

Young Catholics Leaving The Faith

Cause And remedy.

By Rev. Eustace Dudley, S.J.
Catholic Truth Society No.c131a (1931)

[Modern readers will find this pamphlet particularly interesting both from an historical viewpoint of the troubles besetting the Church at a particular time in its history, and as an analysis of an ongoing challenge to Catholics to bring the Gospel into the lives and hearts of young people today.]

This Paper, a reproduction in substance of articles of the writer's in the "Catholic Gazette," is an attempt to supply what is becoming increasingly acknowledged to be the crying need of the present day, a deeper and clearer realisation of what our Catholic boys and girls have to face on leaving school — a matter that furnishes us with the root cause and core of our terrible Leakage — "the world, the flesh and the devil" parading in up-to-date attire as "the modern mind," an utter perversion of the revealed purpose of life and its destiny, a "world" which only those who have a conscious grasp of the Faith as the true philosophy of life can hope to grapple with successfully. This modern attitude towards life combines, in a most subtle and appealing form, freedom of religion with tolerance of an easy morality, or a refined immorality, which is simply the now recognised right of each to choose or change his or her moral code openly without losing caste. It is perhaps the most deadly challenge the Catholic Church and Christian morality have ever received, because it does not declare itself our enemy, on the contrary it accepts us as an integral part of the national life. If it dared to show its hand — and doubtless Lucifer is quite content it shall not for the present we should see it for what it is, a purely naturalistic explanation of life with a mixture of religious emotionalism, one utterly contradictory with the supernatural end of man, the Catholic body of philosophy. It is an atmosphere in which no Catholic — least of all our boys and girls — can hope to exist unless he is fully aware of it and forearmed; unless too he hold it powerless in the hollow of his hand, in the realisation of his own dignity as the privileged possessor of God's revealed Truth, one to whom power has been given to become "a son of God."

The "modern mind" is, for example, something quite different from the attitude towards morality that prevailed at the French Court in the XVII and XVIII centuries. Men and women lived loosely, but there was only one recognised philosophy of life. Sin was acknowledged to be sin, they did not pretend it was an open question whether or not God cared about it, whether we human beings are responsible to any but ourselves and the social order; nor did they pretend that a kind word or a donation to the local hospital in any case covered a multitude of sins; they knew well enough that only the Blood of God could do that. Above all even when times were worst men and women knew how to put themselves right with God, the Faith always supplied the basis for individual and national recuperation, which sooner or later generally followed.

Today in the absence of any recognised meaning to life, in the break up of the home life and parental control, in the face of so much misguided talk about "sex equality" and "the emancipation of women," above all in the cheap and varied assortment of amusements and the plentiful supply of

modern conveniences — all tending to the gradual elimination of God and to further man's self-sufficiency in his own eyes the presentation of the Faith in such a way as to arrest and rivet the attention of the young is the only possible hope of their salvation. And somehow there has been a fairly consistent failure so far, not only on the part of our primary, but to a large extent also in our secondary schools, to equip all the rising generation with the mentality necessary to cope successfully with the delusions and snares that lurk beneath this modern tolerance of all comers, all creeds, and all moral codes and theories. (Modern tolerance, sadly, is 'tolerant' of all the corners of evil that the rebellious human mind is capable of conceiving. If not stopped, this 'tolerance' will shortly 'tolerate' divorce, abortion, euthanasia, pornography, homosexuality, yes, and even genocide. Do I exaggerate? Time will tell.)

The Faith must be their living experience and certainty, before the world absorbs them. And our manner of its presentation, animated of course by the Spirit of God, must ensure this. We must bear in mind the words of Pascal, sear them into our very souls — “when the mind has seen where Truth is to be found we must penetrate ourselves therewith, and dye our very thoughts with that Faith which is so ready to escape.” But the “penetrating” and the “dyeing” must be accomplished before the subtle appeal of “the modern mind” has sounded in their ears. These boys and girls must go out into the world knowing it for what it is, anti-Catholic to the core, and inimical to all they count worth having, understanding the pagan philosophy that lies beneath this modern outlook, and where it runs counter to their own revealed philosophy of life. Above all they must meet it with “the fiery glow of their Pentecostal experience.” And no amount of shepherding into clubs and sodalities is of avail unless it is a means of rooting the Faith deep in their hearts and minds, incomplete with the average boy and girl until eighteen years of age. They must know in Whom they believe — and they cannot know unless they be nourished — and in proportion as they know so will they love, so will they live their Faith, “so ready to escape.”

If we Catholics are ever to regain our country its lost inheritance, to get a grip upon the national mind, it will be by no other means than the mass knowledge and living experience of their Faith on the part of our boys and girls; what Karl Adam calls “the broad stream of the uniform life of faith,” based on a full, clear exposition of their religion and its application to this modern life and its delusions.

Here then is the position that confronts us today. Our boys and girls are being sent out into a world infinitely more treacherous and subtle than anything with which their grandparents had to contend: one behind which, despite all the professed indifference to and unbelief in a spiritual order, the powers of darkness are busy to an unprecedented extent, if we are to judge from the appalling numbers of our boys and girls who are falling victims to its siren appeal.

We have no wish to strike a pessimistic note in our diagnosis of the case before us. On the other hand we must not fear the surgeon's knife when our life is at stake. Neither a lopped apple tree nor a woman undergoing a permanent wave treatment are graceful subjects for the painter's brush, but both treatments are necessary if woman and tree are to appear later to the fullest advantage. Nought then but good can emerge from a frank exposure of our wounds, their nature and causes. This indeed forms one of the two main purposes the writer has set before him in this paper: and the other to construct a scheme by which the whole problem of the Leakage may be attacked on a national scale, the scheme which seems to suggest itself most naturally and obviously as the outcome of so much excellent pioneer work that now lies ready to hand.

