COUNSELLING THE UNIVERSITY STUDENT

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THE PROBLEM OF the formation of the christian conscience in university students, with special reference to the phenomenon of loss of faith, has always been recognized as a difficult problem; but within the last five years it has, I think, become one of exceptional importance and difficulty. It is certainly a subject on which my own experience is limited, but one on which we could pool our own experiences with profit.

I would like to make it clear at the outset that I am not an expert on counselling. It may be that I am unduly permissive; but I am afraid of claiming that I have the holy Spirit on my side: I always think of Oliver Cromwell, and those of whom St Peter speaks who quoted scripture to their own undoing. I am, despite this conference, still somewhat uncertain about the discernment of spirits. I do not deny the vital importance of discernment, but I have met so many evangelicals that I am convinced that this is a field where we must tread very warily.

In short I would think that we must start with a permissive attitude, especially in dealing with the age-groups at the university: in fact, with this age-group more so than with any other, because of their own unique problems.

By the time he is eighteen, the average boy or girl, according to the Report of the committee on the Age of Majority, is a mature person.

> Eighteen is already an important watershed in life. To mention some examples of the freedom attained at this stage, at eighteen you become liable for full national insurance contributions; liable for military service when there is conscription; able to drink alcohol in public; no longer liable to care, protection or control orders; free to carry on street trading; and of course, you can apply for a commercial balloon pilot's licence. And by eighteen you can drive a car or motor cycle, be treated as an adult when in need of treatment for mental disorder and choose your own doctor and dentist within the

> National Health Service. In a sentence, at eighteen young people nowadays already become emancipated for many purposes of their personal and private lives, and are free to order them as they will.[1]

The Report goes on to point out that

> the secluded life of the students, schoolchild, or undergraduate of the pre-war period bears scant resemblance to that of his counterpart today. Today's youngster is far more likely to have taken part-time work, to read newspapers regularly and have had his horizon broadened by travel and television; he is likely to have spent a lot more time out and about with his contemporaries. He is much more likely to resent the attempts of his institute of further education to control what he regards as his private life.[2]

We were brought up to think of twenty-one as the age when people become fully mature, but the report is at pains to show that there is nothing sacred about that particular age.

> Roman historians state that the barbarians reckoned their young were old enough to carry arms and be counted as grown up at fifteen. And fifteen became the general age of majority in Britain and northern Europe during the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, though not specifically linked with fighting ability. But by the time of the norman conquest there was a change of emphasis. The role of the mounted knight became more and more important, the armour heavier and heavier, and the horses more enormous as time went on. By the time of magna carta the age for those holding in knight service had been raised to twenty-one, and there is strong authority for the view that this was directly linked with ability to hold up a heavy suit of armour and lift a lance or sword at the same time.

Twenty-one was therefore the age of majority for everyone:

> except the common people who came of age at fifteen, and it was only later that twenty-one filtered down and became the universal age for all classes.[3]

But the majority came to the view that by eighteen the modern

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[1] *Report of the Committee on the Age of Majority* (London, 1968), 5, § 125.
[2] *Ibid.*, § 127. [3] *Ibid.*, § § 38, 39.

boy or girl is a responsible person. 'We feel extremely strongly that to keep responsibility from those who are ready and able to take it on is much more likely to make them irresponsible than to help them',[1] and it concludes: 'the balance of our evidence leads us to believe that the withholding of responsibility from people of a responsible age *could* be a factor in making them anti-social'.

I have quoted this report at some length because it seems to me that the average undergraduate regards himself as a fully mature person, with his own responsibilities and authority; and as a result he inevitably has some difficulty in adjusting his new relationship – whether it be recognised by the state or not – with the authorities already established in his life: his parents, the Church and the state.

At this moment when students are just becoming conscious that they have authority and are acquiring a sense of responsibility, they are like the young emerging states, very conscious of their rights and expecting to be treated with respect.

But they need help.

So first I would counsel friendship. I would think it difficult to exaggerate the importance that good friends can have, whether of the same sex or not, especially if they are of the same age-group; for it seems to me that only their own age-group can give a real, as against a rational, assent to their problems. I would not wish to labour this point too much, but it seems to me extremely important. I wonder how many almost completely different generations we have had – that is, different in outlook – since the war? And I suspect that most of us have treated them all in exactly the same way, as though their problems were uniform.

