

BRAINWASHING WITH CLEAN WATER

We look out on a scene which is troubled indeed. The world seems to be in a state of convulsions and nobody knows what is going to happen. Probably for the first time in history, humanity is seriously considering if it is not at its last days because we are now face to face with discoveries so great that it would seem as if God in His own good time is going to permit Man to terminate the existence of this world, and some people are wondering if the time is not now.

The Legion has been playing an increasing part in surprisingly many of the fields of religious thought and action, and the feeling gains ground that it is not only fitted, but intended by God, to be one of the decisive factors. This is talking the language of optimism, but I think that it will be justified if the Legion continues to grow in its numbers and not to diminish in its purpose. The numbers will come if the purpose be strong; and our purpose will depend on our motives. So I discuss the question of motives.

"Brainwashing" and Meditation

All are familiar with that system of mental conditioning by the Communists—what is called by the colourful name of "brainwashing." They have a detailed process for doing it, a long-drawn-out-one, and for its victims a rather painful and ruthless one. But really there is nothing else in that undoubtedly efficacious science but an equivalent to the

Church's system of meditation and general devotion. This is a way of supplying the mind with motives and atmosphere out of which we will look on life from a pre-determined angle.

The effectiveness of this in the case of the Communists has been evident. Likewise it has been in the case of Catholics who have sought to nourish their minds with correct motives and to keep their principles clear. But probably not so many Catholics have thus sought deliberately to give right direction to their minds. Perhaps the reason for this lies in the fact that the idea of meditation usually presents itself as an intellectual exercise. Certainly books on the subject so present it. Most of us do not feel completely equal to the mental gymnastics which seem to be proposed. It looks like a difficult business, and accordingly it will not be attempted by the ordinary people. Therefore the injunctions which are being all the time addressed to people to meditate on the truths of their religion and to condition their minds in the right way, fall upon ears that are deaf. Therefore we must put to ourselves the question: Is there a simpler way?

I think that there is, and that we are already partly in possession of it in the Legion in very simple form. The whole course of our Legion membership represents that process though we may not be adverting to it. It can be stepped up to an immense extent if we see it as a system and work it.

A Simple Way of Meditation

It consists in the idea which is proposed to us throughout all our literature: that we must unite our actions with doctrines and holy thoughts appropriate to those actions. It means that we must never do a thing simply because the

Legion of Mary says by Rule that we are to do it. We must go deeper than this and perceive what is the spiritual root out of which our action will issue like a flower. The two must go together, and it has been recommended to you that in every meeting at least one report should be seized upon to try to show that life-giving connection. By questioning and by judicious commentary we should bring to light, not merely for the reporting member but for the entire praesidium, that motive, that root. The action must be seen as a spiritual transaction. In the Legion or out of the Legion, all our life should be an expression of our Christianity. For Christianity is our life. Some doctrine must be the motive of every action. Not necessarily is the act always to be hinged on to one doctrine. We should ring the changes, now bringing in one sacred motive and now another.

Actions are Projections of Doctrine

The Mystical Body is Jesus Christ in Whom is the Holy Trinity and the Blessed Virgin and all men. Therefore in each one of our actions is being projected the Person and the action of Our Lord. That is, every one of our actions is a projection of Christian doctrine. The Christian doctrines represent the thoughts and actions of Jesus Christ. But we must try to vary the precise angle of looking at things, so that eventually we will cover the whole range of doctrine.

The ordinary Catholic and Legionary procedure accomplishes this process to a large extent, even when not specifically contemplated or properly understood. As one example of this, I mention an acute observation of the late Cardinal Bourne of England which would not occur to many minds. He said that the having of our long prayers at the beginning of the meeting was a wonderful psychological staging, as well as being an important spiritual one. Most people, in any

case in a city like London, would reach the end of the day with rather frayed nerves. After that they are just about ready to have a scrap with somebody when they come to a meeting. As a consequence many of the meetings of societies indulged in some wrangling. This is another way of saying that they are not going to accomplish much.

Legion Prayers—Tranquillisers

The Legionaries like everybody else would enter with those edged nerves, but instead of getting down to business and to trouble right away, there was a preparatory tranquillising process. They were immersed for the time of the Rosary in holy inspirations and sweetened with spiritual motives. Then when the time arrived for business, the poor nerves had cooled off. An effective soothing had taken place. This had produced results which would never be got by injunctions to be harmonious and kind to each other.