The various efforts already at work in a greater or less degree to solve the problem, as well as our present-day needs and shortcomings were admirably summed up at an informal Conference held at the Catholic Workers' College, Oxford, 7th to 9th April, 1931, to discuss primarily the needs of the Catholic Working Boy; though the conclusions arrived at and the suggested methods of dealing with the Leakage could be applied equally well to the case of the girls. The conclusions formulated at the Oxford Conference — supplemented by the considered judgment of other individual thinkers — centre attention upon three main aspects of the problem: The necessity of:

I.

Improved methods of religious instruction in the elementary school, including anticipation of future dangers, both moral and social.

II.

Further instruction in the Faith, as a normal feature of parish life, for boys and girls leaving school at fourteen years of age or younger.

III.

A greater development of the less directly spiritual activities, the Club, Scouts, Girl Guides, etc., with the necessary and generous co-operation of the Men's and Women's Organisations in the various activities of our boys and girls.

And in the construction of a national scheme to deal with the Leakage-wound no one of these aspects can be neglected, no one of them can be said to be paramount. They are all obvious necessities, crying for attention. If up till now religious instruction in the elementary schools has been regarded too much by boy and girl as part of the curriculum, to be dropped like geography or history on leaving school, it has been for the reason given by His Grace Archbishop Goodier in his article on the Leakage, "The Life was the Light" a failure to present the Faith as "part of the flesh and bone of the child," as the development of a Life already infused. Religion means nothing to a child if it be not its own growing experience. And it is this which is too often lost sight of in the multiplicity and detail of question and answer — leaving the fatal impression on the mind of the pupils that the religious instruction hour is just one of many subjects; so that on quitting school and its restraints their religion becomes all too often at best an appendage, but comparatively unimportant, and quite unrelated to the new interests that now absorb them.

His Grace the Archbishop of Birmingham, (Archbishop Thomas Williams) who was present at, and addressed the Oxford Conference, dealing with the same subject, pleads in "The Clergy Review" of May, 1931, for a revised and rearranged Catechism, which would make Christ and His Redemptive work the centre or axle round which the whole presentation of the Catechism should revolve. So that whilst the child learns Truth, he learns too the essential Newness of Life in Christ, and he finds the heart of that life in the Mass and in Holy Communion. Salvation wrought on Calvary is passed on to him through the Mass, the continuation of Calvary; and the Mass too gives to him Christ's Divine Life in Holy Communion.

But no matter how perfect may be the method of presenting the Faith to children up to fourteen years of age, to think that they can at that age face the world safely without further instruction is to court disaster in forgetfulness of the fact that between fourteen and eighteen lie the critical years not only of character but of mental formation, or better, the character is formed by the mental nourishment received. At fourteen the child receives, at eighteen the boy or girl must know the

reason why. The average pupil is simply incapable at fourteen of knowing his or her Faith with the fulness necessary if they are to see its application to the world about them, and the true philosophy of life it provides. And no amount of shepherding into Clubs and Scout Groups can of itself supply for this essential need. The time when “bribery” ceases must come sooner or later, and then woe betide the boy or girl who has not learned the spontaneous practice of his or her religious duties.

We shall have more to say on this part of our subject further on but would wish to mention at this point that we were unaware, at the time of writing, of Father Murphy’s articles in the “Month” for January and February 1925. We mention this because we do not wish it to be thought that anything we may say is written in a contrary spirit, as to the detail in which this part of the scheme could be developed.

Included in this advanced instruction we must not forget Catholic Social and Moral Principles. There are political, social, and moral theories abroad very much at variance with the Church’s teaching and about which our boys and girls will learn all too soon, and against which they must be forewarned and so be able to counteract them with sound constructive theories. The danger note should indeed be sounded before the age of fourteen, more especially as regards moral pitfalls.

To turn to the third great aspect from which our subject must be regarded — the less directly spiritual activities — the Club, The Scouts, The Squires, Girl Guides, etc. These too are all important and form an essential part of our programme. Between fourteen and eighteen our healthy boys and girls are colts in body, and often in mind, and adventurers born, as witness their camps and “hikes.” A new world is opening before them to which they must respond, not only as immortal souls created to attain eternal life with God, but souls vested in bodies of clay, instinct with energies and ambitions, and initiative, crying for expression; but with the True philosophy of the Faith always present as the guide and interpreter of life and its purpose. What a field of work does not this aspect of the question provide for our men and women in the way of generous co-operation?

And here we must add a further necessity to any successful handling of our problem — The Home influence, acknowledged by the Oxford Conference to be one of the chief causes for the loss of Faith. For whatever projects we may formulate — and on however great a scale they may be put in practice — in the matter of improved catechetical methods and after-care work both spiritual and social, their success will always depend mainly upon the Home, whether or not its spirit and influence be Catholic. This is a responsibility which no Catholic parent can shelve upon the shoulders of either teacher or priest. The example of father and mother is what tells first, and always most strongly, with the children. Let them see the Faith colour and influence their Home Life at every turn, and they will go forth not to fall like ripe fruit into the hands of the Enemy, but sure and confident of themselves, with nothing but scorn and pity for those influences that would rob them of their God, His Church, and His Sacraments.

Here then are the three, or rather four, aspects from which our problem must be faced — how to stem and heal the Leakage Wound — The School; After-care work with its two sub-divisions, spiritual and social, and the Home influence.

But we must plumb yet deeper: we are not yet at rock bottom, if we are to build securely and permanently for the future a manhood and a womanhood Catholic to the core. Karl Adam in his “Christ and the Western Mind” diagnoses the disease most prevalent in our midst as Catholics to be individualism, the loss of that corporate sense so evident in the early Church. He calls it a “self complacent autonomy.” “The faithful” he says “infected with it cease to live in and with the Church,

as flesh of her flesh; they live alongside her in a sphere of existence which they have carefully marked off from the Church. They see the Church merely as an object, at best as an institution of truth and grace... They fail to see her, or see her but dimly, as the Body of Christ. "And yet herein, in a revival of this corporate sense, rests the only possible counter challenge to the world's collectivism and false brotherhood, excluding as it does man's essential dignity as a son of God, created not for this world as an end in itself, but for the life of God. Our one hope of victory today lies then in a much fuller realisation that the Catholic Church is not only God's institution of truth and grace, where alone the fulness and certainty of His revelation is contained, but in deepening our own spiritual lives with that corporate sense of our oneness with Christ in His Body, and through Him with one another — sharers alike of the very life of Christ through Holy Communion, "we being many are one body in Christ, for we are all sharers of the one Body."