After the war there was the age-group which considered that the older generations had failed by allowing the war to happen, and who had no faith in the future because of the bomb. Tradition had gone, and the future too. Not unnaturally there were the protesters, the 'ban the bomb' mentality. Marry that outlook to the welfare-state mentality, which was slowly emerging, face it with Suez and the space-age, and you have a new outlook. Destroy the roots and the future, open up new worlds, discourage initiative, try to encourage social responsibility, then introduce Vatican II; and you should expect an explosive situation. The present generation have never known, since they first went to a grammar school, the Church as the rock of ages. The Church, as they have known it through their ma-

[1] *Ibid.*, § 71.

turing years, has always appeared in a state of flux. It is easy for an older generation to say that whilst everything is changing, the Church is evolving, that fundamentally everything is still the same. But that is far more difficult to say if you have never had as your own the security of the pre-war traditionalist outlook.

Our problem, as priests, is to avoid giving students the answers which were meaningful to us twenty or ten years ago. For this present generation Vatican II is already 'old hat', they are already bored with it, they have heard nothing else; whereas for us it is still something new and exciting. We are conscious of the evolving, emerging Church. They only see what looks like instability. Even though we may be able to give them the answers, even though we may able to give a notional assent to their problems, I do not think it possible, for anyone who has had a completely different background, to enter fully into their frame of mind.

So I come back to the importance of fostering friendships. I would think that one can foster them by study groups, action groups, a wide variety of groups. Such groups are usually criticized in that they never do anything, their members do not learn anything, they consist of the blind leading the blind. But I would think that their primary aim is not knowledge, but a deepening of their understanding of personal relationships. They provide an opportunity for students to discuss their faith really openly; to discuss their own spiritual problems and personal problems (whatever the difference may be). They probably talk heresy; and I would think that this is usually the best way for them to get their own particular heresies out of their system. If authority comes in, unasked, and gives the answers, the pet heresies are bottled up and fester. In practice I am convinced that where two or three are gathered together, trying to sort out their problems honestly, they usually develop an almost uncanny knack of ending up on the side of the angels.

If I may be allowed what is something of a digression, I would suggest that some sort of group-therapy is especially valuable today, when families are on the move and have no roots anywhere. When neither society nor the Church is giving them roots, when the economic system makes it difficult to put down roots, then they need more than a vertical line, the 'hot-line with God' (though they need that); they also need a strong horizontal link with their fellow men. Both are, I would think, equally spiritual and both the concern of the Church, for they concern man. The traditional viewpoint which has identified the vertical line with the spiritual and relegated the

horizontal line to the 'merely social' has, I suspect, done more harm than good in denigrating incarnational values.

From the Church's point of view, some such group system would seem to be at least one way, if not the only way, to form a community in an industrialized society. We could with profit study the community development system used to fit detribalized people into an urban society. This problem is less important for those settled into a way of life, with their own family and jobs; but from the point of view of the Church in an industrialized society, from the point of view of students in huge impersonal universities, and from the point of view of the students if they are to play their part in the life of the Church, there would seem to be a need for small primary groups, intercommunicating, interlocking, overlapping.

But groups need to be counselled. Dr Bernard Towers, writing in the London *Tablet*, remarked that Koestler 'very rightly points out that man is adept at satisfying both his aggressive, self-assertive instincts, and his altruistic drive towards self-transcendance, by creating a group (family, clan, political, religious) and becoming aggressive on its behalf rather than his own. This trick has provided the basis for some of the cruellest acts of man, all the more cruel for being self-righteous.'[1] It is not uncommon for those who are fighting for their own particular cause to neglect their primary responsibilities to their family, or to their work, or to their Church.

It would seem to be very difficult to learn that it is possible to have loyalty to many different groups. Most students want to push their own particular group, and always see them as competing in a limited market; whereas they need to learn to treasure their loyalties, but to see them as co-operating with, rather than competing with, other groups and other loyalties. In the field of ecumenism, at student level, this is a lesson which must be learnt unless they are to give up ecumenism or give up their faith. In fact, I think that the advent of ecumenism has high-lighted what was already an urgent need in the life of the student.

