

# The nature of the Apostolate in the University.



( At a meeting of students from the various Universities of Australia Peter Wertheim gave a report on what we at the Melbourne University understand by the words "Student" or more correctly, "Intellectual" Apostolate. This report will help Freshers to get a very good grasp of the various talks to be given during the Summer School ).

## L. THE STUDENT VOCATION :

The problem faced by the Catholic student at a University is at heart, basically the same problem as faces the layman everywhere. Namely, how he is to live his life so that he sees the whole of it as a response to God's Will for him. So that he sees every part of his life as centred on Christ, so that he no longer has Christian area of his life, and secular areas, religious exercises unrelated to his everyday work, but sees all his life in the vocational and supernatural dimensions which it is meant to have by virtue of the fact that since the Redeeming work of Christ, all Christians, lay as well as clerical, are meant by God to play their appropriate part in the completion of that Redeeming work.

But though all Christians are faced with the same problem, viewing the matter from one angle, we, by virtue of the fact that we have chosen the University, and not - say - the life of a factory worker, - are faced with discovering for ourselves what is the appropriate response we as University students are called upon by Christ to make. For just as a person's growth in sanctity in the priesthood is conditional on the priest making the appropriate response to the objective demands of the priestly life, so it is that the Christian formation of the student, his growth in sanctity, is conditional on the fulness with which he responds to the objective demands, vocational demands made on him by virtue of the fact that he is a Christian University student, and not a priest or a Factory worker.

It cannot be repeated too often or too strongly, that the type of response a student is to make, that is the type of apostolate he is called on to engage in at a University, is not a matter of his private whims, his personal preferences to do this rather than that, but is dictated by the nature of the University, including its providential role in human history, and the way in which such an institution and its members are meant to play their parts in the Redeeming work of Christ. Thus it must be stressed that it is not a question of Sydney having one sort of Apostolate, Melbourne having another and Western Australia having another, and each of these Apostolates being different, but equally valid as apostolates.



But rather the truth is that there is but one essential Apostolate proper to Catholics at a University, and this because a University anywhere has a proper nature, a proper purpose and function, in the natural and supernatural order of things, and this nature and purpose is there to be discovered by us and is not subject to our whims.

Secondly, the nature of the life a Christian layman is called upon to lead is also objective, and not a matter of his own private feelings on the matter. This is because Christ makes a quite particular and specific sort of demand on His followers, and demands a quite explicit sort of action and transformation of personality. The laws of this requirement are enshrined in the Gospels and teachings of the Church.

Thus the nature of the Christian student's response is objective, and depends on the proper nature of the University, and the proper nature of the Christian life. From this it follows that the first demand made on a student is that he seek to penetrate the Truth about what a University is, what is its meaning and purpose naturally and supernaturally, what is the purpose and meaning of his particular discipline of Law, Science, Medicine, History, Philosophy etc. in the light of the Christian message. Unless the Christian student attempts this penetration in community with others, despite difficulties and frustration of such a task particularly at first, no matter what other activities he engages in at the University. Activities such as arranging talks or the faith, selling C. T. S. pamphlets, taking courses in thomistic philosophy, boning up on apologetics, organising hikes and dances, attending U. E. F. A. conferences without number, even speaking at them, he is still not yet facing up to the central demand made on him by Christ. That is the demand to understand and live the life appropriate to a Christian University student. And it follows that if he is not meeting this demand he cannot grow fully in sanctity, for sanctity comes only as the Christian strives to make a complete response to the objective demands made on him as a Christian student. This of course is not to say that the various activities I mentioned may not be called for as expressions in part of a genuine apostolate, but it is to say that they are not the heart of such an Apostolate.

