

## A SPIRITUAL MILITIA.

### ANOTHER PHASE OF THE LAY APOSTOLATE.

The world, recently, was amazed by the spontaneous and generous response of the youth of our country to the call to the colors. Recruits came from every walk and station of life into the democracy of patriotic endeavor. All other interests were cast aside; pleasures were forgotten, and, because of the nation's crisis, at the magic word of patriotism, millions generously suffered hardships and resolutely faced death. Surely, of all human emotions, patriotism is the noblest, and of all sociologic phenomena it is the sublimest. What are its springs? Here a most interesting study opens to the psychologist and sociologist. The moralist will declare that the love of country is closely related to the love of God, and the experience of the world's battlefields and senate chambers has been that the truest patriot is the man who really and truly loves God. He who serves God well will serve his country the best. Right here, the priest likewise can begin an inquiry of even a higher order, and one that will be of the greatest importance to his sacred ministry. He, too, is a student and an essential cooperator in this national edification. What more timely and logical thought, therefore, can come to him than the following: Can this magnanimity of spirit be supernaturalized and turned into a working force for religion? In other words, is not the time ripe for the organization of a Spiritual Militia?

Patriotically we urge our young men to give a period of their life to their country, why not to the Church? If army training means much to them, spiritual training will mean more. If their service is of profit to the country, it will be so to the Church too. Is not every priest conditioned to encourage some good-hearted boy or girl to give at least two or three years' service to some good work? Should not our children be taught of all service that given to the Church is the greatest; of all glory that of working for God is the highest?

This is the laymen's hour and we will be wise if we but practically note what a power one of our flock may be for good or evil.

Our Divine Lord divides the human family into two classes, those who work for Him and those who do not. "He that is not with Me, is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth." (St. Luke 10: 23.) He stands at the cradle of every generation to receive its devotion or to challenge its disloyalty. If our young men and young women could be made to understand that with Christ there is no neutral, that they must, therefore, either be for Him or against Him, either working for Him or for His enemy, the devil, then the Fifth and Sixth Stations of the Cross on the walls of our churches would mean more to our adoring multitudes, and every parish would have many Saint Simons of Cyrene and Saint Veronicas.

If our people did but realize that in the little circle where Divine Providence has placed them, they may become an invincible power for good; that they may stand for their Church, alert for its interests, zealous to reclaim the wayward, to strengthen the weak, to hinder the perverse and to save little ones from scandal, what allies we would have in our priestly care for souls. To effect this blessed condition three things are necessary, good will, a spirit of sacrifice, and the priestly encouragement and enlightenment of the faithful. Good will is an essential to Church progress and missionary activity, and of nothing has the Church so much need from her children. Nothing takes its place. Our Lord glorified good will with a pledged blessing of peace, " On earth peace to men of good will" (St. Luke 2: 14) ; " But glory and honor and peace to every one that worketh good" (Rom. 2: 10); and over the lack of good will the Holy Spirit has this lament, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God;" "All have turned out of the way, they have become unprofitable together; there is none that doeth good, there is not so much as one" (Romans 3: 10-13).

Of good will there is an abundance; but, like the scattered waters of a meadow which become a stagnant mass, offensive and disease-breeding unless turned to a useful purpose in conduit and stream, good will must be directed and streamed into channels of good. This is a work for priestly direction, a direction that presupposes zeal and generosity. Our Catholics have great impulses for good; they seek leadership. As the Israelites of old in time of battle cast their eyes upon Moses on the Mount praying for them, to-day our people turn their eyes to the priest, looking to him for inspiration and guidance.

A spirit of sacrifice is necessary in the priest and in the workers and if the leader prays and works for this grace he will taste the sweetest fruits of his ministry and accomplish one of its divinest ends, to encourage others to good; thereby, he enlarges his ministry, for our holy books say, "Quod facit per alium, fecit per se;" and he also increases his own eternal merit because he makes himself a cooperator with the charity of others. If the priest is self-sacrificing, this blessed grace will become contagious, and the love of God in his own heart, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, will be instilled in the hearts of others. After all, the measure of our sacrifice is the measure of our love of God. Love of God and sacrifice for God are convertible terms. It is delightful to serve those whom we love, and if we love much we will serve much.