But even so, however many friends they make, however good their groups, the students will need personal counselling, and this, I would suggest, must normally be some sort of echo counselling. Certainly not what the undergraduate complained of in the Majority Report when he said 'there are already too many adults made

[1] Towers, B., 'Biology and the electronic Village', in the London *Tablet*, (25th November, 1967), p 1224.

ridiculous by unwelcome pandering to youth in attempts to be switched on';[1] but some sort of counselling, based on respect for students' views as being essentially their own unique contribution to the Church, is needed. There is always the danger that some students will attempt to shift their own responsibilities on to our shoulders. They would like, and indeed insist, on being treated as mature, but shy away from some of their new-found reponsibilities which irk.

Within the Church we are probably all conscious that we have been brought up to treat the laity as minors. The older generations of the laity, having lived with this attitude all their lives, for the most part accept it. The younger generation will quote Vatican II at anyone who dares to do so. They know it is not our function just to tell them what to do, and yet, tragically enough, they do not know the answers themselves.

I would like to pick out three aspects of student life which are all interconnected, and in which it is particularly easy for a student to become demoralized, and so undermine his faith; so that he needs help over and above the help he may reasonably expect from his own contemporaries.

First, in the realm of his academic work. Every chaplain would tell you that it is only too common to meet students whose attitude to the university is that the university exists to 'produce the goods', to serve their needs. Students are still often unaware of the fundamental principles of living – that every department of life has to be lived as a dialogue; that unless they contribute something of themselves, they will be quite incapable of receiving. This selfishness or immaturity is probably the root cause of their discontents. Many, despite what the headmasters may tell us, do not know how to work on their own, at least not when this means working with no one apparently interested in their success or failure. Not infrequently, even in their second year, and sometimes even later, they discover that they were meant to be working (usually they had not been working very hard but had not discovered the reasons) on a course in which they were basically uninterested. Even more frequently, they complain that had they realized that there were other courses open to them, they would have availed themselves of them.

Again, it is only too common to meet the student from overseas who dare not fail: his family honour, and even more than that, is at stake. He carries a very unfair burden on his shoulders. Students

[1] *Report of the Committee on the Age of Majority* (London, 1968), § 448.

whose parents are teachers or particularly class-conscious find themselves under the same pressures which have nothing to do with their work. Still more frequently, one meets with students who are just filling in time: they hope something will turn up later, they have no clear objectives, may be they hope they will get married. They happened to be good at a subject at school, so they went on, under sometimes quite a distinct pressure from the school, into the university, though they would have been far happier and more usefully employed elsewhere. Again, it is not unheard of for retreat masters so to stress the importance of personal relationships that those engaged on pure research, especially if they are women, question the apostolic value of technical research. There is also the question of what is the function of the educated layman, and still more of the educated laywoman, in the Church in practice; the ideals, when translated into the harsh realities of actual living are far from clear in Britain today.

If their academic life is unhappy, pointless, drifting, purposeless, it is easy for the student to seek relief in ephemeral pursuits. He is the more likely to do this if he is also under pressure from his parents, if his 'digs' are squalid, cold and uninviting. In passing I would suggest that 'landladies' often play a most important part in the religious life of the students; though it remains true that whilst some may help them by their own family example, others may exacerbate the situation by being over-protective. The Majority Report quotes the example of the american cartoon of the pilot's mother standing in the hangar saying: 'But what's a mother for if she doesn't check your parachute and your oxygen cylinders for you?' There are some landladies who fall into this category; and not suprisingly cause as violent reactions as the most protective of mothers. Halls of residence where students find opportunities for exercising some responsibility, for making friends and with some sort of access to tutors and the academic staff, clearly provide the best solution in a difficult world.

Failure to cope with their academic problems not infrequently leads to depression, frustration and breakdowns, and, by causing unhappiness, can be the root cause of many moral problems, including those specifically about faith. Few problems can be completely isolated into water-tight compartments; and it is not always clear which are the primaries and which the secondaries.

A more obvious cause of student demoralization is difficulties arising from personal relationships. Most students have not previously been their own economic masters, nor have they been free in the

disposal of their time, nor have they had a place which they could truly call their own. Many find the blatant immorality of others disturbing, especially if they are still inexperienced in organizing their own lives. I find that most students, catholic and non-catholic alike, condemn promiscuity among their contemporaries, but far fewer condemn pre-marital sex. I have frequently found young people new to university life appalled that an invitation to a dance is looked upon by some males as the equivalent of an assignation. How can a decent girl both mix and keep her standards? I would think this is probably not more difficult in university circles than elsewhere; but the student who comes up against this problem in all its crudity for the first time can easily react in a variety of ways; be bewildered, bowled over, driven back on herself away from society, according to her own background and unbringing. Those who do in practice enter on pre-marital sex, so far as I know, are not only normally opposed to promiscuity but say they will expect fidelity in marriage, and often regard their present liaisons as likely to be formalized at a later stage in the public forum by a marriage service. In the meantime they would regard themselves as faithful within their own particular field.