## 2. SANCTITY and EVERYDAY LIFE :

Perhaps, before I proceed, I might say a word about the nature of sanctity and its relation to our everyday life. Unfortunately too many of us have the idea that our formation in holiness is somehow distinct from much of our everyday life and work. As though our sanctification went on independent of the mundane activities we are continually engaged in, in our "Secular", in inverted commas, lives. We have the idea that being a Doctor, teacher, scientist, historian, lawyer etc. is one thing, and our religious life, our growth in sanctity is another. This is a dangerously wrong image of the Christian life, particularly for the layman, for it leads him to see the major portion of his life as at best spiritually meaningful only as the subject of the morning offering and at worst as having nothing whatever to do with Christianity, except in the most negative of senses. — for example, the medico who sees Christianity as bearing on medicine, largely in terms of ethical questions, the lawyer who does likewise, or the Academic who in history thinks largely in terms of taking the Church's side in certain disputes.



It is this sort of attitude that enables Catholics at a University to hold and live according to debased values of what a University is, or what a profession is, and yet be meticulous in attending Mass and the Sacraments, being personally kind, and leading blameless moral lives, if one uses the word moral in the rather restrictive sense in which has become attached to this word. Turning now from this note on Sanctity, I wish to examine briefly the nature and purpose of a University in its natural and supernatural dimensions, secondly I wish to indicate three of the essential marks any apostolate must have and after this I hope to be in a position to discuss how such a genuine Apostolate can be achieved here at the University.

### 3. PURPOSE of a UNIVERSITY :

I said earlier that a student must attempt to discover the meaning and purpose of the University and his studies in the light of Christ's Redeeming work, for unless he does this he is in no position to live the vocation of a student. What then is the nature and purpose of a University? Briefly a University is a community dedicated to the pursuit of Truth. It is an intellectual community of its very nature because it deals in an intimate way with ideas and values. The University is both a mirror of the ideas and values that inform the society of which it is a part, and because of its nature it is either forming or deforming, extending or narrowing, raising to God or cutting off from God those ideas and values. Ideas and values which in turn have their existence only in so far as they are the ideas and values held by men individually or collectively. The University then in pursuing truth is meant to extend, mould, and guard the ideas and values of the community on all levels. It does this on the level of the professions through its graduates who become at that level responsible to God and the community for the ideas and values of that profession. It does this on a University level by those who make up its staff and student bodies being responsible for the ideas and values the University stands for. Finally it does this on the level of society as a whole because the totality of the members of the Intellectual apostolate, that is, the academics, the graduate member of the professions and the students are all committed as part of their total apostolate to those general ideas and values that shape society. By this I mean those ideas and values outside the particular field in which the lawyer, scientist, doctor is engaged by virtue of being a lawyer, doctor etc., or outside the particular discipline of the academic. For instance there is the field of education. What sort of ideas are current about education? What sort of education system should we be working towards? Again what sort of images are current concerning the type of society we are moving towards? Are they adequate ones? Are our own images adequate on this matter? The University then is an institution dedicated to man's highest end, the pursuit of the truth. As such it is morally responsible for the values that inform the society of which it is a vital part. If the University fails in its task it betrays society; if it betrays society it betrays men for society simply is men, individually and collectively. And because man is a unified being, body and soul, he is meant to achieve his salvation by living a life in this world fully in accordance with God's Will.



For the University (and for you and me) to betray its task is to betray souls. For us in fact, it is to refuse to take our appropriate part in the redemptive work of Christ. It is to fail to become incarnated in the way appropriate to us, and it is to refuse to exercise the specific form of charity proper to the, christian student or graduate. Finally, it is to refuse to play ones providential part in restoring all things to Christ the King.

Having dealt very briefly with the essential nature and purpose of a University, I pass on, in the light of this nature and role, and in the light of the nature of the Christian life, to state the three essential marks any genuine apostolate must have, be it an intellectual one, or the one proper to Y. C. W. These three marks are that it should be fully incarnational, secondly communal, and thirdly total.

#### 4. MARKS of an APOSTOLATE :

I do not intend giving elaborate arguments for saying that these three marks are essential to any Apostolate. I take it that they flow from the nature of man, the nature of Christ's redeeming work and of his Church. I will however say a few words on the meaning of these marks.

