

The Truth is Victorious, but it Must Be Presented

Conversion has assumed an importance greater, if possible, than ever before by reason of an unexpected feature presenting itself. False ecumenism has exercised a destructive effect on the faith of Catholics, such that it is being said that many Catholics believe that one religion is as good as another. The result is a great falling away from practice and a total cessation of effort to convert. Fr Congar delivers a statement to missionary students to the effect that they should not be seeking to convert the mission lands. When asked if this does not deprive the missionary orders of any function, he replies: 'They have a function; it is to study.' May I ask: To study what and for what purpose? This is such a blunt denial of everything Our Lord said and of what the Catholic Church has always held that it is intolerable. This sort of thing is the opposite to the Catholic Church.

Conversion Is Out and Yet....

As a body which believes in the Catholic Church, the Legion must set itself resolutely to conversion, thus

to do the same. What is at work? Does it mean that every university in America has the same possibility in it but is not being exploited. Does it mean that no other university has three professors who believe like those do? Are there no Catholics anywhere else who believe in the potent way that we do?

Whatever the above instances point to, they show that people are willing to believe; that there is an instinctive urge in mankind to believe. Let us hug close to us St Augustine's statement that the heart of man cannot rest except in God.

The position is that we are God's children. He has placed in each one of us that inclination towards him which we can describe as embryonic faith, but which has to be enkindled by contact and baptism. Therefore the first consideration is that we make contact with every person on earth with a view to setting this process in motion. And this is precisely what Our Lord ordered. As a total proposition this sounds impossible. But reduced to parochial level it becomes a practical matter. It could be done at present over the greater part of the world. For the moment it is not possible in certain areas. But in absolutely no part of the world is that attempt being made. This represents a terrible act of disobedience to the divine command.

Faith and the Mind of Man

Now I consider the question of faith and the mind of man. That mind has a unique quality. It is able to rise inconceivably above itself. The other living orders of nature cannot do so. The vegetable order cannot understand or rise to the life of the animal. The animal cannot even

remotely conceive the life of man. But the man's mind can ascend into a higher order and be at home with God and the angels.

Someone will say; I do not see anything strange in that. Is not the mind a thinking machine which is capable of speculating about things above itself – just as man is capable bodily to get into a flying machine and rise above the material earth? This introduces some complex ideas. I can indeed imagine a natural intellect being able to speculate in regard to God and another life, but not in a serious, believing way – only as we would think over a fairy tale. Would a man possessed only of a purely natural intellect be capable of considering the question of the Divinity, the Trinity and the works of God? Probably he would. For example if he was looking at the believing section of the human race, he would have to observe that they accepted the idea of God. But I do not think *he* would be capable of accepting it. I think that this follows from that idea of each natural level being unable to appreciate a higher one.

Then how is it that apparently all men *are* at home in that supernatural stratosphere? It used to be said many years ago that every race instinctively believed in God except the Hottentots of South Africa. But later I saw this generalisation made absolute; the ban against the Hottentots was raised. If all men do in a sense believe naturally, how comes it that the purely natural intellect is thus able to rise above itself? The reason is that man is *not* purely natural. He has a soul which uses the body and which makes him half-spirit. Incidentally I suggest that here we have conclusive proof of the existence of the soul. For in man we see the operation of something which is far, far above the purely natural; which is at home as I have said in the spiritual world, believing that God exists

and that there is a life to come. I contend that without the soul the purely natural intellect could not accept those things though it could face them in thought and wonder that people could believe in them.

Baptism and Faith

The next question is that of baptism. Theological faith, or the capacity to understand and believe easily, comes by baptism. What then of those who are un-baptised? The great majority of the people of the world are un-baptised and still have that instinctive tendency towards God which proceeds from the soul. In a special way baptism takes hold of that and attaches the soul to Christ and gives it the power to lead the full Christian life.

There are a large number of cases where the baptised persons seem to be in the position of pure nature, that is of being able to reason about God but not accept him. Why in view of the argument about the soul and baptism? I would ascribe that position to the fact that the will remains dominant and is in those cases set firm against belief by circumstances which we can only guess at. How much of faith is made up of the desire to believe? Can we not create in ourselves by our conduct a mental climate in which belief would be so disadvantageous as to cause the will to reject it? Such things as a bad life to which one is attached, or a state of pride which is unshakable, could so dominate the position as to make the idea of God utterly distasteful. In which cases, faith would find it hard to enter.