I would think that many of them have lost, or perhaps never had, the sense of absolute right and wrong with which we were brought up. They see the Church as changing her position on many things; in the meantime they hear from all sides that conscience is paramount, and they want to please. If the Church does not seem helpful to them in this crisis of their personal relationships, and if, as seems to be frequently the case, they think all that christian morality is centred on sex, then, because they identify their faith with a sex morality which does not seem to help them, they think they have lost their faith. They are, I would think, less able than earlier generations to say, 'I have sinned', because even their notion of sin is often confused.

But many students who have no particular problems in their work, or with their parents, or in their personal relationships, fall away from the Church. One could categorise them in various ways, according to their attitudes to the Church.

Traditionally it has always been assumed that there are some ultra-conservatives who adopt an escapist attitude, and, washing their hands of a sinful world, escape into their own ivory castle. Few of these survive in the universities, even if they survive elsewhere. I sometimes wonder if they ever did exist except in the imaginations

of those who want to put up Aunt Sallies which can easily be knocked down.

There is another group, not quite so conservative, who, brought up in the 'old religion', are unwilling to discuss their faith for fear of losing it. They accept every change with difficulty: but they accept them because of their spirit of obedience and respect for the Church, the bishops and the priests. Living a personal religion by the rule, with fidelity, they find dialogue difficult. They satisfy their own conscience by social works, usually of their own choosing. They welcome black and white answers; they want to be led. The evangelical approach may be *simpliste*, but is very attractive to them. There may be a danger if we satisfy their needs; for somewhere along the line they have to meet with some astringency, if there is to be any growth. Right timing seems of the essence.

There is another group who have grasped the modern catechetics; who see their faith as a going out into the unknown, but have a reasonable grasp of the present; who do not expect cut and dried answers and see their faith as above all meaningful in their personal relations – and these most certainly include their relationships with God in Christ. They love Christ, they respect the law even though they are conscious that they need to develop a prophetic role. They are a small group. They would agree with Oestreicher that 'radical change, revolution if you like, is both necessary and possible, and that it can only come through those who believe in it'.[1] They would accept wholeheartedly what the Pope said when speaking to the youth of Africa: 'the fact is that it is your task to overcome the opposition between what is past and the new forms of life and structure of the present'.[2]

But the majority fall between the two extremes. Feeling little sympathy with institutionalism and a legal approach, they are not yet sufficiently in tune with the modern catechetical movement or the teaching of Vatican II. With one breath they will demand that the Church give the answers, and ask to be treated as adults capable of making their own decisions. Negative, discontented and uninformed, they make up a large group. They need a vision in which the Church is meaningful for all mankind, which is existential and forward-looking. For the most part they adopt the attitude of those who in Oestreicher's words claimed 'that the individual is capable

[1] Hill, R., 'The Alpha and Omega of Dialogue', in the London *Tablet*, (4th November, 1967), p 1145.
[2] *Ibid.*, p 1166.

of making moral decisions for himself, though not for society'. This is probably the most common attitude of all.

It is partly due to an almost frightening lack of historical sense. I would want to underline what Illtyd Trethowan wrote when reviewing Hugo Meynell's book on the new theology and modern theologians. He says: 'The insistence that christianity is bound up with historical facts and promises for the future was never more necessary than it is today'; and he applauds Meynell for making the point that 'over and over again in the works of contemporary theologians one finds it taken for granted that since absolute certainty is unattainable about matters of historical fact, one cannot validate or invalidate christian belief by historical enquiry'.[1]