But a few moments' contemplation of our present situation and outlook as a unit in the body politic will show why and how far we have fallen short of that ideal. Our present situation is perhaps best summed up in the following words:

"The opportunity for the Catholic Church has never appeared greater than it is today; and yet at the same time, the Church was never more obviously marking time in this country than She is today."

These words, uttered some three or four years ago by one of our greatest Catholic thinkers and historians, are, I believe, substantially true of this present year of grace, 1931. And it is a situation altogether contrary to past experience that the Church should mark time anywhere for long; either She conquers or is crushed into a tiny section of the people, almost forgotten until She springs to life again. And at present, we, in Britain, are in this unnatural position of marking time, of nicely balancing our accounts, year after year collecting our 15,000 converts, whilst at the same time, letting out another 15,000 — keeping the plug out whilst the taps flow.

The opportunity is certainly ours. There is no active persecution; on the contrary, we are highly respected. There is little or no counter-religion of a constructive trickery, puerilities, and even immorality, is there? Or is there not? Or is there enough interest in, and realisation of, the spirit world at all to-day to make it a formidable enemy?

Or again, we are assured that a wave of gross immorality is sweeping over the country, that practically all non-Catholic married couples are practising "birth-control" and the unmarried immorality of some kind, that all restraint is now thrown to the winds. I doubt very much if the country is more immoral than it was fifty years ago. Certainly things are talked about, portrayed in print and displayed before the eye in advertisements and pictures in a way which at that time would not have been tolerated and is highly offensive to right-minded people today. The cinema, by reason of the quality of its films, its enormous growth and popularity — 42 millions we read, attended the London cinemas during one week only, that before August Bank Holiday 1930 — is a growing evil; but it can hardly be said to be more suggestive than the Music-hall of 1900. I doubt if there is any clear evidence that the young men and women of today have ceased to practice self-restraint in regard to the sex-instinct in the way in which, for example, those of Bolshevik Russia are said to have become simply animalised. The youth of today have still a deep respect for clean living and manliness and a natural reverence where God and religion are concerned, little alas though they know of either.

What is really afflicting the modern mind is an inevitable reaction against the Victorian era of prudishness and hypocrisy. Youth, quite unconsciously perhaps, is celebrating its emancipation, not

from religion as in Communist Russia, but from Victorian “respectability” and its irritating restrictions upon most of the innocent pleasures of life; and which had no religious foundation whatever but was a pose inherited by our grandparents from their Puritan ancestry and adopted, by the puritans, in fanatical hatred of Catholic organised nature. There is indeed something that passes for religion in the popular mind, and which appears in various disguises in those religious stunts that our Dailies indulge in from time to time — “What I believe,” etc. We might call it Pantheistic Humanitarianism, the idea, always more or less blatant, that we humans are the highest expression of some impersonal evolutionary Force, that man is therefore responsible to no personal Being outside his own sphere, but only to this present order. It may become organised; if so, God help us Catholics, for it is the utter contradiction of the revealed end and purpose of human life. But at present we practically hold the field as a strong organised force.

Since the [Great] War [of 1914-18], neither socially nor to the various trades and professions can the Catholic Faith be said to be a bar. Deliberate caricatures in prints and illustrations, and public offensiveness against Catholics are at worst spasmodic and in bad odour. There is more; the need of religion, of public recognition of God, was expressed by leading statesmen in 1918-19, to give unity and purpose to a people who, though victorious, yet found themselves broken and disillusioned by the political and economic strife that succeeded the loss of some million of our manhood. The opportunity was and is surely ours; yet, despite the open door, we marked time in 1918 and continue to mark time twelve and more years later. The national mind, the great mass of the people, is still, to all intents and purposes, oblivious of our existence. Why is this?

Amongst other suggested reasons, there are those who profess the growth of certain counter-attractions as mainly responsible for our apparent failure. One is Spiritism, very attractive by reason of its appeal to the marvellous and the sensible, and its quick returns, though not always of the nature desired. But has any large proportion of the people ever been, or likely to be, hoodwinked by a movement so largely compounded of joy of heart and expression. It was probably the only example of a people observing, outwardly at least, the moral law without a sincere religion for its basis and for that reason, if no other, it was bound to collapse. What is really surprising is that this rebound has not carried us as a nation much further; why the people still preserve a respect for God and religion at all. For we have to remember that the modern Britisher has never known Christianity as it really is, a divine revelation, an answer to the big questions of life coming with the authority of God made Man, a religion which, through the Sacraments, uplifts men and women to be nothing less than sharers in the life of God for all eternity.

But the fact is, we, as a people, will not be frightened by bogies; and everything is a bogey to us which is not tangible and immediate. It does not matter how imminent the peril is, if not actually experienced. So, in the same way, tell the average man the country is sinking into an abyss of moral corruption and only Catholicism can save it from a Lenin, and he will answer mildly: “What’s wrong with the cinema?” or “England under a Dictator, I don’t think!”

But in reality we are far afield in trying to locate the real obstacle to our forward march in any or all of these counter-attractions — Spiritualism, Humanitarianism and the rest. The real cause of our standing still, the Real Enemy is in our midst, amongst us Catholics as well as in the opposing camp of growingly pagan Britain. He came in with considerable guile about the time Persecution and the Rival Religion went out and began to infect the whole national character like the working of a secret drug. His name? Religious Paralysis — of the creeping sort. As regards the non-Catholic world, his work is now nearly accomplished, the drugging of the religious instinct where the

supernatural is concerned. It amounts almost to a simple incapability, on the part of the masses, of visualising or appreciating the supernatural. And we use the word, not in a vague general inclusion of whatever has to do with the spiritual unseen order but in its proper restricted sense of the union of the human with the divine, of the finite creature with the Infinite God, through Grace and the Sacraments, as the whole meaning and purpose of creation, the whole importance of life. This, we say, lies today apparently outside the ken of the modern mind.