The Case of H.G. Wells

In order to make this a little more definite I mention a couple of cases. One is that of H.G. Wells, the very brilliant

novelist. He seems to have absolutely no supernatural sense in him, to be incapable of believing. I saw two ingredients in him which could incline him against faith. The first was the lack of morals. The second was a simply colossal pride – to appreciate which, you would want to read his book *Homo Sapiens*. It is an exercise of arrogance that few men could achieve. He really believed that he knew the secret of knowledge to the extent that he could write a book on mankind which would out-distance and supersede the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Koran, and any other influential document which has ever been written.

From Convert to Priest to Unbeliever

The other case is that of a great friend of my own, a convert who became a priest and a fervent one. Suddenly in the midst of war he felt he no longer believed in God. He abandoned the priesthood and has never come back to it. His life is blameless and I do not see the operations of pride in him. He is living at the other side of the world but visits me every year or so. The only thing we talk about is the Church, which he claims is the only religion if God exists. I have tried to analyse this mysterious situation and the only explanation I can think of is this. He was brought up in a very refined Methodism in which kindness and love of neighbour were paramount. In other words Christianity was placed in an extremely sentimental setting. This worked out all right until he was placed face to face with the ultimate grimness of life. He witnessed multitudes shattered to bits. He saw hate and cruelty in control. This so violated the benevolent code in which he had been brought up as to hit at the very foundations of his Christianity. He was not able to reconcile the horrors

of life with the goodness of God. And the shock of this expels God despite all that he learned in the Catholic Church.

Attitude in Israel Today

The PPC parties to Israel have found this notion universal; the injustice and abomination of this world are incomparable with the idea of a good God! The legionaries have pointed out that this entails an incorrect view of suffering and Redemption. Man himself brought sin into the world and suffering is the remedy – first with the Messiah, second of those united to him, and thirdly the woes of all mankind.

This tendency on the part of man to reason about God is no doubt laudable, but should be approached with common sense and caution. For the intellect cannot even remotely conceive him. God contains in himself attributes which would seem to us to be opposites but which are harmonious in him. No matter how much we strain the mind we will only end up representing God to ourselves as a superman; and he is infinitely beyond that. He exceeds even the capacity of the Blessed Virgin to access him.

On Being Deprived of Faith

When I was twenty-five years old I had a strange experience which has remained vivid in my mind and has been more than helpful to me. After confession one afternoon I was before the Sacred Heart altar in Whitefriar Street. Suddenly the world turned upside down for me. I realised that there was no God, and with him went everything that mattered in life. I assure you that what was left was a hell. I do not think that I could have lived on in the meaningless existence which was left. Perhaps

this condition lasted for five minutes; it seemed like an eternity. Then as abruptly as it came it passed and never since have I experienced even remotely like it. I knew that there was no God and the resulting thought was terrible. Life had suddenly become a torture. I think I would have gone mad if the ordeal continued.

I must explain that there was nothing emotional about all this. It was as tangible as if an organ had been removed from me and then suddenly replaced.

My own explanation is that I had been deprived of the gift of the Faith, or rather of all its sensible effects in order to make me understand what faith really is. I suppose that this would amount to placing me in the position which I have been presuming the purely natural mind to be in; that is of being able to contemplate the idea of God and the spiritual life but without capacity to accept it.

But this question may be asked: Those persons whom you imagine as being without faith do not feel the catastrophic effects that you did. Why not? They are able to lead normal and even happy lives. Why? I would suggest the explanation that they are not deprived of all that I was, which would make life intolerable and indeed unliveable. I was caused to experience a degree of loss which I would regard as one of the big lessons and blessings of my life; which gave me some light on what faith is. So I smile when people come to me and tell me that they have lost the faith. Because I know the reality – which is not their position.

Counting on Basis of Faith in All offer the Faith to All

So counting on the existence of every man, in different degrees of course, of that element of faith, let us face

up resolutely to the problem of offering Catholicism to the world. Our approach to men must be universal and undiscriminating. As we do not see beneath the surface of the person, we are not in a position to judge as to the degree of possibility in the individual case. Conversion is of such supernatural quality that it would be absurd to go by our own estimates. So we should try after every case. Before each approach we should summon to mind the distinctive legionary idea that we, united to Mary, are seeking to give Jesus to that soul. Not only does this correctly condition our mind for the approach but it is at the same time a potent prayer. Perhaps this regular advertence may seem artificial or an over-stressing. Not so, for all the time I find legionaries going by their own valuations of the possibility of cases, showing that they are under-stressing the divine side.

