


Australia

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 ONE great and perennial spiritual problem for Catholics everywhere is that of achieving a right attitude towards the material creation. There is in this matter some difference in the attitude to be adopted by clergy and religious on the one hand, and by the laity on the other, although the fact has not always been understood with sufficient clarity and its consequences fully appreciated. Though the vocation of the priest and religious often demands that they withdraw from many activities, the laity are to immerse themselves in the affairs of the material world in order to consecrate it to God, as Pius XII put it. At the same time, they are not to deliver themselves up to the material world, not to be completely absorbed and dominated by it. Rather, they are to dominate it in the name of God and for His purposes.

Christian history shows that this has never been an easy or a completely successful activity; and the circumstances of life in prosperous and developed countries today have certainly not lessened the difficulty, although they have changed the emphasis. Nowadays the ordinary Catholic has to deal with a condition of abundance and relative luxury rather than of shortage. This is certainly true, by and large, for the Australian lay Catholic. He has left behind, possibly for good, the situation in which he had to show patience and humility under the burden of deprivation, or was forced to struggle long and hard to impose his will on matter, to wrest a meagre living from its tenaciously held riches. A genie has been let loose in our time, the productivity of modern industry, and now the struggle is rather to control its amazing power and to use rightly it and the abundance it produces.

These are the conditions in which the Australian layman must seek to become more like Christ, and it is the function of his clerical and religious brethren to help him in this. It is not an easy matter. The problem is not to be solved by trying to make the laity act like monks and nuns, nor by giving them a few formulas culled from the great spiritual writers. There is need for a major effort at spiritual education from childhood into adult years, an effort that will seek to create in the layman a strong desire for sanctity, an

understanding that it will have to be gained by a positive personal consecration to God through the Church, and by the exercise of self-discipline in the extraordinary task of further liberating, controlling and *using* the already abundantly available perfections of creation. This sort of education is not achieved by any system that concentrates on the *defence* of the Catholic against the world and the attacks of opponents. Whereas the defensive attitude was formerly common, now the will to conquer the world for Christ must be inculcated in its place, unwarranted fear and diffidence must be set aside, and the words of Christ, 'I have overcome the world', must inspire the layman's approach to prayer, the liturgy, Christian revelation, and his fellow men.

The need for a truly Christian use of the perfections of creation is nowhere more acute than in the field of higher education.

One of the outstanding and characteristic features of the latter part of the last century and the first half of the twentieth century has been the practical abolition of illiteracy in the world. It is true that in some backward areas the proportion of illiterates is still fairly high: but the campaign for popular education has been virtually universal and only 'pockets' remain here and there with any conspicuously high proportion of illiteracy. Two interesting and important consequences have followed in the train of this contemporary development: and both of them are of immense significance to any mind that is alert to the demands of the 'acceptable time'; to the obligation, that is, to take into account the existential situation and circumstances when planning to play one's proper part in the life of the Church. The first is that not mere literacy but first-rate scholarship is now the passport to influence and leadership, to overcoming the world: and the second is that, with universal literacy, Catholics need to be more profoundly and intelligently instructed in their Faith if they are to overcome the obstacles which hamper the Church's growth, her progress to Christ, and positively contribute to the redemptive work of His Mystical Body.

Both of these consequences deeply concern all Catholics, at every level of intellectual development – but none more so than the Catholic whose vocation is to be the intellectual *élite* of the Church, in particular the University Catholic Student. Every Catholic must study his or her *milieu* for the indications that point to the appropriate apostolate in *that particular milieu*. The 'acceptable time' is not a mere matter of time, but also of what specifies the different environments at that time. In the case of the university student's

environment two things are abundantly clear: that the leaders of the future are his companions; and that men and women who form the minds of these future leaders are the members of university staffs.

The unfortunate situation in the universities which is part of the structure of *our* acceptable time, is the fact that nearly all positions of academic influence in the world of today are occupied by those who are *not* Catholics. Though often the Chancellors, the Lecturers, the Readers and the Tutors may be personally very good people, they so far outnumber the few Catholics whose scholarship has enabled them to share these positions that Catholic influence in shaping and forming the minds of the future statesmen and of the leaders of the various professions and enterprises is almost negligible. Hence one of the duties, and it is a most serious duty heavily incumbent on university Catholic students, is to conceive the ambition and to toil towards the achievement of first-rate academic scholarship. The Catholic graduate content with the Pass standard will never be called to fill the Chairs of the universities of the world, nor to carry out the equally influential task of lecturing to or tutoring the minds of the future leaders of the world in their acceptable time. Men will listen to and respect the man or woman whose views and whose vision of the world are supported by their repute for scholarship: but they will not be influenced by mediocrity.