The priest who will open his ministry to others will receive much divine consolation in meditating on those words of the Book of Proverbs, "Do not withhold him from doing good who is able, if thou art able do good thyself also" (Proverbs 3:27). The words of the Holy Ghost here are terrifyingly plain, and surely there is not one of God's anointed who would wish to go to his judgment without having lived out, in some perfection at least, this injunction of the Holy Ghost; for a priestly life barren of good works and wanting in encouragement to others to do good, will be an unsightly thing in God's eyes.

Another advantage of encouraging our people to be zealous is that it establishes them in Catholic practice and holds them to the best traditions of the Church. After all, it is only the manifestation of what a perfect Catholic life should be, for good works are an essential element of our Holy Religion. Faith and good works is the Catholic formula, so

that if a man should profess nothing but faith, he would be wanting in his Christian life, as also would he be who did good to his fellows without faith. There is much reason and obligation for us to make the children of Holy Mother Church feel the responsibility of showing forth good works with their belief.

"Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come." This is the prayerful lesson of our Divine Lord. Can there be found a more perfect expression of the Divine Mind and Will than He gives us in these words? He would have this to be in our hearts and upon our lips. Anything that concerns this heartfelt wish of our Divine Lord is to us of the keenest interest; therefore, even though burdened with many parochial cares, our zeal and love of our Holy Religion have no limits, but are as far-reaching as the stretches of the Universal Church. Any plan that will help to realize these words of our Blessed Lord will be a welcome message to the priest. Encouraged by this, prayerfully and humbly we place the following considerations before our reverend readers.

A spiritual militia is not a mere theory. The name may be new, but the idea is as ancient as the Church. The plan of encouraging young men and young women to offer two or three years of their life to the service of God has the cordial approbation of the Papal Delegate, Cardinal Gibbons, and other prelates, and to show its efficacy the writer would like to give some concrete examples.

During some years of a long missionary career, pastors were urged in their own parishes to engage the help of those who showed some generosity above the ordinary. As a consequence many devoted themselves to parochial and local missionary work, and, because of this, children are being saved from fatal dangers; a very large number of sacramental reconciliations have taken place; and many, after God's grace, will owe their eternity of blessedness to quiet and devoted lay apostles. Through these we have a knowledge of 800 souls brought back to their duties. These conversions happened to those who range from one to eighty years, and in every instance they were started toward God by some good soul working at the bench, or in a store, a shop, or a factory, at the bedside of the sick, or in a classroom. Understand, this is but a part statement, a recent accounting of an ever-increasing volume of good work, and all done without offence and as quietly as God's angels pass through a crowd.

It is, however, in one of the most afflicted and desolate parts of the vineyard, the Southern United States, that the value of the lay apostolate is best seen. The difficulties that obstruct the Church there in the carrying-out of Her Divine commission, "to teach all nations", can scarcely be understood by the average Catholic living in the North or the West. There are conditions existing in the South that can scarcely be paralleled in any other part of Christ's Vineyard. First of all, the dominant sentiment is essentially Protestant, and no work of evangelization is so difficult and discouraging as the attempt to reclaim to the Faith a powerfully organized, well-to-do, and well satisfied heresy, ingrained in several generations. There exist in parts the crudest and wildest conceptions of everything Catholic. The Church, in certain sections, is practically unseen and unknown, and, as a consequence, there is an extensive and profound ignorance. Provincialism and sectionalism add to this general misery; but the greatest of all

difficulties are the fear and dread of our Holy Religion, and the fierce hatred entertained toward its priesthood.

