

OUR POTENTIAL MEMBERSHIP IS THE UNCOMMITTED CATHOLIC POPULATION

I AM forced to say that to spend a day in a Legion atmosphere and then to return to the normal level of thought and idealism, is a psychological experience. It is not even in the order of leaving a warm room and going out into the cold. The difference between what we are inclined to call the Legion mentality and the common mentality is something radical. It is a manifestation suggesting the broad divisions of positive as against negative, of optimism as against pessimism in the community. Unquestionably the Legion affords a practical idealism based on Christian doctrine which tends towards the fulfilment of everyday duty and at the same time to holiness. It makes the best of both worlds because it unites them. It represents a genuine loving of one's neighbour as contrasted with the skin-deep products which are in evidence on all sides. To-day humanitarianism is paraded as a substitute for Christianity. But it tends to remain impersonal and at best it is a flower without any roots. On the other hand, the Legion seeks to divide humanity into individual persons and its gamut of interest takes in everything from pure conversion to recreation, as Christianity is supposed to do.

Really I think that the Legion contains everything which is needed for the present period of pessimism and for future Christian building. We must clear our minds in regard to what we are seeking. We should realise that we are thinking in different terms to the Governments and the newspapers. These are concentrating on grandiose schemes while

our thinking is along the more modest lines of religious morale. Yet our programme really contains everything, whereas theirs may only amount to a mirage.

It is quite possible to establish a sort of worldly paradise and a spiritual hell at the same time. I give you Sweden as a case in point. There the grave problems of society have, according to popular acclaim, been solved; the edge has been taken off poverty and misery; and yet that country is a spiritual inferno. Such that it could provoke a hard-boiled Journal like "Time" to send over a special commissioner to investigate the state of things there because it did not believe it could be as bad as alleged.

His report stated that things were worse even than they had been represented. I ask if that materialistic solution to our problems is what we want. If we reflect, it will be evident that it is possible to solve economic problems at a price which is too much to pay. What shall it profit a Nation to gain the whole world and at the same time suffer the loss of its soul?

On the other hand, consider what the Legion has in its treasury and can give. Its vivid, restless Christianity seeks to pour itself out in every direction from great to small. It is as tender as it is tough; as full of courage as it is of faith. Its women are as brave as its men, and its men are as gentle as its women. It has a heart for every employment that seeks to serve Jesus and His Mother. It cleans up the home for an invalid with no less intensity of spirit than those four Legionary Brothers displayed recently when they entered an area which promised them a tombstone if they tried to promote Catholicism; or with which the 4,000 Chinese Legionaries met their gruesome deaths.

The manifestation of spirited service is no select business obtainable only from the higher types or as a result of long special training. It is not the product of study or of profound thinking. It seems to be quite easily picked up. It seems capable of handling any problem. You can recruit a person into the ranks and in a matter of a few months you can send him off to court that tombstone. It strangely

resembles Christianity viewed as a pure ideal, and it is for all.

The important consideration is that the Legionary is not made of better material than the non-Legionary. The raw material is the same, but the results are very different, and that fact is there for all to see. I think it would be improper to pretend otherwise out of a false modesty. One is in the Legion and has that spirit and its full philosophy. One is not in the Legion and has not got those things. So the problem is how to extend that benefit on a comprehensive scale?

When we look around us, many commendable things meet the eye. There are plenty of excellent movements, but where in them is that extraordinary blend of things which go to make up the Legion: the action, the doctrine, the attitude towards Mary our Mother, and other things too numerous to mention—as the phrase puts it. If we succeed in the sort of plan that we have been proposing to ourselves, surely it would make our era like those splendid ones of the past in which religion shook off its fetters and resumed triumphant march!

Another salutary reason for spreading the Legion lies in its relation to Mary. She is essential to religion. She is the Mother of every soul, so much so that without her the soul would not have life. But she is a Mother who cannot do her mother-work fully except her children co-operate with her. Therefore that co-operation must be forthcoming and must include a couple of ingredients: appreciation of her role and a measure of loving service of her.