How far this drugged condition of mind where the supernatural is concerned is peculiar to this country, I cannot say; nor how far it is a psychological effect of the [Great] War, of the disillusionment and of the economic depression that followed. Nor does it matter very much for our purpose. The fact is there, nor can we wait until the economic atmosphere be healthier. It is notorious everywhere, in the British Isles, even in Ireland. Dr. Norwood bewails the fact at the [Congregationalist] City Temple: Dr. White seeks to stir up his congregations with the threat of Rome: Mr. Baldwin [the former British Prime Minister] speaks in Scotland of religion having become obscured in these days, as though it were useless to expect help from that quarter in these hard times.

That we Catholics are not immune from the effects of this creeping paralysis is evident. There is a blunting of the Catholic conscience which shows itself in many ways but most of all on the marriage question. In England and Scotland, it shows itself by the extra-ordinary ease with which mixed marriages are made and the extraordinary difficulty which we priests experience in telling the people exactly what the Church thinks about them; that She, “everywhere, most severely forbids them” (Canon 1060). That the mixed marriage is in its turn responsible for the huge leakage is everywhere evident. It has been the writer’s experience both in London and Edinburgh that in any large parish, say of five thousand souls, one third will be fervent Catholics, another third practising and many of them monthly communicants; but the remaining third have to all intents and purposes lapsed. They are not practising except, possibly, to attend the midnight Christmas Mass, and the best one may hope for is a death-bed repentance. I remember a typical case: A Catholic woman of the artisan class sends, a day before her death, one of her Protestant daughters to fetch a priest. She will know no peace until he comes, and makes the fact quite clear to all about her. She died in perfect peace, her soul saved, please God. But what of the loss to the Church — five or six sons and daughters already married or about to marry, and never having heard a word of the Faith. This is only one of hundreds of cases which are happening, not only among the poor, but in some of socially our best Catholic families — this inexcusable carelessness about marriage and its vital importance to the Faith; and which could not happen but for this blunting of the Catholic conscience. One third of the Catholic body and their children lost annually! And we wonder why we are marking time!

But this Religious Paralysis, which is so seriously sapping our Catholic vitality, has become a real strangle-hold upon the multitudes about us which only a miracle of Grace can break. It is not that the opportunity is wanting. It is rather that, the doors being flung wide open, we have rushed in only to find the Protestant world about us drugged and helpless. There is no question about liberty all over England, Scotland, and Wales, the Town-halls, the Press, bill-posting and open-air pitches are to be had for the asking, for propaganda purposes.

The writer has given missions in parts of Wales, once the hot-beds of Wesleyanism: we plastered the Town thick with bills; we made house-to-house visits; we hung our Motor Mission flag from the Town-hall; we lectured in the open. But when it came to the real thing, the careful exposition of

historical Christianity as the Catholic Church, entrusted with a divine revelation and guaranteed by divine authority, her teaching on the ultimate end and purpose of human existence, etc., one found oneself, not only in Wales but throughout Britain, wherever the Protestant tradition held sway, up against an impenetrable state of mind which could only see, in the Catholic position, a particular viewpoint; one to which we, of course, had a perfect right to cling and try and propagate, if we liked, and very interesting, no doubt! But there it all ended. That the Church can have any serious claim upon them as a people; that the subject as to which religion is true can be compared in importance with the business of living; that religion, in its essence, is anything more than respectability and feeling good; or religious controversy more than a mere battle of opinions; that heaven can be more than a glorified natural existence; still less that the only alternative to the Catholic Faith is eternal misery in separation from the Object that, alone, can satisfy man's nature — in the face of all these questions and realities, the masses appear afflicted with incurable blindness. They sense nothing of their own need. The big questions of life demand no answer in their eyes.

This strange attitude of the modern mind towards the Church — one of tolerance, yet utter misunderstanding is well summed up by Mr. Vernon Johnson in his "One Lord, One Faith," and with this quotation we will conclude the first part of our subject. He says:

"...in the minds of most English people today the Catholic Church is no more than a name. In so far as she touches their lives, she only does so indirectly. To some she is a fact that only arises in times of controversy... To others she is an ecclesiastical museum... To others, who think more deeply, she is an insoluble enigma... They cannot help but admire the amazing unity in which she holds men and women of every nation. But it goes no further and they explain away this mysterious Church by saying to themselves that the religious instinct is common to all the human race, and exists for all time, and that the Catholic Church is merely the most highly organised expression of that instinct. Their inborn dislike of authority and their national prejudice against anything foreign, prevent any deeper understanding. And so for them, too, the great secret of the Catholic Church remains unsolved."

There, then, is the Real Enemy in our midst: Religious Paralysis masquerading under many forms but always blinding the religious sense of the masses: an enemy as elusive as the Scarlet Pimpernel, because you are absolutely incapable of getting to grips with such a mentality. Are we then to sit still with folded hands till the present uncanny and abnormal situation ends in disaster? No! There are definite measures, a definite plan of attack which, if put into force, will dislodge this elusive enemy and annihilate him.

And at this point the writer would for our earnest consideration, as well as for our hope and encouragement, quote the words of another well known Catholic writer — "There is enough spiritual dynamite in the Catholic Church," he writes, "to create the greatest revolution the world has ever known, but the dynamite does not go off because the spiritual temperature is too low."

We may be perfectly aware of the truth of the first part of our quotation, the fact of the "spiritual dynamite," but we are not all so sure about the spiritual temperature being low. Some of us are thinking of Catholic Lancashire, of vast enthusiasm at Missions; or that, if only more came into the open, the success of the vanguard would fire the lagging rear with zeal and determination. Stimulants, all these, doubtless raising the spiritual temperature temporarily, but incapable of

keeping it at blood heat. A lasting spiritual awakening that will weather all storms, can only be effected by a living personal experience of the Faith.