##### (a) INCARNATED :

Firstly, then, any genuine Apostolate must be fully incarnated as was like its Head. Our Lord was fully incarnated in that he was fully a man. He was not just God in a human shell, a sort of Divine automation, but a flesh and blood human being subject to every desire, hope, aspiration and need that is truly human. Moreover he was fully incarnated in the sense that he was fully attached to all the genuine values, and aspirations of human beings. Finally he was fully incarnated in the sense that he came to earth as a Jew, in the particular time and place in History, and as such he was fully to all that was best in the Jewish culture, history, and aspirations in a particularly personal and intimate way; and in this lies one of the deepest reasons for his weeping over Jerusalem.

The University Apostolate then is fully incarnated, and this means that individually in its members, and collectively as a body it must be aware of, and attached to the highest ideas, values and purposes of the University. Communally and individually it must seek to live the demand that follows from these values and purposes. On the personal level this means that the individual student should be at the heart of his particular discipline. This does not mean that he has to be a brilliant student (that after all depends on gifts as well as dedication) but it does mean that he must be aware of, and attached to, the particular ideals and values enshrined in his discipline. Moreover he must be attached to the ideals and values of the University itself, as has been said. And these attachments must not be merely mental, but must reveal themselves in his life, and issue in appropriate action. If the student's attitude and actions reveal themselves in a real interest in the society, proper to his discipline, and a willingness to spend time and energy making it worthy of the values of that discipline, .



if his attitude to his studies is marked by a steady desire to reach the truth about them and does not make his primary object the passing of exams, if he is, in his relations with other students open and frank, ready to share any knowledge he has with them, rather than hold it back so that he can defeat them at the exams, if he is prepared to spend time and energy to further the ideals and aspirations of the University as a whole, if he is prepared when he meets in his subjects, things which seem to contradict the faith, or cast a dark light on the Church, if he is prepared to face such things honestly with other students and seek the truth of these matters, rather than find out what is the Catholic line on this topic and push it whether he thinks it is true or not, if he is not part of a tight Catholic clique, but seeks to meet the needs of all his fellow students as they arise, whether they are particular friends or not, if the student is in some degree aware of all this, and endeavouring to live more fully in this way, we have indications that he has some idea of a genuine Apostolate, and is making some attempts to live it. If on the other hand he shows no interest in the values and ideals of either the University or the general community or his discipline, if he studies primarily to pass exams with indifference for the Truth, if he holds back knowledge in order to beat others in exams, if he takes little interest of his fellow students needs if they are not in his circle, then we can be quite certain that he has no interest in, or any idea of, a genuine Apostolate. We can be certain that unlike his Master he is not incarnating himself in the appropriate way.

I turn now from the individual to the Apostolate as a whole. It too must be fully incarnated. It too must be living, and witnessing to its realization of, and dedication to, the ideals and values of the University by appropriate action. If, at regular meetings of the whole Apostolate, the Apostolate is collectively deepening its understanding of, and dedication to, the aspirations and needs of the University, if concrete needs for communal action are regularly being raised and met, if more and more clearly the communal and individual action of the Apostolate is seen for what it is, i. e. Christ acting through His Church at the University, if failures by the Apostolate in insight and dedication are constantly watched for, raised when they occur, and faced, and if the University itself is in some sense aware of the Apostolate working within it, then again we can be reasonably sure that at least some semblance of a genuine Apostolate exists, and is incarnating itself in the proper way. If, on the other hand, none of these things is occurring we can be sure that no genuine Apostolate exists.

(b) IT MUST BE COMMUNAL :

The second mark an Apostolate must have is that it must be communal. This means that there must be, not just isolated individuals engaging in appropriate action, but that there must be a unity amongst all those engaged in the Apostolate. This unity should manifest itself in regular meetings of the whole Apostolate where the difficulties, frustrations, needs, and successes of individual groups or members should be increasingly recognised as being vital to the Apostolate as a whole. Thus if one group brings up at a meeting that it has become aware of the need for action