Outside the Legion (I make this as a general proposition subject to honourable exceptions) she does not obtain her due in those respects. For this reason, if there were no other, it is important that everybody be given the Legion mind in regard to her. In practice will this be given outside the Legion itself? Will it be given even through our works? Not completely, I think. I have been watching sections among whom we have been working and I do not

discern in them any marked tendency towards the Legion Marian behaviour. In fact I would fear that there is a tendency towards regarding the Legion's attitude as being a little in the way of excess. Inevitably people who think thus would be led to take a step back. This could mean a withdrawal into definite deficiency. This would be an offence against Christianity itself, one which the Lord will not abide. So we must strive with a sort of desperation to make all see the Mary that we see, that wonder-working Maid who transforms everything she touches because she carries with her the source of all good.

To what extent are we acquitting ourselves of our duty of getting those who are outside to come into the Legion? The fact is that we are not really trying to recruit, gloss it over as we may. People have almost to force themselves into the Legion. We offer people auxiliary membership when we should be suggesting active membership. We are proportioning the recruiting to the works we have in hand, rather than the reverse process of recruiting as a first principle and then finding the additional works for the new manpower. We are improperly selective, even exclusive.

Apart from the gravity of denying suitable persons the philosophy which I venture to declare vital, any sort of exclusiveness on our part must inevitably constitute us as a clique. It would stir up a vein of opposition to us, and then by a freak revenge it would confine our membership to persons who will not be the most suitable. If there were a sort of feeling against the Legion, it would only be persons of rather determined will who would enter. Having thus become a separated and unpopular section, our influence would be reduced to vanishing point. I have already contended that this would inferentially mean the repudiation by the community of the things the Legion stands for, and that would be a lamentable situation.

But in the measure that the typical material of a place enters the Legion in number, the above opposition melts away. More than that, the Legion visitation and its other works would be benignly viewed and an atmosphere created

which would be favourable for the universal extension of an idealistic programme.

Now let us analyse some of the reasons for that hesitant and narrow recruiting. I think that the root cause is our present works. These latter are too restrictive and not in line with our idea that the potential membership of the Legion is the unmobilised Catholic population. Our present tasks engage only a fraction of that Catholic potential. Neither are they proportioned to our goal of seeking out every soul with intent to do it large good.

A secondary aspect is that the bulk of those outside the Legion would not be willing to undertake the works which we are now offering them. Therefore what has to be faced up to—and I think it is beyond question of yea or nay—is a great widening of our works. In the first place, there is room for such a widening inside what has been called our traditional programme. We cannot be said to be visiting either houses or institutions with sufficient intensity. A visitation which goes a couple of times a year to a home is not visitation according to Legion ideas, because there is no friendship and no development. There is no intimacy in that performance. Indeed I think it would have to be admitted that such a visitation would be little better than Symbolic Action.

Nor have we exploited that traditional programme, which would ambition the full Christianising (including brightening and embellishment) of every aspect of life. A part of this would be the running of betterment and cultural groups, classes, clubs, societies, and even sports clubs. To do all this would need a much increased membership. New members are coming in to us, but so slowly as to demonstrate that a radical alteration of our method is necessary if even our traditional programme is to be covered.

Then even if we did cover it, I think it would still leave the title of this Article a mere theory. The Catholic multitude would still be outside the ranks of any type of organisation. It would remain in possession of undeveloped

notions of religion, and it would be an easy prey for false propaganda.

As things stand, we would not be able to cater for that potential if it suddenly entered. The Legion is not ready to receive them. The ordinary army has a framework and scheme which can be expanded to meet the emergency of war. But we have not the ideas nor the framework to receive all the uncommitted Catholics if they suddenly decided to join us—which could happen as the result of some special situation.