If the Catholic student at the university humbly listens today to the answer to his question, 'Lord, what would you have me to do?' it is impossible to doubt that the Holy Spirit, ever conscious of the Church's contemporary needs, will give him to understand that the fulfilment of his specialised vocation as a Catholic student *demands* earnest and profound scholarship. He must understand that he is not at the university merely in order to obtain a degree, but essentially to equip himself to be a suitable instrument in the apostolate of restoring all things in Christ. The student must be imbued with the conviction that worldly and material success is *not*, despite all contemporary secular judgments, the meaning and the purpose of life. 'What does it profit you if you gain the whole world?' Christ asks him. It is true he must make it possible for himself to live respectably and independently, to marry and to care for his children, but throughout the fulfilment of these obvious obligations there runs the thread of the significance of the sign of the Trinity imprinted on him in Baptism and the mark of his Membership of the Body of Christ. *His* work, in *his* acceptable time,

is to put his intellectual talents to the use of influencing his contemporaries; and later, if he undertakes an academic career, of influencing the minds of those who in their turn will be influencing others as leaders in the world of today.

The second feature of our time which has a special challenge for the Catholic student is the widespread and indiscriminate availability of literature of every sort for the public mind. Knowledge of the famous, and of the infamous, writers of twenty-five centuries is no longer the preserve of those sufficiently educated to evaluate and criticise them intelligently. In ever cheaper editions, and in seductive appearance, they flood the bookstalls of the world, the good with the bad. The enemies of the Church have not been slow to take advantage of the opportunity to enter the minds of the Members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Any priest will bear witness today to the fact that he is increasingly 'put on the spot' by the depth and the seduction of arguments against the Church's authority, and against many of her most important teachings. In particular university students, representing – in fact, being – 'the Church-at-the-university', will feel the need for a far wider and far deeper understanding of their Faith if they are to play any positive part in the development of the Mystical Body under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the secular environment of their 'acceptable time'.

One thing at least may be said that is applicable to all alike: the Catholic student in the university world of today cannot any longer be left to subsist intellectually on the tabloid doctrine imparted to him in the days of his secondary schooling. The time has come – the acceptable time for him – to realise the sad inadequacy of his knowledge of the faith *vis-à-vis* the *milieu* into which he is plunged when he arrives as an undergraduate in a modern university. Unless, under guidance, he takes the care necessary to secure that he advances in his knowledge of the Faith at least as intelligently as he fills his mind with secular knowledge, he will not be responding to the needs of the Church of his time. And even if there is not the tragedy of the shipwreck of his faith, there is the certainty that he is not vitally living as a member of the *contemporary* Mystical Body.

It is, of course, impossible for the average young university student to be the prime mover in meeting these specifically modern needs. He is, in fact, at a most grave disadvantage when he first arrives at the university, for he is savouring the heady wine of emancipation and immaturely experimenting with himself and society, pre-

occupations which leave him neither the time, the inclination nor the steady judgment to weigh such important issues. This has to be done for him, and his thinking must be guided. But the important point is that it must be *his* thinking ultimately which would lead him to make any personal decisions in the matters which I have said so urgently need attention in today's university *milieu*. It is the Church's duty to see that the universities are provided with chaplains who realise deeply the importance of the two points stressed in earlier paragraphs – the crying need for Catholic academics, and the very much greater and deeper knowledge of their faith imperative in today's university apostolate.

Finally, to conclude on a quite practical note, I hope I may mention two attempts to cope with these problems in the university college where I work. In Newman College (Victoria, Australia) we have had the very great advantage in the last eight years of being able to offer a valuable annual Travelling Scholarship to attract prospective Catholic academics to fit themselves to compete on a level of equality with those who do not share their faith in seeking appointments to university staffs. On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of the ordination to the priesthood of the Archbishop of Melbourne, the Catholics of the Archdiocese offered His Grace, Dr. Mannix, a very large sum of money. His Grace accepted on the condition that the money was made over to Newman College (a residential college on the campus of and affiliated with the University of Melbourne) and administered as a Travelling Scholarship. Each year since 1952 we have thus been able to send, especially to Oxford and Cambridge, one or two young men or women who have been inspired with the desire to devote themselves to an academic career. Gradually, as these young people have returned, they have been absorbed into one or other of the departments of Australian universities – and in time we hope that this regular flow of young Catholic academics will considerably lessen the scandalous disproportion of Catholics on university staffs, at least in this country. It is a scheme which even so short an experience makes one want to shout from the housetops.

The second attempt to deal with the problems mentioned earlier is one of longer standing. One of the Fathers on the staff of the college, a full-time chaplain to the students, during the last two months of each scholastic year visits all the Catholic schools who send their boys and girls for the matriculation examination. All those who are to come up to the university after the long vacation

are interviewed, and thoroughly briefed on conditions prevailing at the university. As many as possible are then and there recruited for what is called a pre-university summer school. When the time comes, about a fortnight before the beginning of the academic year, these young people are taken to a large sea-side camp, where they are given a solid week of instruction in the apostolate of the university. On their return they are encouraged to meet in small groups throughout the year to carry on their discussions and to further their apostolic formation. The summer camp has proved to be a most powerful weapon. From its numbers have come nearly all of those who have subsequently heard the call to an academic life – and many of the friendships and the groups formed as a result of it have continued with weekly meetings long after those concerned have graduated. It is another venture towards the solution of the problems mentioned which one would like to recommend unreservedly.