in some area of University life, this should be recognised as a call to action for every member of the Apostolate. It should naturally become a matter for the prayers of individuals, and for the Apostolate as a whole at the community Masses, Rosaries etc. Too often, unfortunately, one sees at the University, Catholic students talking and acting as though one could be an adequate member of the Church without being concerned with, and an intimate part of, the visible community of the Apostolate. This individualistic and egocentric attitude amongst so many Catholics, an attitude at once so counter to the unity of the Mystical Body and the unity of mankind, manifests how deep in our society is the essentially anti-human and anti-christian view of human personality that has become current. This attitude has as its ideal the self-made man, not needing others, but self sufficient. On the Catholic level it shows itself in the Catholic who feels or sees no need for a community of the Apostolate but feels that all that is necessary is his own private prayer and action. This attitude incidentally represents an excellent example of how ideas and values held in a society profoundly effect souls without those souls being even aware of it. It also makes clear how vital is the need for a genuine intellectual Apostolate.

(c) IT MUST BE TOTAL :

The final mark is that the Apostolate must be total. That is, as a unity, and in each of its members it must be fully committed to the vocational demands made on it. This means on the level of the individual, that he does not divide up his life by saying "well I'll give two, four, six or whatever number of hours you like to the Apostolate per week, but the rest of my time is my own". Rather it means that the individual strives to put his whole time and energy at God's disposal so that whatever demands Providence makes on him as revealed through the teaching Church, the interior promptings of the Holy Spirit, and the events of his daily life and the world at large, he is ready at all times to recognise and embrace these demands. Thus once again the demands made on the individual are objective ones, becoming clear in the actions of Providence working in the ways mentioned. On the level of the whole Apostolate the same is true and it's commitment must likewise be total. It cannot select the things it happens to feel like doing and ignore the Providential demands that should reveal themselves through its members, and claim it is a genuine one. This incidentally raises the whole matter of the workings of God's Providence in our lives, and the life of the world. I cannot go further into this here except to say that most of us live as though God's Providence were not governing the world or our lives at all. Because we live like this we fail to recognise God's calls to action when they manifest themselves in the three ways mentioned. Thus it is that we often fail to see any need to act at all, or have to manufacture tasks to do while the real work of God for us, goes undone.

5. PURPOSE of GROUP and ROLE of CHAPLAIN :

So far in this talk I have said that the Christian student is called upon to play his part in the Redeeming work of Christ by fully understanding and living the Providential demands of the life proper to a University



student. I have said that the marks of any Apostolate must be that it is communal, incarnational and total, and I have tried briefly to give some idea of the nature of a University viewed naturally and supernaturally. But in what specific way does the individual student discover in community with others the demands of his life? How is he formed within the Apostolate so that he has become fully incarnated in the University, just as our Lord was fully incarnated in the culture of His times? It is here that a discussion on the Apostolic group is called for, for it is such groups that are the centre of formation in the Apostolate. Because the University is a community of persons seeking the Truth, and because the Christian life is essentially a community of persons in Christ, it is not only fitting, but essential that some system of groups be at the heart of any Apostolate. However there are groups and groups, and it is important to try and get straight just what an Apostolic group is, what it is meant to accomplish and how it does this. An Apostolic group then is a group of people, usually from five to ten, who have come together in Christ in order to strive to discover, and live fully the appropriate life that Christ demands of them. The group should meet regularly, every week if possible for periods ranging from one to three hours approximately. Since Christ and His work are the centre of the group, meetings should start and finish with prayers, (usually short ones) that make this dedication explicit. If possible the Chaplain should always be at the meetings for the Chaplain's role is at the centre of the whole Apostolate and each group. It is his duty to form his flock in the appropriate way, it is their duty to transform the World. The Chaplain is not a sort of super quiz kid who gives definite answers to a wide range of questions from the layman, answers which in turn the layman passes on to the appropriate people at the appropriate time. It is for him to see that the layman grasps more and more fully the Providential significance, and the supernatural dimensions of all the details of his daily life. The Chaplain must see to it that the layman sees less and less of such details in purely natural terms, and he must be ready to discern and meet any tendencies on the part of the Apostolate as a whole, or the individuals who compose it towards naturalism. The Chaplain is not one member among others of an Apostolate which is a lay one, and determined by lay interests. He is in it as a Priest, and as a Priest whose specific function in that Apostolate is to watch over and encourage the spiritual growth of the souls who engage in it. If the community of the University Apostolate represents the Church to the University, the Chaplain is called on to represent the Church's treasure of spiritual teaching to that Apostolic community. He is one of the means by which the Apostolate as a whole and the individual members of it come more deeply within the central mission of the Church herself.