That is good. But a potent atmosphere is not enough. It can be a useful prelude to action, but it must be complemented by the deliberate feeding of motives to the mind, so that in the end we make not only the Legion meeting but our whole lives an expression of doctrine. Thereby we not only make them rich in grace, but we can even go so far as to give attractiveness to circumstances which would normally be repellent. And this is absolutely essential if we are going to face up to the worthwhile tasks such as are only going to be accomplished by devotion, sacrifice, and in some cases immense suffering. Nowadays there is hardly a post comes to us which does not bring news of the murdering or mutilation of Legionaries in the line of their duty.

Faith Expressed in Life

If Legionaries are going to a person who is distasteful to

them in some way or another, either filthy or truculent or abusive, it is necessary to counter the natural revulsion by supplying the mind with a motive which not only balances that other feeling but even weighs down the scale against it! More than that! As I have said, it can lend enchantment to that uninviting approach. It is Legionary bedrock that we think of Our Lady as coming with us to that person in whom her Son is being so badly treated. The very notion of that is compelling. At once a new ingredient has entered into the mind and so affects it that the mental processes, and the actions which follow, are radically altered.

We have all seen people working at chemical experiments. There is a liquid in a vessel. A few drops of something else are added to it and at once it becomes different. It has assumed a different colour or it has started to foam or boil. That striking change, caused by the addition of the new ingredient, is an image of the process which we are seeking to study and to apply as scientifically as possible to our minds. Our purpose is the subjecting of the mind to spiritual injections which will change the composition and the course of our ideas.

Applying Doctrine the Way to Power

We must not stop short at that simple idea of Our Lady being with us and looking after her Son; we must go on to other aspects. We must turn from her to the Holy Spirit, her Spouse without Whom she does not act. Where Our Lady is, the Holy Ghost is. She is an expression of the Holy Spirit, the making visible of His very action. That happens whether we advert to it or not. But, as so often insisted upon in our system, when these things are adverted to and understood, the efficacy of the transaction is incomparably enhanced. It is the understanding of Christian doctrine that is so

important. And conversely, if by an understanding of the divine truths we enter into the mind of Christ, shall we not also receive His power?

We could in the same action go on to the idea of the Father, and thus make the approach to someone whom we are visiting, an exercise of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. But the bringing in of all the different Persons at that moment would overburden the mind and be a distraction from the treatment which we have to administer to that individual. We have to deal with him on human lines by speech and behaviour and we cannot at the same time carry on a fully-fledged meditation. So one idea at a time is enough, but we could make all those other applications of Christian doctrine over a period, something different every week. All this is accomplishing the essentials of meditation, and yet it is only an action to which a mere thought has been added.

To Grasp a Doctrine, Practise it

It is another of the Legion's ideas that it is only by practising a doctrine that we can grasp it. The reason why the Legionaries have been able to get so much out of the doctrines of the Mystical Body and of Our Lady's Motherhood of Grace is that they are practising them. It used to be contended that those doctrines were select and inaccessible. But the root has been attached to the flower, and then both the root and flower have gained their meaning. A mental glance is all that is necessary, not a process which could be described as meditation. The thought carries on in the action and the action becomes meditation—as the soul gives dignity to the body.

In the lives of Our Lord and Our Blessed Lady we will find a multitude of events and circumstances which we can

link up with the situations in which we find ourselves. And here it is necessary to insist that we must have knowledge of those two Persons for whom we are living. Therefore we must read about them, especially in the New Testament. In that little document the person of Our Lord emerges much more vividly than through any other means; His speeches and His movements are wonderfully chronicled there.

In the spiritual or physical defilement of a person, and we deal with so many who are in that plight, we can contemplate the Passion of Our Lord. If somebody reviles us or strikes us, we can think of Our Lord scourged and insulted. There is a veritable magic in that thought. If we can really represent to ourselves, in such a way that the mind accepts as true, the fact that we along with Our Lord are receiving ill-usage, that treatment, though it may hurt, has become sweet.