Let us remind ourselves again where we stand: how low the mass temperature is. Hundreds of parish priests and superiors of missions, up and down the country, in England, Scotland, and Wales alike, will tell you the same bitter experience; that one third of their Catholic population have entirely lapsed; that another third go to their duties, to Sunday Mass and the Sacraments, perhaps every three months; and that the remaining third are really fervent, living and not merely practising their religion. He will tell you that at least half his peoples' marriages are with non-Catholics; and especially in the large towns and cities, that a very large proportion of his boys and girls are lost to the Faith as soon as they leave school at fourteen years of age.

And as aiding and abetting the above state of things, there are two other attendant evils damping down the spiritual fires and keeping the temperature permanently low.

There is first the habit still strong amongst us of keeping our light under a bushel, and hiding the Faith in our hearts. It is a remnant of the days of persecution, and, for it, there is no excuse today. But worse than this, there is that deadly compromise with the world about us, unspoken but implicit, that hateful separation of our Faith from our lives, that determination that the practice of my religion shall in no way interfere with my worldly affairs, instead of letting it colour and influence that life at every turn and in every sphere of my activities — a spirit which, whilst it appears to work so long as all goes well, fails inevitably when the big test comes.

If we possessed the true philosophy of life, we should see this subtle siren appeal of the world to follow the line of least resistance — and which almost inevitably ends in the mixed marriage and its attendant evils — in all its ghastly nakedness and answer with the simple truth: "If I was made for this world, I would live for it; but since I was made for eternity and to share God's life in eternity, I will live for eternity."

I think a glance at history will best serve to illustrate and confirm the truth of what we have been attempting to lay bare: that the source of all our evil today, our terrible leakage and our failure to get to grips with the national mind, and even to stir that mind to a sense of its own dire need, lies in our low spiritual temperature; and that as a preliminary to any real forward movement, the temperature of the whole Catholic organism — and not a few thousand of its best equipped members — must be raised to blood-heat.

About A.D. 300, the Roman Empire had reached its zenith. She was resting, laurel-crowned, on her oars — a dangerous situation. She was fast becoming decadent both in morals and religion — in many respects a state of things not unlike our own. Upon that Empire burst the Catholic Church like a scourge of fire. Emperors strove, again and again, to extinguish Her, only to see Her break out again the more fiercely and upon a far wider front until the heathen religion and the heathen philosophy were no more. And whilst the Empire, as such, passed, the new philosophy, the Catholic Faith, preserved and transformed all that was worth while of the ancient civilisation for the nations of the new world.

And how was it done? What really brought the proud Roman Empire, little by little, to the feet of the despised Galilean? Was it the eloquence with which Christian apologists expounded the Faith to admiring multitudes? Was it the marvellous harmony and the superiority of the Christian doctrine over that of the heathen religion? Was it by showing the weakness and failure of the heathen philosophy of life as an end in itself? Or was it the miracles of the Catholic Church? No! It was

none of these. The very foundation doctrines: the Divinity of Christ and the Passion, were utterly contradictory to the whole heathen conception of the Deity. Roman and Greek philosophers roared with laughter at the idea of God becoming man, let alone dying as man. To suppose that God should love man, Aristotle had taught, would be absurd. The miracles too would, of themselves apart from faith or at least a right disposition of heart, mean little or nothing to the heathen public. They believed much in preternatural signs; they had their magicians, wonder-workers, and oracles; and the Christian experiments with the unseen world would seem, at best, only more marvellous than their own.

No! Not by these things were they known and acknowledged as God's people and the possessors of God's Truth — but by their fruits. One third of the Christian world was not lapsing from the Faith at the time of the Empire's submission to the Catholic Faith, though large numbers began to lapse shortly afterwards during the Arian troubles that succeeded. Half the Christians were not making heathen marriages. No; the great bulk of them were living and not merely practising their religion. They realised intensely that eternal life had begun for them in the waters of Baptism that they were born again, recreated, transformed. You can see it in their very frescoes on the walls of the catacombs — the soul coming out of the water a fish — that is another Christ. You can see their grip of the supernatural in the priest's wand, held over the bread in a basket and the goblet of wine, changing them into the mysterious Fish, again the symbol of Christ, on whom they fed daily and in whom they lived hourly. It was their own vivid personal experience that Christ's promises were true — the peace and the joy and the hundredfold He had foretold "in this life." The veil between them and their eternal reward was of the flimsiest nature — miracles and visions and other glimpses of the eternal were continuous. They had a philosophy of life, a religion, which they had proved to the hilt. They knew in Whom they had believed; and therefore, they loved and followed and embraced all that He loved and embraced, and scorned all that the world embraced.

Father Grou, S.J., has a passage which very aptly describes the intense nature of the Faith of these early Christians. He writes:

"With the early Christians, to be Christian and to devote oneself to God were the same thing. He had become a supernatural being by Baptism, the entire property of God, whose only tie to earth was necessity. He lived his life in a state of perfect readiness to quit it and be with Christ ; perpetually to oppose nature and the world ; to yield unreservedly to grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit; to devote all his powers to the imitation of his Saviour, whose Will was wholly spent in doing His Father's"

Is this language intelligible to the bulk of our Catholics today? We ask. Would they not say: "Such a life is absolutely impossible for us; it is only for priests and religious. My business is to save my soul." But that they must live their lives in habitual readiness to do all, to suffer all, to sacrifice all, as existing for no other purpose than as God's creatures, to give Him glory every moment of their lives; and that the bulk of the early Christians did so live — to the average Catholic today, all this is unthinkable.

Only then by a great spiritual awakening on the part of our Catholic masses, only by raising our own low spiritual temperature to a permanently higher degree will the spiritual dynamite of the Faith go off and create the mighty revolution in the national mind we all desire. We have to make of our Catholic lay-folk preachers of the Faith by the sheer force of their own living and personal

experience of the power of that Faith. And we ask ourselves, if we have failed in the past, what methods lie ready to hand to ensure a better future, methods that we have not already employed?