I think that the real deciding circumstance in regard to conversion is our own degree of conviction and the amount of the supernatural which we contribute to it. Our attitude should be the piling of weights into our side of the scale so that they will eventually outweigh the resistance of the other scale.

Here too remember the golden spiritual rule that if something is sought over a long period and by a number of people, it almost has to be granted. The idea there is that the unity and the perseverance are most likely to be a fruit of the Holy Spirit which indicates that he is working with us towards a favourable result.

Helping Protestants in Their Difficulties about Our Lady

Though she is the mother of every soul and therefore the greatest aid in converting, Our Lady appears to be an

obstacle and sometimes we push her in the background for that reason. How are we to present her in the simplest way? Point to the extreme force of Genesis 3: 'I will set enmities between thee and the woman, etc.' All modern scholarship has turned to the judgement that this woman is Mary. Such a stressing of the woman must mean that she has a place in Redemption and Christianity. Yet the Protestant suppression of Mary had unconsciously so taken charge that a very learned book like Dr Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible* can be found abbreviating Genesis 3 as follows: 'God said to Satan, I will set enmities between you and the Redeemer.' Although the woman is placed first, and quite evidently with a significance, she has been so blurred by prejudice that she is skipped over by the mind as if the text had not included her at all.

Protestants having been taught that devotion to her only began after the Council of Ephesus in 431, which is early enough – goodness knows! But history can point further back than that. The inauguration of Constantinople as the new capital of the Roman Empire was in 328 and took the form of a consecration of the city to the Blessed Virgin. In other words the most important official ceremony after the emergence of Christianity from the catacombs was built around Our Lady. But long before that, as Cardinal Newman has proved, the New Eve doctrine is found as the central idea of sub-apostolic teaching.

What is Mary's place?

Protestants are not sure today but coming around. Why do they not deliberately think it out and give it some form of their own? They have been taught from their cradle that they must not pray to Mary: only to God. So propose to them the idea of talking to her as their mother. I have

known cases where that simple suggestion met their difficulty. If they do not like our methods of devotion to her, let them work out a system of their own. But they must do something.

A primary rule in dealing with others is: Listen rather than talk. Buy your right to talk by much listening. Avoid giving any impression of forcing things on people. If they feel they are being pressed, it is elementary psychology that they will react in the contrary dissection.

Our Formula for Approach

Our little formula has proved itself to be invaluable. But do not make it sound formidable, but rather casual. Put it in this way: 'By any chance did the thought of being a Catholic ever cross your mind?' This invites the truth and the reply will often be surprising. Even if the answer is no, it provides the opening for another question such as: 'Surely you should have a look at the Catholic Church which is the mother of all the Christian Churches?' They may grant the Church that status but retort that it became corrupt and had to be reformed. But point out that those reforms have drastically altered all doctrines, ending in such travesties of religion as the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses. Therefore the reform has destroyed itself and gone on to produce such fissuring that outside the Catholic Church there is no doctrine and no uniformity. Today the Protestant Churches are desperately trying to unite. But each effort to sew up a tear only produces another one elsewhere.

When you have established a contact, do not willingly let go. Your tenacity may be the condition which determines success. Sometimes a whole lifetime is required to land a big fish. A while ago a Jewish lady in America

died in the Church. We encountered her thirteen years previously when on holiday in Donegal. An unremitting correspondence was maintained with her. Eventually she asked for reception and died a month later.

A fact which emerged in that case, and which would have perhaps a great general importance, is that for a considerable time she had wished to be a Catholic but was deterred by the fear of a long instruction course. In two other cases of conversion known to us, the same circumstance was at work. They stated that they would not be able to undergo a long instruction; the ages of the three were 75, 80 and 92. When reassured on this point they at once demanded reception. Possibly the same fear operates in many other cases. Has instruction become so formidable a proposition as to frighten off people? Is too much detail being required as a condition of reception?

Conveying the Essentials

You know my own little proposition of the 'Living Core' of Catholicism which could be taught to an intelligent person in an hour. It is that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity came on earth to redeem fallen man. He united the baptised believers with himself in the Mystical Body of which he is the head. They live in him and he in them with a real interchange of life. They are his members who carry on his life on earth, and he pours his grace and power into them. Mary his mother is likewise mother of that body. Certain ones in the body are the channels of his special functions towards the body. The Pope represents him as the head of the body and as its authoritative, infallible teacher. The bishops and the priests are his local representatives. Baptism is the sacrament which unites the soul to the Mystical Body. Confirmation imparts the

Holy Spirit to strengthen the soul. Holy Orders give us priests. Matrimony provides for the growth of the body. Extreme Unction prepares it for death. Through Penance Christ forgives the sins of the body. The Eucharist is the food of the body and likewise gives us the Mass through which Christ continues daily and everywhere his sacrifice.