Some six years ago the Vincentian Fathers began to labor in the eastern part of the diocese of Mobile. The Community gave generously of its members to this very unfriendly, even hostile place. Several zealous and able Fathers were forced to give up this mission in these six years. They came to give a large-hearted service, to solace the burdened of mind and the heavy of heart, and to be the friends and servants of the poor and of the sick. They had no proximate or ulterior motive outside of the love of God and the love of their fellow men. Three of these Fathers suffered personal violence, one was assaulted, another stoned, and one had the hose played on him. Repeated attempts were made to destroy and desecrate the Church property.

The consequence of all this is quite apparent—that the priest's personal contact with such a people is simply impossible as things are. This is the crux of the whole difficulty, and until this be removed we will find it difficult to deliver our message, for what can be done with those who look upon the priest as a menace to society, and who have the most horrible conceptions of all that we hold to be dear and sacred. Because of this hatred of the Church, statute after statute of unfriendly legislation has been enacted. A pertinent question may arise: What is the reason of all this? The reason is deeply rooted. Years and years of misrepresentation, without a concrete Catholicity to give the lie to malicious slander; unprincipled teachers and unspeakable papers, wily demagogues who have learned that a short cut to public favor and to office is to berate Catholics; these have all contributed to this conspiracy against the Catholic Church.

It can readily be seen that to evangelize a condition of pure paganism would not be so difficult. It can also be readily seen that in the ordinary exercise of our ministrations, we priests could do little to break down these gigantic walls of prejudice and misrepresentation. Sisters, too, are powerless because they also are under suspicion. What is to be done? The Fathers did everything, published a magazine, held non-Catholic missions, carried on many charities, and were priestly in their lives. Inspiration and plan were sought from the Holy Ghost in prayer and council as to necessary action. He graciously made manifest the means to counteract this vexatious opposition.

There was, because of the fewness of our number, one thing yet untried, and this a force that has been a tremendous evangelizing power since the days of our Lord Himself—the life and the example, the cooperation and good will of a highly spiritualized laity; in other words, the Lay Apostolate. To demonstrate Catholicity through them as a merchant does his goods was the principle evoked. The invincible argument against slander was the open lives of a number of refined, enlightened, and virtuous Catholic men and women. Frequent contact with them on the part of the natives, daily association, and much questioning about their Faith and practice have accomplished results that seemed beyond the efforts of our priests. When every other means failed, the Fathers appealed to edifying and self-sacrificing daughters of Holy Mother Church to make common cause with them in the interests of our Holy Religion.

The Fathers were never attacked in dogma or principle, their enemies only making use of trite slanders and vile personalities. They were accused of all kinds of crimes. To defend themselves against such attack was only to scatter their ill repute. They realized that good works were their only defence. Their anxiety, then, was to enlist the cooperation of those who would place good works. Hence their joy when a number of young men and young women volunteered as teachers and catechists, or who in some capacity would touch the family and social life of the locality. The chief concern was to reach the mind of the child; in this lies the real hope of the mission. It surely is a sorrow of sorrows to know these little ones are maliciously filled with hatred and fear of the most glorious work that Christ accomplished on earth, His Church. How could we reach their minds? As far as the priests were concerned, it appeared to be an impossibility, inasmuch as many children are brought up in dread and contempt of them. It was left to the Lay Apostolate to solve this seemingly insuperable difficulty. To tell of their success is to relate the story of three years of hardship and struggle against insult and opposition.

In January of 1915 they started their school with three children. A perfect bedlam of hate and insult was let loose against them. The meanest kind of trickery and unprincipled obstructive tactics were employed by their enemies. They were refused dwellings, or driven from them if they found some one with enough heart to give them shelter. They were even forced to share a barn, with turkeys, rats, and snakes as their companions. Undaunted, they persevered. Their modesty, charity, meekness, and Christian refinement caused sentiment to turn gradually in their favor. The school began to increase. During that time many an insult, patiently suffered, they offered to Him who for them suffered so much. God was touched by their constancy and He realized in their favor the words of the Psalmist, "Trust in the Lord, and do good, and dwell in the land: and thou shalt be fed with its riches" (Ps. 36: 3).

