

The Sword of the Spirit

BY

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An interpretation of the Sword of the Spirit Movement may be more appropriate than a bare narrative of its origin, organization, objects, methods and achievements. A living movement is always becoming different from what it was. When I saw the names of the first officers of the movement in England I recognized them as men and women who before the war had been active in Catholic social movements. The Sword of the Spirit movement is only a phase of the general Catholic social movement, a natural development due to the special problems created by the war. The leaders of the Sword of the Spirit had long been leaders in the Catholic Social Guild and the Catholic Council of International Relations; they had been apostles of the Catholic principles of social justice and international order. I refer to Christopher Dawson, Barbara Ward, Richard O'Sullivan, K.C., and others.

The name of the movement, and indeed the movement itself, was due to an accident, not design, or perhaps we should say it was due not to accident but to providential inspiration. Cardinal Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster, was invited to give a national broadcast in December 1939 on the spiritual issues of the war. The Cardinal of England described Nazism as it has been described by the Cardinal of Canada, by the Cardinals of neutral countries, by Cardinals of Germany, and by the late Pope Pius XI, as the most formidable assault on the essentials of Christian civilization, on the very life of the Catholic Church. All this has become very familiar, we might say commonplace, but all the most necessary truths are commonplace, and St. Paul, after his encounter with the Athenians, who cared only to hear something new, was confirmed in his resolve to preach only on one text.

The people of England were well aware that the issues of the war were not wholly spiritual. The greatest worldly issues were at stake. They were fighting for their country's place in the world, for their national honour, for their liberty, for their homes, for the interests which normal men, whether Christian or heathen, have always thought should be defended with their lives. Cardinal Hinsley dwelt on other and higher issues involved. The defeat of Nazism was required for the defence of the highest religious interests. The hopes of Christian civilization were bound up with the victory of the British arms. Yet the victory of British arms would not be enough in itself to assure the salvation of the higher interests, and in this connection Cardinal Hinsley

quoted the military metaphors of St. Paul on the warfare against the powers of evil.

Cardinal Hinsley's broadcast gave consolation and encouragement to all the British people who retained Christian traditions. Protestant church leaders thanked him for it. A Catholic élite saw the need of keeping before the minds of their fellow-Catholics the message that the Cardinal had given to the nation. The Sword of the Spirit Movement was organized and its work won the admiration of Protestant church-leaders who actively associated with it. The publication of the Pope's Peace Points seemed to afford a common platform to Catholics and Protestants who appealed to Christian motives for a total war effort and wished to be in a position after the war to establish a Christian peace.

The Sword of the Spirit Movement strives for a total war effort. It combats the lukewarm, the cowardly, the isolationists, the cynics, the pessimists and all who would injure the national morale. But at the same time it warns ceaselessly against the idea that Satan casts out Satan, that evil on our own side can destroy the evil against which we fight. Nazism, and we can say Communism also, grows from seeds which have been scattered all over the world. There are growths in our own soil which should fill us with alarm, but not drive us to despair. Catholic doctrine repudiates the Wyclifite heresy that dominion is founded on grace. A sinful ruler may command our moral obedience; a sinful priest may validly administer the Sacraments; a nation may fight for the right though its escutcheon be not unstained.

The end of war, as St. Augustine told us, is peace. The Sword of the Spirit movement strives for a total war effort only as a means to a peace founded on justice and strengthened by Christian charity. No peace will endure which is not in accord with Christian principles. No member of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association will dissent from this statement, which is a mere truism. But we cannot expect a Christian peace to come without effort on the part of Christians. Public opinion has to be prepared; public opinion has to be educated; we must know ourselves what sort of international organization and social reconstruction is practically possible and in accord with Christian ideas. There is a need of knowledge, of education, of study, of propaganda. To supply this need is the work of the Sword of the Spirit.

It should go without saying that any Christian work must depend on prayer, and the Sword of the Spirit movement is a prayer movement. In Canada the movement has been associated with the distribution of crucifixes to all Catholic members of the Canadian armed forces. Father Lanphier, of Toronto, by means of his radio propaganda, has distributed tens of thousands of Sword of the Spirit crucifixes to civilians. There is no need for me to say more of the prayerful side of the movement. It is most distinctively an

educational movement, and it uses the ordinary means, such as publications, lectures and study clubs.

In Canada, so far, we have got along without any organization ad hoc. We have enjoyed the co-operation of other organizations and agencies. The Catholic Press, both weekly and monthly, has given space without stint to news of the activities of the movement and to articles expounding its principles. The Trans-Canada Catholic Radio devoted all its programme of twenty talks in 1941-42 to the Pope's Peace Points and related subjects. It may be questioned whether any papal pronouncement ever before received so much publicity in Canada, apart from purely religious decrees like that on frequent Communion.

Despite all the publicity, I am not sure that a large percentage even of this select and learned audience could say off-hand what are the Pope's Five Peace Points. Much more forgetful are the general public in this rushing and distracting age. How many people could name half the members of the last Cabinet of the Hon. R. B. Bennett? Who remembers the headlines of last week's newspapers. If the Sword of the Spirit movement now ceased its propaganda the work of the past would be almost completely lost. It is intended to continue the work with the generous co-operation of the Catholic Press and other agencies. It is hoped that Sword of the Spirit study courses will be taken by some of the study clubs of the Christian Doctrine Confraternity in every diocese and also by Christian Doctrine classes in high schools. There are pamphlets published by the Sword of the Spirit which, supplemented by the Encyclical, "Summi Pontificatus", form a satisfactory text book. Scarcely any formal organization is required as long as we have the co-operation of the Catholic press, but study clubs taking Sword of the Spirit courses might be given an opportunity to affiliate and then there would be a fund and an organization, perhaps capable of bringing out new publications suitable for Canada. The British and American publications that we now use are exceedingly valuable, but they do not completely satisfy Canadian needs. The movement might be the means of bringing together for mutual help and inspiration our Canadian Catholic scholars of the highest class who are devoting themselves to Christian political science in the true sense of the term, the sense of St. Thomas Aquinas who said that politics is the highest of the practical sciences. International order and social justice are the ends of this science and besides the work of popularization we need the training of the highest authorities. Lacordaire once said: "Are its apostles, its martyrs, its pastors enough for the establishment of the Church in the world? Certainly not, for its work is that of universal instruction, and to these it needs to add yet another order of men, its Doctors, vowed and consecrated to the building up of dogmatic truth, without whose labours its diffusion among the less enlightened would be impossible, and the reign of light on the earth would remain the mere dream of an unsanctioned and powerless goodwill."

Much has been said in England of the possibilities of the Sword of the Spirit movement as a means of achieving co-operation between all Christian forces opposed to the tremendous secularist and godless influences now let loose in the world, among the countries of the United Nations as well as those of the Axis. I have nothing to say on this question at present. I am sure that if we Canadian Catholics make a success of the Sword of the Spirit movement we shall receive the admiration and gratitude of Christians who are not Catholics and we shall be doing a good work for our country, for the Church and for the whole world.