—I am thinking of books like *The Everlasting Man*—it frequently fails in two respects. First, it often does not carry the battle on to the ground where the modern intelligentsia choose to fight. This was the complaint made by Professor Haldane against Mr Arnold Lunn, and the same could have been said, perhaps with more justice, in a number of other controversies. Secondly, an apologist labours under the immense handicap that whereas he is inside the Church, most of the people to whom his work is addressed are outside—and not only outside the Church, but outside what is popularly called Christianity. It is a testimony to Catholicism that it transforms one's thinking even when it does not transform one's life; but the difference must be paid for. Catholic spokesmen suffer from being Catholic. They try to communicate a vision which can only be had from within; and this is the business of the artist, not the apologist. When a few judicious phrases in the outsider's language would be enough to establish contact, they perplex him by talking in their own. The sympathetic inquirer who wanders into a Catholic bookshop usually departs a trifle less sympathetic, and therefore less disposed to inquire.

With the utmost deference, and simply because I have had a few opportunities of observing conversions and hearing the debates *pro* and *con*, I wish to suggest one or two ways in which the practice of apologetics can be better adapted to our Post-Christian society.

The prime necessity is to understand what happens in modern