Having rejected what is often a caricature of the past – they think everyone lived in an ivory tower mentality before the war; they accept quite uncritically all the denigration of the past – it is not surprising that they are suspicious of authority and institutionalism as being out of touch, if not a positive hindrance. Filled with a sense of the paramount importance of conscience, and very conscious that to fulfil his vocation in a constantly changing world man must live in the present historical moment, they are not sufficiently mature to realise the dangers of modernism and situation ethics. Afraid of hurting the consciences of others, they have difficulties over standing up for the faith in public; not because they lack courage – they will speak out on political issues; not because they lack faith – they will go to all-night vigils; but because they do not wish to impose their views on others. Their morality, as they learnt it, spoke about social responsibilities in a way quite different from that in which it talked about the Church, sex, the mass. I have yet to hear someone truly contrite that he had not prepared an agenda for a committee meeting – so wasting the time of others; that he had failed in his responsibilities when chairing a meeting; that he had sinned by his failure to vote, to attend meetings, or even to write his essays well. After all, he would say, he had intended to do the right thing, and that was all that mattered. Many, it would appear, think that the Church's views on morality are identifiable with the doctrine of intention; and this they reject as unrealistic. They would claim that they were taught that failure to play their part in social responsibilities is regrettable, but a matter on which they are free; – whereas on the sixth commandment . . . that is a different matter.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p 1151.

In short, they would regard the Church as teaching that their social responsibilities are an optional extra. Some accept this, and refuse to allow their personal views to affect others; others reject this view as unrealistic, and think that they are thereby rejecting the Church.

I would think, and I must stress the fact that these are only my own reflections on a rapidly changing scene, that the bishop of Woolwich has analysed the situation admirably in the *New Reformation*, when he maintains that the present generation does not ask 'how do I reach God?'; it does not start from the fact of revelation but from personal relationships. 'It begins, not from revelation in which it has no prior confidence, but from relationships which it is prepared to treat with a greater seriousness than any generation before it'.[1] 'To ask men to believe in the doctrine or to accept the revelation before they see it for themselves as the definition of their experience and the depth of their relationship is to ask what to this generation, with its schooling in an empirical approach to everything, seems increasingly hollow'.[2]

Criticism of Church structures which are parallel to, and separate from, those of secular society, might have been voiced by any student. His desire, quoting Colin Williams' words, that 'the forms of her renewed life should grow up around the shapes of worldly need' are exactly their views; mission should determine structure, not vice versa. He would want the visibility of the Church to be in her transforming of society: when she is apart on the mountain top, when she is the salt piled clean and white in the cellar, then she is like the leaven unmixed with the meal. She is not herself, nor performing her essential function.

Most students seem to be convinced that the work of the Church must lie in the world, working from within the world, not coming to it as an organized body from without. Hence their increasing suspicion of catholic chaplaincies, catholic societies, catholic social organizations, ultimately, presumably of much of the institutionalism even of a specifically organized catholic Church.

> The function of the manifest Church in the new reformation . . . is not . . . primarily as the organized centre into which to draw men – as if the enlarging of this circle were the object of the whole exercise . . . its normal form of existence,

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[1] Robinson, John A. T., *The New Reformation* (London, 1967), pp 33–4.
[2] *Ibid.*, p 40.

> when it is distinctively being itself, is not to be gathered together in one place, but to be embedded as seeds of light within the dark world. And within this world, by no means its only job is to make more christians, that is, more members of the manifest Church. Yet this is regularly assumed to be the goal to which the whole of the Church's mission is geared. It is taken for granted, both inside and outside the Church, that the eventual, if not the immediate, aim of all it does is to elicit that commitment.[1]

I would think the bishop's thesis is that of many, if not most, students, making them often impatient with the Church. It also explains their mental reservations over forms of catholic action which appealed to previous ages as being directly apostolic. In fact I would think that many have mental reservations over the whole notion of the apostolate as seen in the context of making all men members of the one visible Church. They want an open-ended Church, as well as an open-ended theology.

Perhaps the most frightening effect that recent events have had on students is that some feel that they are now at liberty to discuss quite openly whether they should or should not continue to be catholics. They see this as part of their open-minded search for truth. This is not only due to the publicity over Charles Davis, but also due to a misunderstanding of ecumenism, a fear of being brain-washed, a suspicion of institutionalism and all triumphalism. Many of them will say, quite openly, that they know very little of other religions, that they ought to study them with an open mind; Zen Buddhism in particular, with its freedom from structures, has a strong emotional appeal. Many students would agree with Charles Davis when he says:

> the present it seems to me is characterized by an escape into theology. This is the modern form of the retreat into the spiritual which has prevented earlier movements of reform from achieving an effectual and decisive renewal of the Church. We are dazzled by what is fundamentally an uncommitted theology, deluged with a spate of theoretical ideas that are not thought through consistently to their ecclesiastical, social and political consequences. Conceptually the theology is wonderful, but it represents an unreal world. It

[1] *Ibid.*, p 48.