Now I come to what is perhaps new in our consideration—the question of those who will not undertake the Legion under present conditions. Take the ordinary rough-and-tumble man or woman in the lower social bracket, or even the chronically unemployed, a type whom our programme has been pleased to designate as “the man from the corner.” These may have little education. They are painfully shy about their religious knowledge and they also exaggerate their other deficiencies. It would be impossible to get the average one of them into the Legion if it is to mean their being immediately sent on visitation or on any other work which would entail the talking of religion. In reality they can quickly be made capable of it, but they do not now see this. Therefore if we want those classes in our ranks, and emphatically we must have them, then we must provide tasks which they will recognise as within their scope. Our agenda says that this might call for the acceptance of manual tasks. This suggestion has provoked alarm on a grand scale—as if it meant a total departure from existing practice and a change of principle. So let us examine it closely with a view to establishing our principle in the matter. How much is new in this? We have already incorporated in our works such things as the following:

Works entailing duties of a household character, for instance in our own hostels; the conducting of classes of various types; clerical work in certain cases; elementary nursing duties; supervising and organising; works of service in general—so beloved and ardently recommended by the

Legion, so Christian, and indeed to a large extent a test of our sincerity.

To some extent the element of personal and religious contact would enter into those employments, and of course the Legionary must neglect no opportunity of deepening spirituality. But in some of those cases the opportunity would be small. Would that invalidate the work as a Legion one? I do not think so, and I propose the following.

An elderly widow was no longer capable of looking after her land. Her plight became grave. A friend of mine, the retired Superintendent of a Mental Hospital, took it on himself to bring her land into cultivation. That lone digging did not afford opportunity for discussing religion, but could a nobler serving of religion be found? Incidentally it would set a whole countryside thinking in terms of true charity.

Take also the long, tiresome task of cutting the bread in our hostels. Solitary, hedged away, yet these hostels turn out the finest types of Legionaries.

I think we would want to guard against imagining some work which is purely religious in type, that is involving total talking of religion to another person, and then setting up that as the model which must be conformed to. In practice that would be a fictitious model. Only such works as the apostolate to the crowd, or conversion work, would conform fully to that pattern. Here I think we must contemplate Our Lord and His Mother whose time was not wholly given to the proclaiming of religion. Can we not associate our manual tasks with His carpentry or with her household chores?

I do not think that we need fear an adverse effect from even the most prosaic task. The Legion must be taken as a whole. The amount of "direct religion" in our tasks is by no means the only sanctifying element. Every moment is intended to be stimulating and sanctifying. At the Praesidium meeting, there are the considerable prayers, the spiritual reading, the allocutio. Then the reports are the linking up of the work with its doctrinal roots, thus turn-

ing every occupation into a living in Christ with Mary.

In addition the Legionary is subjected in some degree to the play of such things as the Curia, Congresses, Acies, Reunions, Auxiliary Rallies, Patricians, Praetorians, Retreats, Legion Holidays, Peregrinatio pro Christo, MARIA LEGIONIS, and so forth. No one in the Legion can escape from the potent atmosphere which reigns inside that comprehensive circle of formation.

It is reasonable to suppose that this total process of Legionising can avail to make people wholehearted who came into the Legion doubtfully, and would then render them willing to undertake works which at first they would not touch. So very timidly I put the question: Is a task involving religious talking any more sanctifying than the digging of that old lady's field, or that bread-cutting, it being understood that these tasks are being done in the full spirit of Legion idealism, i.e. in union with Jesus digging (as He must have done quite often Himself) or with Mary busily engaged in the daily routine of her home?

Some apprehension has been voiced lest we might abandon that vital item of our Rule which requires SUBSTANTIAL WORK. There is no question of any modification of our rules. We are going to continue to insist on substantial work, and it is the function of the Praesidium, and later the function of the Curia, to see that each and every member performs substantial work.

There is no need to suppose that this process of widening our works has to be accomplished at a stroke, like a sort of Revolution. No, our motto continues in force: "Evolution, not Revolution." What immediately happens here is a broadening of our outlook and then the proceeding along thin end of the wedge principles. This has been our method since the beginning. We have put a few people experimenting; and as each step proved fruitful, more have been assigned to the work. The wedge has been pushed in fully. A great, new work has been developed.