Easter of this year saw over three hundred pupils on the roll. Please God, the Fathers are about to begin a school to accommodate four hundred children, and of these all but a dozen will be non-Catholic. A radical change has come over the townspeople. Street demonstrations held to terrify the teachers and drive them out of town have been suspended; disturbers of the peace and those inciting to riot against the school have disappeared; a much more tolerant spirit seems to be in evidence. To-day these devoted apostles are held not only in respect but even in affection. This progress has been made on the barest material resources. Their schools are but a number of shanties, the desks planks, and the seats soapboxes, but all this is accidental to the fact that the faculty ranks second to no teaching staff in that section of the country. Thank God! now, Catholicity has an exponent here in a number of Christian ladies, who by their charm and grace and modesty show that the Catholic Church is the mother of all that is sweet, refined, gracious, and lovable.

It may be added, in conclusion, that all this work done for religion on their part is gratuitous. The question may be asked: How do they live? As the sparrows live. Their only hope is in the Name of Him who made the heavens and the earth. Their ambition and joy is that God's Holy Name may be hallowed and that His Kingdom may come. God has rewarded this hope by touching the hearts of many who have known of their

sacrifices in this afflicted mission. Thankfulness is one of their virtues, thankfulness for the smallest consideration and benefaction. May you, dear Reverend Father, help to answer the question of how they live!

The South is one vast mission field, and apart from the non-Catholic whites there are millions of negroes to be evangelized. If we do not reach out to them soon, their conversion will be difficult. This work is too much for a few priests, or for a few scattered communities, or even for a diocese. It is our work, yours and mine. "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come" is a personal obligation. To discharge ourselves of it is life's most blessed opportunity.

Surely there is no more useful exercise of our ministry than to encourage the missionary spirit in our young. If we could only unlock the powers for good around us and set them in motion, how much more would God's Holy Name be hallowed and His Kingdom come!

Finally, we can not treat of a Spiritual Militia without mentioning the needs of home missions, for these come under the same scope. Foreign missions, surely, should be fostered and maintained. But so also should the home missions. Think of the millions and millions of non-churchgoing folk in our country; then think of the millions of negroes, and children of foreign-born Catholics. Out of this ocean of souls let us take one single element, the Italian child. What we say of him in one city, we say of him throughout the United States. It is safe to say that a very large number, by far the majority, of these little ones receive no religious instruction at all. This excludes, of course, the feverish activity of so many proselyting bodies who infest the foreign settlements of our large industrial centres; as a consequence, these abandoned boys and girls are so destitute of the knowledge of the rudiments of their religious patrimony that thousands and thousands do not know whether there be one Person in God or a multitude. This is an incontrovertible fact. Investigation will only add to its horror. It is simply appalling. I am speaking now of children, children born in the United States, children who belong to our home missions, children nearly in every case born in sacramental marriage, and almost to the individual baptized. Are not their souls and the souls of our poor negroes as dear to God as the souls of the Japanese or Chinese babies?

The devoted apostles of whom we are writing are helping in a humble way to the solution of our foreign settlements problem. Some hundreds of these children are also under their care in other parts of the country. Through the Spiritual Militia it is hoped to recruit sufficient workers to develop a larger volume of home mission work. The need of this is surely self-apparent. Some carry on the work from their homes; others who are free to do so live in community, wearing a modest civilian garb. The qualifications of those who would undertake the work are few and simple, a love of God, a zeal for souls, and a spirit of sacrifice that will cause them to willingly suffer hardships for the sake of their Holy Religion. If there be such a young man or young woman in your parish, he or she need bring nothing else to the mission.

Applications and letters for more detailed and necessary information may be sent to the Cenacle Lay Apostolate, St. Patrick's Church, Phoenix, Alabama.'

The highest ecclesiastical authority has recognized the urgent need of this movement and is hoping and praying for its support.

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