> is not based upon the actual life or situation of christians, nor is it allowed to have practical effect or social expression in the life of the Church.[1]

In many different universities all over the world there have been reports of student unrest. One common feature has always been student demand to be represented on the establishment – whether it be in policy-making, on the administrative councils, or amongst those who decide on courses. They feel that they need a more responsible role in the running of the universities; they know that they have something which only they can communicate.

They also need a more responsible role within the Church. Student criticisms are usually disallowed as ill-informed, shrill, representing a minority. They may be. They are nearly always violently expressed. But just as students have their own charism which may largely consist in making mistakes and growing to maturity thereby, it would be foolish to deny that they always have, like every age-group, a unique contribution to make to the life of the Church.

If we are to counsel them, we must listen; and if we are to listen sincerely, we will find that we must not only counsel them but let them counsel us. It must be a dialogue – and not between the deaf. We may have a clearer picture of the past, but they may have not only a different but even a clearer picture of the present. And who would claim a monopoly of the prophetic role?

To return to the original question: how does one form christian students? How does one counsel them? First one must know them, and an essential prerequisite for this is availability: so that students can find you, rather than you finding them; which presumes that they know they are welcome to come and talk on their own terms.

Nearly all students seem to agree that they had very little instruction on personal prayer at school. They recognise this as a major defect in their training, and partly for this reason, I think, they welcome all-night vigils. They are also much cheaper than retreats or days of recollection.

Many come up to the university with an almost anti-catholic suspicion of piety, the rosary, benediction, etc., and are thoroughly muddled about devotion to our Lady. They usually like the stations of the cross, and more and more are interested in bible services. They are attracted by informality, often preferring services in thoroughly uncomfortable laboratories to those in church; they feel

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[1] Davis, Charles: *A Question of Conscience* (London, 1967).

that they have more to contribute, that they are more personally involved in such informal gatherings. In the same spirit, many of them are attracted by informal prayers, and once they get over the initial shyness, they are attracted by the thought of composing their own. Groups that pray together, informally, usually stay together. Much of the antipathy to benediction seems to come from the thought that it is a stylized form of prayer which they attend as onlookers, but not expressing themselves.

It is not unusual to hear students complain that they spent the last two years at school 'concentrating on the plumbing', with contraception, abortion, sterilization and other medico-moral problems as the main staple of their spiritual life.

A more valid complaint is, I would judge, that they have been given a great deal of information, but not always the right amount at the right time. Information is like a two-edged sword; it forms or deforms, but seldom does neither. It is like food, which can produce nausea and sickness if given in over-abundance. That there is a time and a place for sex instruction, all would agree. That religious instruction is intended to form, all would agree. There seems to be less realization that too much religious instruction may produce indigestion. Growth should be slow, if it is to be healthy; so I would counsel patience.

Theology lectures are probably useful: not in forming students, but at least in informing them that there is a science of theology; and this is a point learnt both by those who attend and those who do not. Whilst the closed-mind mentality can be a serious problem, I would think it comparatively rare these days. Eight years ago it was rampant; but today the pendulum has swung to the other extreme, so that theology is regarded as a free for all, and authority must answer to the demands of each man's reason. There is very little sense of the accumulated wisdom of the past. But lectures ensure that the Church's teaching gets a hearing, and the discussions, informal, endless, into the night, preferably into the small hours, is one vital factor in the students' formation.

Preaching is another – and recognized by most of the students as the most valuable contribution a catholic chaplaincy has to make. Over the past ten years I have heard nothing but praise from students for sermons which were informed, realistic, personal and convincing. They realize that they are special sermons put on for their benefit by a wide variety of preachers; and they appreciate them and quote them long afterwards. Personally I would want to

make a distinction between lectures and preaching: the one as I see it applies to conceptual knowledge, the other is essentially concerned with living the gospel.

I have not spoken of catholic action groups, not because I think them unimportant, but because they open up too large a field. An outlet in the corporal works of mercy would seem to be one of the surest ways of deepening personal faith, and time and again of helping to revivify a waning faith. In the rather artificial atmosphere of a university, such outlets become even more important. Some forms of the lay apostolate are somewhat rigid, others more flexible; some hardly encourage a spirit of initiative, but prevent self-deception in the choice of good works; others encourage a spirit of initiative and enterprise, but can produce a dilettante. I would think that all the traditional groups like the St Vincent de Paul society, the legion of Mary, sodality-cell, league of Christ the king, etc., have their own unique and quite different contributions to make. I think we need to stress the value of their different approaches. Some discernment is needed, so that students may be helped to choose that form of the apostolate most suited to them at their own particular stage of development.

