

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Apostasy

I'm afraid it isn't too much to say to Christ that in England "your people have apostasised". If the people who were Catholics in 1950 had kept the faith and handed it on to their children, we should have been in a very different country today.

Parental Grief

There's a great deal of parental grief about this, and even more grandparental grief. Good people torture themselves because they feel they have failed to hand on the greatest treasure they had to their children. It's entirely true; and the grief is well-placed. We need to understand what caused this massive failure, and learn from it. I think part of the fault has to be lain squarely at the door of the clergy, and the policy-making Bishops. In the fifties and sixties we made vast provision for "Catholic education" at all stages, offering 800,000 places in Catholic schools; we also set up huge provision of Catholic Teacher-Training colleges: Fenham in Newcastle, Sedgley Park in Manchester, Mount Pleasant and Christ's College in Liverpool, Mary Ward in Nottingham, Trinity & All Saints Leeds, Newman in Birmingham, St Mary's Twickenham, Roehampton, La Sainte Union Southampton, St Paul's Rugby, to name but a few; it was designed as a vast educational advance, with committed Catholic teachers running spectacularly Catholic schools, a brilliant exercise in passing on the faith. It was expensive and ambitious; and it was a dreadful failure, because teachers did not want to be trained in the colleges, so most of them closed, and they did not want to teach in the schools, which ended up with teachers largely not Catholics; and partly because of the vast emphasis placed on this flawed policy, Catholic parents decided that the education of their children in the faith was sorted in the schools, and many relaxed their own efforts to the point of total indifference. Priests used to say that the *parents* of schoolchildren did not know how to cross themselves at a funeral; but these days it is their *grandparents* who do not know the words of the Lord's Prayer with sufficient confidence to join in.

The World, 1: The Church, 0

The biggest and most pivotal result is perhaps the drying-up of candidature for the priesthood. Parents who have accepted the

world's plan for their children no longer see the slightest sense in the life of a priest, and by eliminating the Eucharist, this will annihilate the Church faster than anything. It seems clear that most parents' priorities for their children are *wealth, health, and happiness* - by which I mean social and sexual happiness, and by which they mean a good marriage and a good family and plenty of what it takes to pay for it. Bearing witness against the way of the world is no longer something anyone would contemplate: the world, it seems, has won, and the Church looks old-fashioned and wrong because it does not sing from the same hymn-sheet.

The Way Forward

I've been told countless times in this atmosphere that everything will change when the Church relaxes its antique principles and encourages its priests to marry, ordains married men, and ordains women to the priesthood. I can hear the voice of concern and love for the Church in these statements; but I think they ignore the elephant in the drawing-room: which is that the Church is *not* obedient to the way of the world, but to the way of Jesus, who died unmarried at the age of 33, and who called people away from their trades and rewards and wealth to follow a way that would be homeless and (in all worldly terms) directionless, and humanly unfulfilling. We can, if you like, invent a new Gospel which involves wealth, health, and happiness as its prime tenets, but it won't be Christian: it will be a decorated version of the Way of the World, and its hidden agenda will be a well-disguised form of selfishness; a Gospel of death. If we don't get wise to this reality, if we don't pass *that* on to our children, then the Church in England will indeed die, as it has died in Ephesus and in Antioch; starved of the Eucharist, and blind and deaf to the true voice of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it will become first a benevolent wing of the consumer society, and then a dead letter from the past. Westminster Cathedral will make a splendid Mosque, and there's a great need for a multi-storey on Monks road. But who knows? Perhaps we might light up the sense that a pigsty is not such a good place to live, and that there are better things to be had in the house of the Father, and - long as it may seem - there's a way home. *Fr Philip*