Now I come to something which I regard as of supreme

importance in the Legion, because it is a vital principle of life itself. We must experiment. This means taking risks, entering on unknown ground with consequential peril. But the Legion is reasonably proof against all those dangers. The system is capable alike of absorbing and of rejecting. Many examples of the latter stand out in our history. It might surprise many to learn that in the earlier days we experimented with the idea of study as a satisfying of the work obligation. That was a case where we were conclusively proved to be wrong—I do not mean in the experimenting but in the particular item. Well, we had to turn our backs on it and to bar the door against it. It might be that we would have to do the same in regard to certain of the works which would be tried in this proposed widening of scope. What of it? In that very failure would we not have been safeguarding our idealism, one part of which is that we must never be static or rest content. Another part is that we are never to be afraid, a principle which is beautifully set out by Newman: "They who never venture never gain. To be ever safe is to be ever feeble. And to do some substantial good is the compensation for much incidental imperfection."

Let us be greatly daring and suppose the Legion in a small town to be possessed of a membership of five hundred. And why not, if the idea be that of mobilising everybody to apostleship! Surely this would not mean, as some have feared, that there would be nobody doing the visitation of homes and hospitals? At present members do not abandon the difficult tasks for more congenial ones. Why should this happen in the future? It must be the care of the Praesidium and of the Curia to see that no such advantage is taken of any widening of the Legion works.

In regard to visitation, I have heard you on all occasions professing your ardent appreciation of that work. You have declared the good it was doing to those to whom you were going and the still greater good it was doing to yourselves. Then how would it be possible that you would turn your back on it, or that you would turn others from

it? Of course the visitation would not be dropped. It should be increased. For you would have more members. Out of that 500 a great number would be engaged on visitation, and covering it adequately instead of after a token fashion as is sometimes the case.

In addition every other untouched work could be attended to in such a way as to help the recipient and the giver alike. All that 500 would be attending their Praesidia and imbibing the full Legion education.

Surely the impress of all this on that town would be devastating; so that duty (that forgotten thing) and public spirit (that absent thing) would come into their own and life would be lived on the levels depicted in the Gospel!

A Nation is composed of its communities. Suppose, as a document known to you says: "A Nation were to arise which built its life on lofty standards and held up to the world the example of a whole people putting its faith into practice and hence as a matter of course solving its problems, who would doubt that such a Nation would be a shining light to the world, so that the world would come to sit at its feet for the purpose of learning." Those words were not added to the Handbook yesterday. They were always a Legion objective.

In any widening of our works we must not lay ourselves open to the charge that we are depriving people of employment. So we must keep away from those needs which would be subjects for ordinary contracts. But otherwise our ambitions should expand towards everything helpful to our neighbour, even to the creating of employment and the building up of industry, the aiding of our districts to improve themselves, the reclaiming of what is waste.

Our visitation takes us often into dwellings and surroundings which are miserable. Our respect for those who live there should compel us to put them into order.

The blind and other afflicted classes, and likewise the young, offer infinite opportunities to serve them.

Legionaries with taste could help girls to make the most

of their charms. Other qualifications should similarly be put to devoted use among those who are less endowed.

We never hear of legionaries being sent to help mothers of families with their household work for the sake of freeing them a little. Many of them would wish to join the Legion but cannot do so except they are helped with their burden.

Those and other kindred purposes should receive the attention of the Legion, but they will remain a pious dream until the membership is available to cover them. This brings us back to our theme: we must drastically revise our present ideas of recruiting and cast our nets widely for that potential.

Jesus and Mary were citizens of Nazareth. They lived the common life of that village with perfection. Every person and thing in it was an object of deepest interest to them; we could not conceive them as being indifferent or neglectful in any respect. Now, by the law of the Mystical Body, They live on in us and in our places with no less degree of concern. In fact with more concern, inasmuch as Our Lord lives more intensely in a baptised community even than He did in Nazareth. That solicitude has to display itself through the Mystical Body of which we are the members. If we are inactive, we fail the body and the solicitude of Jesus and Mary cannot issue.

That is the Charter for our community service.