I do not find that students read very much; probably the majority do not read any catholic books or papers at all. They need direction on useful articles or books, or chapters in books, and they respond to it.

Confession is, I think, the most neglected sacrament. They welcome an opportunity where they are free either to confess anonymously, or sit down and talk informally. Few confessionals are adapted for this sort of use. Confession as they have been brought up to it often appears legalistic. Few have any clear idea of the community significance of sin. I need not say anything about the mass, except to stress that it is through the mass that the community is formed.

One is saddened by hearing students say, time and again, that they have never before had an opportunity of talking freely, informally, about their faith to a priest; that had they had such an opportunity earlier they would never have given up their faith. So often they seem to feel that the Church is not absolutely honest with them: that they cannot really speak their minds, or say what they honestly believe in their own hearts, that they are in a straitjacket. They want to be listened to; they want their views to be respected and treated as serious and sincere. Within the organization of the Church as it stands today, the opportunities for this sort of

dialogue are limited. Those who went to schools run by priests, or which had effective chaplains, had their opportunities, but they represent a small minority; and sometimes indeed they seem to have been spoilt, for there are those who were so encouraged to speak their minds, who are so conscious of the contribution which they can make, that by the time they come to the university they have lost the ability to listen. One is very conscious of the fact that many a student on leaving the university may also have lost the ability to listen, and that the chaplaincies will be blamed for encouraging students to speak their minds, and unfitting them for life in the parish. To keep the right balance is difficult.

Finally, I think the fundamental reasons why a boy or girl gives up the faith are as numerous as the sands of the sea; I think that very often the whole approach to their faith is different in the case of boys and girls, but I would think that increasingly they see their faith as irrelevant in the post-war space and technological age, in which they find their own identity threatened, and in which they cling increasingly to the outlet of personal relationships. They also see their faith as unnecessary because their grasp of the significance of revelation is weak, because they have been brought up in an age which has little historical sense, and which has delighted in denigrating the past so as to enhance its own achievements. This is perhaps nowhere more true than in the field of ecumenism, where it is assumed that before the war no one could have had friendly relations with non-catholics, and in the field of morality where it is assumed that the Church was unutterably legalistic.

The bishop of Woolwich remarks that 'morality must be self-authenticating or nothing; it must validate itself because it is true, whatever the consequences for the individual. And this holds true whether or not it is conceived as grounded in anything transcendent.'[1] Few students realize that the truth they see in this statement would also have been recognized by previous ages.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that many students see the Church as having failed in the past and as an optional extra today: serving their needs, but leaving them free to avail themselves or not. Nor do they realise that if they avail themselves of the Church then they must give as well as take if they are to benefit. Very much 'captains of their souls', they would like to be captains of the Church too, but are not so clear that this will only be realized through their

[1] Robinson, John A. T., *In the end, God* (London, 1967), p 23.

own service in the Church; that they need to exercise their newfound authority in service, if that authority is to be authentic.

I have spoken much about students' concepts of the faith, of morality, of the Church. I have not spoken about their concept, or perhaps I should say the inadequacy of their concept, of God, though this is certainly another vital factor in the problem of the loss of faith.

I suspect we might be able to help them much if we ourselves only asked the right questions, and helped them also to ask the right questions. To ask the right questions, the questions relevant in the Church today, is the essential prerequisite before we can consider any answers. Maybe a conference on the questions we should ask would be even more useful than one on the answers we should give.

Finally let me say that university students are above all human. They want to be loved. They want to be saints, but they certainly do not want this in any sense of copying what others have done in the past. They want to be themselves, fully in the world, and not in quite such a pelagian sense as I may have painted. They want a holiness which will enable them to help suffering humanity, a holiness they can respect, which will stretch them to the utmost. They have as much generosity as any previous age, possibly more; but they are more intolerant. If they see an irrelevant and unnecessary Church, a lazy Church, a complacent Church, an unhappy Church, in which people are endlessly quarrelling over theories which do not seem to add up to much in practice, then it is no wonder that they turn away. And who would say that the fault is wholly theirs?