There are those who will cry at once: “More missions! More evangelical missions! to our own people and on a much larger scale”; “missions given simultaneously throughout a whole diocese, accompanied by the prayers of all the faithful and especially the Religious Orders”. Such missions are, unquestionably, accompanied by great graces, but do they raise the mass spiritual temperature permanently? That is the question. I do not believe that missions, on the biggest scale possible, will tear out the roots of the evil that is in our midst, and I believe equally there is a method that will.

It is through a regular, systematised, catechetical instruction of our Catholic boys and girls, from fourteen to twenty years of age, or as near that age as possible, and given preferably by trained lay catechists licensed and approved by the bishop. There must be male and female catechists working classes of boys and girls separately, once a fortnight, for an hour, to allow of questions and answers on matters of faith and the moral teaching of the Church. A complete syllabus of instruction would have to be drawn up by the diocesan authorities along the lines, say, of Archbishop Sheehan’s “Apologetics.” The work could be very advantageously inter-related with the various efforts — spiritual and social — being now made, though spasmodically and here and there, to keep in touch with the boys and girls on leaving school.

A strong body, then, of lay catechists — men and women — fired with zeal to pour into the hearts of others what they themselves have experienced — a living Faith.

This is the first and immediate need, our mission, our responsibility for those perishing here and now, in their thousands, throughout England and Scotland, the boys and girls between fourteen and eighteen, absorbed by their general pagan surroundings, and all too often by the definitely irreligious influence of the home and workshop.

And why so easily absorbed? For the very simple reason that they never grow up in the Faith, they become stunted and remain children of fourteen. They grow up in everything else: they learn a trade or a business for the necessities of their life, but they learn nothing more about their religion for the necessities of the next — the temporal is immediate, the eternal can wait! Philosophy teaches us that the will loves in the proportion that the intellect clarifies its object to the will. There may be emotion, but the will is not gripped and held except by what the mind knows.

For sheer lack, then, of mental nourishment in their Faith, the souls of a very large proportion of our boys and girls are starved before ever they reach manhood or womanhood. Devotion becomes cold because the mind has nothing with which to attract the will in a religious direction. The images it presents for the will’s interest are just those catechism answers, those definitions of the Faith, they learned at school. But these are merely the coverings and wrappings — principally to preserve the Faith from error — which must be unwrapped, and their contents “read, marked, learned and inwardly digested,” before our youth can penetrate to the inner meaning and personal application of their Faith; see its beauty and ordered harmony; realise, the “unsearchable riches” contained, for example, in the term “state of grace;” and most of all grasp the true application of their Faith to the new world just opening before them. As it is, they leave school carrying their little parcels — their definitions of the Fall, Original Sin, the Sacraments, etc., — but all unaware of their hidden treasure; and absorbed in the thrill of the immediate present, they quickly drop those parcels by the wayside; they appear to have no connection with the business of life. The sermons they hear either are too advanced, take too much for granted, or are for children. The ten minutes, or less, instruction

on the Catechism at the early Masses, though excellent for the adult whose grip on the Faith is presumed, are but a scratching of the surface so far as concerns the youth of the parish. For this large and vital part of the Catholic community, there is little or no provision of the nature required. For them, the Faith must be presented in such a way as to furnish them with a true philosophy of life and the world about them — the crying need of today.

It will not therefore be out of place to give one illustration of just how much the Faith can be made to mean to the average boy or girl of sixteen as contrasted with the little it actually does mean, if he or she is left with his mental growth stunted at fourteen years of age; how from being a mere appendage to their lives, a round of duties carried out at definite times but essentially distinct from their lives in the world, the Faith can become a religion, a philosophy of life that colours and influences and intermingles with the whole of their activities and interests; the sort of influence that very effectively kills the likelihood of the mixed marriage, and keeps the conscience at razor edge, keenly sensitive to the snares and pitfalls of life.

The example we have taken is that of the average boy's or girl's knowledge of Original Sin and the Fall. This we will contrast with what their knowledge and realisation of these doctrines ought to be, and can be made to be, and must be, if they are to have any intelligible connection in their relations with the world about them. Properly understood these two doctrines supply the key to what, to non-Catholics, if they think about it at all, is the unsolvable problem of life and its purpose, the existence of evil, the mingled quota of sorrows and fleeting, unsatisfying joys that are the lot of all. "Man has lost the organic control of himself in the course of evolution." Thus man, unaided, senses the facts which revealed truth alone can explain.

Our youth learns at school of original sin as that stain or guilt of sin which we all inherit from the Fall of our first parents; and which Fall consisted in the act of disobedience by which our parents ate the forbidden fruit, and for which fault they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. But without careful and thorough instruction as to what these definitions mean — their full significance, that is — how are they to meet that travesty of the Fall and Original Sin as, "that doctrine which teaches that all infants born into the world are hateful in the sight of God, because, in the dim dawn of prehistoric times, a woman ate a forbidden apple"? They must be made to see that the act of disobedience, the eating of an apple, was significant of something infinitely more serious, namely the deliberate rebellion of our first parents against the Will of God with the consequent perversion and wrecking of their whole nature — the very crime of Lucifer himself, the determination to be independent of God, to find happiness in himself apart from God, and so to be like God; and into which sin and its fearful consequences, he now inveigles the whole human race in the person of Adam, our head and surety. They must be made, too, to realise that the consequences of the Fall were something infinitely more far-reaching than a cessation of a happy lazy life in Paradise, where they had but to reach for the fruits about them, and now, as a punishment, must dig the earth and make clothes. That they were deprived in that terrible perversion of themselves of all the wonderful gifts with which God had endowed them and, most important to note, which He in no way owed them as essential to their human nature as such, and which He only gave them conditionally — "in the day ye shall eat thereof ye shall surely die."