A Way to Holiness and Heroism

Or we can think of the Apostles as they go out from their severe flogging. No crying or whining! Nothing but a rejoicing at the thought of having been privileged to suffer for the Lord.

To descend from that exalted plane to our own conditions, let us think of that Chinese Spiritual Director who was probably the first to be condemned in the desperate persecution in China. When he wakened up to the fact that he was being marched out to be executed, he was so overwhelmed by the realisation that he was going to die for Christ that his joy became uncontrollable and was visible to all.

We must not think that the same is beyond us. The extreme measure of his sacrifice will not be so often required, but a million lesser ones will be exacted. In each

one of them, big or small, the summoning of a thought of the right kind can operate transformingly—like that ingredient added to the chemical mixture. It can give the mind the force which will lift it from the baser levels and give it the temper of holiness and heroism. But these conditioning thoughts must be valid ones. They must be something that the mind accepts as true.

Spiritualise Action: Neutralise Weakness

That supplying of counterbalance to the impulses of nature is important as enabling us to go on and perform an action which we might not otherwise do. But a higher aspect is that the action is spiritualised. An act proceeding from a mere benevolence towards a person will not open the flood-gates of grace for us as the realisation of the Christian idea would do. Actually the whole Legion system depends on those twin ideas of spiritualising our actions and at the same time proposing a counterpoise to the weaknesses of nature. From beginning to end the praesidium meeting is an exercise along those lines.

In particular the reports fulfil that twofold function. In a gentle but compelling way they neutralise a certain natural reluctance. If we were assigned to a task but never required to report on it, it would probably happen that the task would not be done. It is the duty of having to report it at the next meeting which ensures the satisfactory performance of the work.

Examine Reports

In the second place, there is that spiritualising aspect. The reports should be examined very carefully by each one listening with a view to judging if everything is going as it

should, and if the Legionary motives are in play. The praesidium should not be too easy on those who are inclined to slack. That is not a hardness. It is service to them. It is an act of love.

We must try to bring to bear all the things which will counterbalance the operations of weak nature; which will, so to speak, keep us on an even keel so that we can set out with confidence and without too much fear on that voyage of doing the Lord's work. Fear, inertia, disgust, human respect—these are the powerful enemies of the apostolate. We are dominated by them. If we do not stand up to them and battle it out in a resolute way with them, they will certainly gain the victory over us.

A Word with the Holy Ghost

We must cultivate the idea of approach to the Holy Spirit who is the source of knowledge and enterprise and zeal and inspiration and courage. We should get into the habit of having a word with Him at every difficult moment. To the extent that we do so, we gain the mastery over our weaker side. We can even become charged with divine energy. But it is important to realise that the Holy Spirit is going to answer our call. If we want ordinary light, we know where to get it. We believe that if we push a switch the room will be flooded with that light which we want. If we truly believe that by turning to the Holy Spirit we are certain to get help from Him in our difficulty, we will by very instinct hurry to importune Him.

It does not of course follow that we will get the precise aid which we demand. If we ask Him for light, it does not mean that the very first notion which flashes through the mind proceeds from the Holy Spirit. But what we must believe is that recourse to Him is going to be answered, and that in the very best way.

This whole question of stress or inclination at the beginning of our acts is all-important in human affairs. Because when a thought enters the mind, it rushes off in some particular direction. Once started, it has a tendency to continue on that course. Therefore it is vital to ensure that the initial direction is a right one. Because if two lines constantly diverge from a starting-point, one will end up at the North Pole and the other at the South Pole. Applied to the moral order, this would mean that such a divergence of ideas can end up in one case in the friendship of nations, and in the other in war. Little fires can turn into great conflagrations; so make sure that the fire that originates is the fire of the Holy Ghost and not a devil's kindling.

Spirituality and materialism both can start from the very same point. And holiness and wickedness. And success and failure. All can represent different prolongations of straight lines from the one point. Apply this principle to the situation where hopelessness and failure hold sway, and where everybody is satisfied that nothing can be done. For instance, get the Legion going, and in one minute the atmosphere has changed. At least that little group has become hopeful and is moving. Where is that going to end? Perhaps in the very opposite to that original state of deadness. Such is the difference between the positive and the negative, between nature left to itself and nature corrected and stimulated.