It seems to me that this very brief formula contains the essentials of Christianity. I know it is too compressed for practical purposes. But on the other hand how can one justify catechumenates of many years' duration which appear to represent a disproportionate demand on poor human nature and which must scare off multitudes? And remember that the people in question are not even armed with sacramental grace.

Other Protestant Difficulties

A formidable barrier to Protestants exists in confession. I have just now been dealing with one of the Kansas students about to enter the Church, who declares great fears on that score. Protestants have been brought up to regard confession with loathing, so that it must bulk big as an obstacle. It should be explained to Protestants that they can be shielded off so that the priest does not even see their face; that they can go to any priest anywhere, even in another city or country. We have been accustomed from our childhood to this difficult disclosure of self. It can seem awful to a person strange to it.

The papacy has always been controverted by Protestants. Accordingly an extremely important item should be brought to their notice. An article in *Maria Legionis* was recently devoted to the change made by the new Standard Bible which has been accepted by all the Protestant Churches. The change relates to the Petrine

Text, that is: 'Simon, thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church.' Hitherto every Protestant without exception was taught that when saying 'rock' Christ was referring to himself and not to Peter. In the new Bible the text is made to read: 'Simon, thou art Peter the rock and upon this rock I will build my Church.' Which makes it clear beyond question that the Church was built on Peter. Protestants will now argue that this was only a personal grant to Peter, one not continued to his successors. This would be contrary to right sense. Why establish the papacy when least required, that is when the other apostles and contemporaries of Our Lord were still available to settle disputes?

The Catholic Church Our Only Justification

I have mentioned Newman. Let that tremendous phrase of his in the handbook be on your lips for it is what one might call a hall-marked pronouncement, that is it bears on its face the evidence of its truth. 'Either the Catholic Church is the living oracle of truth or else we have no idea whence we come or whither we are going.'

This is analogous to a pithy saying of the Methodist Tyrrel: 'Were the Catholic Church to die, all the other Churches can order their coffins.' Today these words sum up a self-evident situation.

In a recent discussion at our Pauline Circle, a Baptist lady challenged the Church of Ireland representatives to justify their use of infant baptism. She pointed out that there was no mention of it in scripture and that all the first baptisms were of adults. She insisted that consent and knowledge were necessary ingredients. She reduced them to silence, because in the end the only justification lies in the teaching of the Church which those outside it

do not accept. Therefore non-Catholic Churches which administer infant baptism are in a fix.

... Even for Eating Bacon and Eggs

A kindred impasse would reside in the fact that the prohibitions and injunctions of Deuteronomy and Leviticus are still in force so far as the Bible is concerned. These concern the keeping holy of the Sabbath Day which is Saturday; the limitation on travelling and working on that day; the prohibition of the eating of pork or hare. The modifications of all those prescriptions depend on the dispensing power of the Catholic Church. By what authority do the other Churches put aside that stern legislation of the Bible? Surely this is a point which must be settled before embarking on that appetising breakfast dish of bacon and eggs?

Milton has the following: 'Who does not know that Truth is strong, next to the Almighty? It needs no policies, nor stratagems nor licensing's to make it victorious.'

But it must be presented.

The truth is victorious in its essence. Our special aim must be to propose it with as much of Our Lady in it and as little of self as possible, hoping all the time that God will cause it to prevail. As this is a divine operation, it will not work out exactly as we would want it. We may feel what we say to be very convincing, but it makes no apparent impression. On the other hand there will be a breakthrough where you least expect. Recently I was talking to a man who had given up all belief at the age of fifteen. He was now twenty-five. He was scientific and like all of that tribe hard to deal with. Yet he seized on a remark of mine to which I had attached little value and declared that it solved his problem. The sequel was his

return to the sacraments a short time after. He was a real case of a big upset arising from a mere missing screw. We may not have the slightest notion as to where the trouble lies. But we do our best and the screw is back in place. It is a question of a spiritual problem the solution of which is not in our hands though we play an essential part.

But that is the very part which is providentially assigned to every person. Ozanam says that it is the divine arrangement that the action of one soul is required for the uplifting of another. Scripture says that faith comes by hearing and I think that this must be read in the narrowest sense of one person speaking and the other listening. Prayer alone will not suffice. So go out into the whole world and talk to every man.