That these gifts were of a twofold nature: first, and infinitely the greater gift, "the state of grace," by which they were already partakers of the Divine Nature and destined after a short trial to the Beatific Vision: to share God's own life for all eternity. Secondly, the preternatural gifts, certain gifts of the body and mind but, like the supernatural life, not owed to them — namely, freedom

from ignorance, concupiscence, and death. These must be carefully explained: that our first parents were endowed with a wonderful knowledge and a wonderful facility for gaining knowledge of God and His works. Remind them of Scripture's words: "He filled their hearts with wisdom" — "He taught them the science of the spirit" (see Ecclesiasticus 17:6-7); also of St. Augustine's statement that Adam's understanding as much out-stripped that of us, his fallen descendents, as does the speed of an eagle outstrip that of the tortoise. Again, "God made man right," (see Ecclesiastes 7:30) that is, there was no rebellion on the part of his senses against his reason; all was in perfect order and harmony in his nature. "God made man immortal," free from death and therefore from sickness and from all ill effects from the forces of nature. In God's good time, but for the Fall, man, without having to pass through the gates of death, would have been translated to another state of life, the Beatific Vision, his body glorified and endowed with new powers like that of Our Lord's resurrected Body. These latter gifts, they must see, are not restored in this life.

And now, in the much more perfect realisation of what the Fall was and its consequences — essentially the privation of the supernatural life and the Beatific Vision (sharing God's life in eternity) and so a complete perversion of the end and purpose of our existence — our youth comes, as an immediate consequence to value the Sacraments as he never did before. His Confession and Communion are no longer a monthly duty to be fulfilled in a spirit more or less willing. The Sacraments, he realises now, are essential; that without them he cannot get back this supernatural life lost in Adam, and by his own actual sins; that they are pipes or channels so that, if severed, he cannot get into touch with Calvary; as necessary as the pipes connecting with the city's water-supply without (outside) the walls.

He is feeling nourished now, the catechism answers are being unrolled to him, he is digesting well the good food, mind and heart one in harmony. He grasps the wonderful gratuity of it all on the part of God. Why was he out of millions chosen for baptism, for regeneration, recreation, for the life of God as a "partaker of the divine nature?" "How he thirsts to have this supernatural life increased in himself as often as possible in Holy Communion — "He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life," and "abides in Me." Should he fail at any time in that life, find himself not running straight with God to the Beatific Vision beyond the veil, how he hastens to possess himself of that second plank thrown to the ship-wrecked mariner — "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven."

He has become a first century Christian now with all his devotion by the simple pressure of facts. He is quite natural and unaffected about it all; there is no strain. The mind has clarified its object to the will — that is all. Armed with the revealed facts about his present state of nature as wounded, as deprived of certain gifts of body and mind, as having a natural tendency to self; but knowing withal the glorious, almost inconceivable nature of his destiny, and the power of the Sacraments to counteract this tendency, he not only willingly accepts, but comes to rejoice in the privation of these gifts, in the opportunity thus afforded him to show his gratitude, to prove his faith and love, to bear his cross, gloriously to merit his eternal reward. He faces the world now powerful for God and the Faith — he is conscious of possessing a true philosophy of life and the world.

We reach now the last part of our subject, the question of constructing a national scheme for the practical solution of our problem, and the general nature of that scheme. It should be the one that most obviously suggests itself from the general conclusions reached at the Oxford Conference in April 1931, and which advocated a generous use of the various organisations spiritual and social that already lie ready to hand. That Conference was the first serious attempt to deal with the

Leakage on a national scale; and though the Convention did not pass beyond the stage of chronicling the Causes of Loss of Faith and suggested Remedies, it appointed a Standing Committee “to collect and distribute information, and to facilitate further intercourse.”

Amongst the Remedies advocated was the active co-operation on a much larger scale of our Men’s — and we add on our own responsibility, Women’s — Organisations, to undertake active work in the parishes in preserving the Faith of our boys and girls. As we have seen there are three main lines of approach in formulating any scheme of attack — The School, After-care Work, (spiritual and social), and the Home. It is obvious that the revision of the Catechism without a special mandate from the Hierarchy would lie outside the province of the Committee, and it is equally clear that the Home influence is a matter of the parents deepening their own spiritual lives and their sense of responsibility.

It remains therefore that projects formulated from Oxford would deal mainly with After-care work. Might it not therefore be a practical step forward if the Committee were empowered to summon a Convention at Oxford, say of two representatives from each of the different Catholic Organisations which could be said to be actively concerned, together with representatives from our Headmasters’ Conference and our Teachers’ Training Colleges, to draw up the scheme suggested? We do not pretend to be in any way exhaustive but would mention, for example, such Societies as the S. V. P. (the Saint Vincent de Paul Society) already doing splendid work in many places in saving our youths ; the C.W.L. (Catholic Women’s League) with its Social Service Work and Our Lady’s Catechists ; the C.Y.M.S. (Catholic Young Men’s Society) and its moral influence, e.g., the Clean Film Campaign in the North; the K.S.C. (Knights of Saint Columba) and their contact with the boys through the “Squires; “the C.S.G. (Catholic Social Guild) for giving instruction in Catholic Social Principles; C.E.G. (Catholic Evidence Guild) and the training of speakers and catechists for giving further instruction in the Faith. In what way, in what districts and to what extent, each could contribute to the active campaign of saving our boys and girls, and overthrowing the Enemy, could be thrashed out at such a convention, and dangers of over-lapping eliminated. (We ought not to forget the influence of the Catholic Missionary Society by reason of its varied experience throughout the country).

If this step be deemed impracticable; let the Standing Committee, appointed by the Oxford Conference, itself formulate projects from the information and material already in their hands. The resulting Scheme, however reached, having been first submitted to the Hierarchy for their approval and recommendation, should be published in our Catholic weeklies and given all the prominence possible through the various organisations concerned, and from the pulpits, each parish priest applying the scheme or part of it, according to his particular needs and circumstances.