#### 6. STRUCTURE of GROUPS - THE THREE REALITIES :

Because then the purpose of the group is to help each other to serve Christ fully in the appropriate then as student, they must come to grips in their meetings with what has been called the three realities. These realities are, - 1. the reality of God and His Church. The mysteries and eternal Truths of our religion all of which are summed up in the person of Christ. 11. The reality of each individual who makes up the group, each one of whom has a unique, Divinely commissioned vocation.



111. The reality of the world in which we live. The reality of our milieu.

It has been found in practice that these three realities can usefully form a procedural division of each actual group meeting. Thus the first part of a meeting can deal with the reality of God, the second part with the reality of its members and the third part with the reality of the world. It must be emphasized that unless the group comes to grips with those three realities sooner or later, its members cannot discover and live Christ's demands on them. Let us turn then to each of these realities and examine them in more detail.

(a) FIRST REALITY or TRUTH - GOD :

In the first reality the group tries to penetrate more and more deeply into the heart of the mysteries of the faith. It seeks to understand the meaning for their lives, and the lives of all men of the Truths of the faith, mysteries which so often remain merely mysteries for us. Such questions as, 'what was the nature of Our Lord's Redeeming work? Was it just a 'spiritual thing' or was it meant to apply in some sense to all created things? If so in what sense, what should a Christian's attitude be to the world in which he lives in the light of the Redemption and Incarnation? What is sanctity? How is it connected with the life of the Trinity? Has the Mystical Body any vital meaning, or is it analogous to Catholic newspapers that many Catholics subscribe to on principal but never read in fact? What is the connection between the life of the Trinity within us and our lives as Apostles? What does restoring all things in Christ mean concretely for a student here and now doing medicine, law, arts, science etc?" These and a wide variety of other matters such as this can be raised in this part of the meeting. Above all it is in the part of the meeting that group members individually and collectively strive to draw closer to Our Lord - His life, His personality, His love, and the mystery of His unified Godhead and Manhood. For this reason it is essential that sooner or later the group should engage in meditation on Our Lord, His life and Church. This can be done in the group by having a selected piece of the Gospels, the Epistles, or some theological work set for all to read and one person to prepare for discussion in the group. Some groups have found this part of the meeting can work reasonably successfully by having a Gospel or Epistle one week, next week having a prepared paper on some such work as Cardigns 'Challenge to Action', Suhards 'Growth or Decline', or 'Congress' Lay People in the Church' and the third week having a talk by the Chaplain on whatever he feels relevant to the Group. The series is then repeated. It must be made clear however, that the purpose of this part of the meeting is to become fully aware of the reality of God, and the meaning of the Truths and Mysteries of the Faith, in order that the group members should come to love and serve Christ more fully and realistically. Thus it is pointless to have any kind of a discussion merely to keep to a routine. And if, as often happens in particular groups, one method proves unsuccessful, another must be tried even if it means temporally abandoning say the Gospel discussion and the Chaplain's talk.



(b) SECOND REALITY - OURSELVES :

I turn now to the second part of the meeting, the reality of the persons in the group. In this part of the meeting the members of the group seek to gain in understanding and love of each other, - they seek also to gain in knowledge of themselves in order that they must serve Christ more fully individually and collectively. By bearing one another's burdens, by encouraging and receiving encouragement from one another, by receiving direction and advice in their lives from the moral authority of the group they seek a more realistic dedication to God. In order that this commitment to, and understanding of, each other come about it is necessary that the members of the group should begin to know each other in a much deeper way. A helpful way of bringing this about has been the following -- Some time after the new member joins a group he briefly gives a report to the group on the main details of his life; his home, educational and work background, the reasons and motives leading to his present choice of vocation, anything relevant about his relationships with other people, the particular contingencies, crises or changes in direction in his life, and his own first response to the demands of the Apostolate itself, are just a few of the questions that are appropriate here. Subsequently he makes periodic (e. g. every 4 or 5 weeks) reports to the group on his action the Apostolate and on the general issues of his life as they arise. In this way each member of the group becomes progressively more aware of the real content of the lives both of himself and the other members of the group. The full significance of the life of each in the Mystical Body begins to emerge. The supernaturally communal nature of the group begins to reveal itself in a very real and concrete way. It is most important of course that this part of the meeting should be handled carefully. No pressure should be put on people for instance to reveal more than they are willingly prepared to reveal. Nevertheless, in practice it has been found that as the Group grows in dedication to each other in Christ the areas of peoples lives and personalities that are revealed become of an increasingly important and intimate nature.