Moreover, this whole process operates irrespectively of people's qualities. I do not mean to say that learning and knowledge and talents do not count, because of course they do. But a useful working out of the foregoing methods does not depend on great qualities. A person without them can exploit the means of grace and perhaps accomplish more than genius could.

So in every need we must turn to those heavenly powers

and talk in simple terms to them. They know our problems better than we do, but the idea of Christianity is a co-operation between them and ourselves. We have to behave to God as if He were a human person listening to us—which of course He is, inasmuch as Our Lord is truly man.

Now let us get down to the detail of that process which we might call 'brainwashing with holy water.' That is, the methodical presentation to the mind of images and motives to which it will respond. Seek to have many of them stored in the recollection, so as to relieve the mind by change of idea. The Gospel and the literature of the Saints will furnish an abundance of them. The effort to add to them will be an effort to know God better, and He will reward that effort.

Faith is the Christian foundation. So strengthen it by various reflections. As examples of overwhelming faith, consider Mary at the Annunciation, or Mary at the Cross, or Mary at the Tomb. Or the Magi after their long journey introduced to lowliness itself—and yet not grumbling or doubting as we might have feared. They opened up their treasures and with overflowing hearts presented them. Or the Centurion seeing God in debasement and death. So when everything looks black, unprofitable, fallen down on us, turn the thoughts to such examples. It will be found that in a second our spirit is revived so that we can press on undaunted.

In these days when tales are told of attacks on women, it is necessary to fortify them for the Legion work which takes them into precisely the surroundings which their minds will fear. Let them think about the Flight into Egypt by night, off the beaten paths, away from people, through territory infested by wild animals and brigands. Moreover this cameo gives one the opportunity to dwell on St. Joseph who must never be left out of Legion affairs. For we, like Mary and Joseph, are carrying the Lord with us.

The Poor Reception—so often the Legionary fate! Turn the mind to the dire phrase: "No room for them in the Inn at Bethlehem." Or to Simon the Pharisee's cold treatment of Our Lord as his guest. Or to Our Lord's rejection by His own townspeople.

When duty has to be fulfilled in dreadful depressing conditions, give thought to the stilling of the storm; or to the miraculous draft of fishes after the whole night of absolute failure; or to the multiplication of the loaves and fishes when all resources were gone and disaster impended.

When dealing with the difficult people, think of Mary Magdalen or of the woman at the well; or of Zacheus; or of the Good Thief whose faith and reward were so great.

Supposing we are assaulted, think then of the spitting in the face of Jesus or the pulling of His beard, or the countless other outrages. Unite our plight to His in faith, and at once He is united to our condition. The wonderful union of the Mystical Body operates whereby we suffer His sufferings, and at the same time draw His merits into ourselves.

We must not think that by this union of our state with His or with Mary's, we will exempt ourselves from inconvenience. We must not imagine that the arrangement is a one-sided transaction of temporal benefit to ourselves. No, it may indeed be that we will be involved in the fate of Jesus and Mary. But if that were to be the case, we could parody an expression of the Great St. Teresa: "O happy that Legionary of Mary!"

I must make a final connection. My remarks have had relation to the Legionary work. Now I must link them with the meeting, and especially with the act of reporting. For this is our major defect, our weak spot. It is grave by reason of its part in the Legion system. The Legion stands upon the meeting, and the meeting stands on the report. Legionaries may have done a wonderful job, but listen to the tale so

often told at the meeting. Without animation, voice low, words colourless, suggesting lack of interest or the performance of a pure routine. That report is not plus; it is minus. It is a betrayal of the good work done.

So what association of ideas must be invoked to put life into that sorry performance? The *Handbook* reminds us that Mary would not be wanting in that direction when it was her duty to speak. And what of Our Lord Himself? "Never did man speak as He speaks," was the bystanders' comment on Our Lord's projection of Himself. Did the apostles go forth in a listless, lifeless, unconvincing way to bring the Message to the world?

The Holy Ghost uses even the humblest well-intentioned behaviour to convey His power. Words, being the expression of our soul and intellect, are His favourite vehicle. The report is supposed to be the image of our work. So it would be a pity to restrict the Holy Spirit by placing shoddy speech at His disposal. It is not reasonable to expect that divine communications will flow through it. Nor would it be according to His common law.