The Catholic laity must be roused as never before, to a sense of their Apostolate. It is the Catholic Action urged again and again by the Holy Father, Pius XI, in addresses and Encyclicals, his appeal to the lay man and woman, whose help at this juncture he says is “exceedingly useful, not to say necessary.” His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop (Cardinal Bourne) has already sounded the clarion call — every boy and girl to an Association, a Sodality or Club: more workers for, and greater effort from, our Catholic organisations. Co-operation, cohesion, fervor — and they are not produced automatically — are essential today if we are to conquer the world’s false collectivism, growing apace ; if we are to counteract the disintegrating, demoralising, and paralysing atmosphere about us. His Eminence spoke at a very critical moment in the history of this country, a moment

when “There are forces arrayed against us which we cannot ignore, which are working havoc in the lives of many who are yielding to them in ignorance or forgetfulness of their baleful tendency.”

It must be recognised from the beginning that whatever scheme materialises it will have to be extremely elastic in its nature, adaptable to varying needs and circumstances, and the particular organisations practising in any particular district or parish. Much of the work for example in regard to moral issues, and vigilance committees, done by the C.Y.M.S. in the North, where numbers of this Society are strongest, might be more advantageously allotted to the K.S.C. in the South. Or again, the difficulties and dangers, moral and social, of a small country town, and in rural districts are obviously not the same as those in a thickly populated slum or city. But broadly we would say the scheme should rest upon the suggestions formulated in that excellent pamphlet, “A Way to end the Leakage,” by Fr. Leycester King, S.J.

Around the essentially spiritual work advocated therein, the boys’ and girls’ sodalities — and the continuation classes for catechetical instruction, — must centre all the social activities of the parish, aided by its men and women. Fr. Leycester King gives us the principle of the net to be spread throughout the land — the linking of the Boys’ and Men’s Sodalities on a national scale, and the automatic passing of the boy at seventeen or eighteen years of age into the Men’s Sodality, which latter provide the Council of the Boys’ Sodality, with the Parish Priest as Director. It is of course the now famous Accrington case, where under the working of this scheme not a boy was lost in twelve years, one quite easily applicable throughout the length and breadth of Great Britain. There is no reason whatever why the same work should not be done on a national scale for the girls, a liaison between their Sodality, i.e., the C.O.M., (Children Of Mary) and the Women’s Sodality. In this way no boy nor girl need be lost sight of when passing from one parish or district to another. The continuation classes, a normal feature of the sodality life, must include, besides a deepening of their knowledge of the Faith, also Catholic social and moral principles, in view of the serious dangers to be met. Doubtless in small parishes and rural districts the parish priest by his personal efforts, aided by Our Lady’s Catechists and others, could do all that is necessary. But in our cities and more populated areas it would appear that the best advantage would be reaped if the catechists were members of those definitely training organisations, the C.E.G. or the C.S.G., the latter undertaking of course social questions. The parish priest, or someone acting for him, would naturally act as Director of Studies of the C.E.G. Study Class, assisted by a Master and Secretary. In this way, with a definite training organisation behind you, not only are you producing the necessary catechists but are forming for your parish or district a body of speakers for definitely propaganda work either in the open or in halls.

The writer is making a successful experiment along these lines in Edinburgh, the object being to train as many speakers as possible, men and women, for whatever work the Bishop of the Diocese may require them — either as Catechists or C.E.G. speakers. The majority of the members of our Study Class are teachers; and very shortly we hope to “man” and “woman” at least three of our principal Catholic halls for explanatory lectures on the Faith. It is uphill work at first but the response is wonderful once their interest and enthusiasm for the “unspeakable riches” are stirred. One discovers too how many would-be speakers there are who have not the special gifts required to address successfully a non-Catholic and unsympathetic audience in the open, who can find a glorious outlet for their energies in the much more immediate work of saving the Catholic youth of today, by feeding their unnourished minds and so raising the low temperature of the Catholic body

as a whole — a work without which our best efforts to convert the masses are doomed to failure — the spiritual dynamite will not go off.

Such a plan as that outlined above would allow of latitude and elasticity on the largest scale. It would give the fullest play to every Sodality, Confraternity, and Third Order as well as to our Social Organisations; whilst working as a national scheme from a centre it would give unity, method and therefore increased strength to the whole lay apostolate. In this work of spending ourselves for others, we must have no die-hards. Shoulder to shoulder must be our stand: “each for all, and all for God” our motto.

But at a crisis like this the most urgent necessity is to act, not theorise. That the world about us has returned to its status naturae purae (state of pure nature), is no longer a fiction but a fact as Peter Wust so clearly shows in his “Crisis in the West.” That means that two utterly contradictory conceptions of life and its purpose are battling to the death for the soul of Europe today — a battle apparently finished in Soviet Russia and Fascist Italy and in full conflict, as we write, in Spain [a reference to the Anarchist and Communist and Socialist anti-clericalism that was to precede the Spanish Civil War]; so that the honours are fairly evenly divided so far. What will be the outcome with us? There are those alas in the Catholic camp who would urge a wholesale retreat underground to the status fidei (state of Faith), away from all contact with this modern culture. Therein lies wholesale disaster for our youth. Others, and they are right, plead for a courageous apostleship. In it lies our one hope. It is not for us to await passively — “gazing up into heaven” — the passing of the glory of this world, and the consummation of all things. Whatever Providence may have in store, whatever part the unseen conflict in the spirit world may play in the issue of the present crisis, our duty is plain — a deepening of our own spiritual lives, and a deeper realisation of the all-conquering power that is ours — if we but will. “All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth... Go... Teach... Witnesses unto Me... I am with you always...”

Our own moral and religious purification first as individuals, and then as Peter Wust in his “Crisis in the West” puts it, “inevitably the effects of our own interior life and personal disposition will reveal them-selves in our action upon our environment.” And again, “this process of regeneration (of those about us) will be accomplished in the very hour when we Catholics unite in the serious reform of ourselves.” And when this is done — “a force of attraction, natural and supernatural, will be generated so potent that none of those standing without will be able finally to resist us... A new age will dawn.”

And so he concludes, “What am I to do, and what are you to do?... Make yourself Christian: completely Christian. Then look around you, and perform the work that has been given you, according to your capacity.”