With this growth of knowledge of each other, comes a deepening of love and respect between the members of the Group, while the individual is aided in facing the truth about himself without loss of human dignity. It is this part of the meeting especially that certain Gospel passages - such as 'love one another as I have loved you' take on new significance. It is worth nothing also that this part of the meeting should lead to a much greater awareness of the suffering of the world outside the group, and a corresponding increase in Charity towards the world. Finally it is the case that as this part of the meeting matures the group begins to exercise a real moral authority in the lives of it's members. It goes without saying that only supernatural Charity could enable this part of the meeting to function successfully, and again new significance is given to Our Lord's words. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them".

(c) THIRD REALITY - OUR ENVIRONMENT :

The third reality is that of the world about us, and in our





circumstances at the moment this has particular reference to the world of the University. Each one of us here is living at a particular time in History and in a particular place. We are all of us attending, or have attended the same sort of Institution, the University. Presumably these facts have a Providential significance and spiritual meaning for us. And presumably we are meant by God to seek out this meaning and significance. This part of the meeting then is where we seek to expose this meaning. As was said earlier in this talk, since we are University students, not Priests or members of the Y. C. W. we must seek out the meaning and significance of the University in all its natural and supernatural dimensions. For unless we do this we cannot come to the Truth about our vocations. Here a word must be said to forestall those who speak as follows. 'Of course we are at the University now, but most of us will be members of professions not academics. What then have we to do with the Intellectual Apostolate? Surely that is only for Academics? This is a common but mistaken attitude. While it is true that the life of the Academic is the most pure form of the Intellectual Apostolate, every member of the professions is also necessarily involved involved also. This because no profession can be divorced without detriment from the ideas, values, and purposes for which it stands. Thus the individual member of the professions will be responsible to God for how he has lived, defended and enlarged those values and purposes. Moreover as was said in a different context earlier, both academics and members of professions are responsible, as part of their Apostolate for the wider cultural issues which shape society as a whole. Perhaps to some all this talk of ideas, ideals, values etc. may seem slightly interesting but rather theoretical and abstract. All that I have time to say here in reply to this is that every member of society and that means every soul - is profoundly effected for good or ill by the ideas and values of the society into which he is born. This despite the fact that he may be quite unaware of it

From all this it follows that in this part of the meeting it will be proper to examine carefully the ideas and values current in our world, to do the same for our disciplines and professions and the Universities. We do this not just to judge the world, but rather to realize ourselves what are the true values and purposes of all these things and to live our life so that it gives witness to our dedication to these true values and purposes. For it is precisely in striving to live fully such ideas and values in all the concrete details of our lives that we give the appropriate witness of a Christian student or member of a profession and so take our Providential part in restoring all things to Christ the King.

### CONCLUSION:

Before closing I would like briefly to place the University Apostolate within the whole mission of the Church. And here it can be said that such an Apostolate is nothing but that section of the Church at the University seeking to incarnate itself in the only way appropriate at a University. A genuine Univ. Apost. must be communal and intellectual because this is the nature of the institution. The formation of the student comes through discovering and living the demands of this life - and this is best done in a group within the community of the apostolate. To conclude - each of us must ask ourself this question "Am I genuinely committed in any sense to a genuine University Apostolate"? We cannot shrug it off, for to do so is to shrug off Christ. And the attempt to answer it is the beginning in the sublime task of restoring all things in Christ.