

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

THE CHURCH AND THE SERVICE MEN

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The towering shadow of Jesus Christ falls across the centuries dominating all men of all time. At the instance of His Heavenly Father, the Son of God comes to earth to redeem the sinful souls of humanity; the merits of His death on the Cross overflow the demands of God's justice and the cleansing flood rushes back to purify those who preceded Christ in time, touches those who associated with Him during His brief visit to earth, and surges forth to cleanse the countless generations who will follow Him. Salvation is for all men and the normal channel by which God's grace flows to souls is through the Church which Christ established for that purpose. The Son of God's direct ministrations to souls on earth was of short duration; Christ usually works in natural ways; accordingly He founded an organization which should carry on His mission—Christ established His Church which would be present every day of every year and would service with God's grace all souls who came to it.

Christ's Church remains the same in every age; her foundation is the rock—Peter. The means of sanctification she is to administer were definitely established by her Divine Founder. There can be no change in the Church, the only adjustment that can be made to bring more

grace to men's souls is to arrange more methods by which more men can come more often to the faucets which lavishly pour their saving flood upon all souls within range of God's beneficence. The Church will use every avenue possible to bring God's grace to souls—that is her only purpose of existence. Everything not evil must be pressed into service so that no soul may perish from thirst in the desert of ordinary living. Those who are charged with the guidance of the Church have only one criterion for all their planning—will it bring more souls in contact with God's grace? Every adjustment of the Church must be examined by this gauge and not be found wanting.

In times of war, because the souls of so many young men go hurriedly and untimely before the Eternal Judge, it is critically important that no moment be lost in ushering souls into the Divine intimacy which is the state of grace. In times of peace we might tarry and experiment and delay; but promptness, even rapidity, is vital in an emergency. When the dark clouds that presaged war began to gather on the horizon, the Bishops of the United States, blessed with the spiritual vision with which God endows their positions, designated as the organization which would serve as the Church's special medium of

charity to servicemen—the National Catholic Community Service.

In the first World War many different agencies of the Church were active in bringing aid to the Servicemen. Prominent among these groups were the National Catholic War Council, and the Knights of Columbus which merited the high praise of our men for their kindness and great generosity. In the present emergency, an inclusive organization, comprising and coordinating all the facilities of the Church, was to be the instrument of the Church in marshalling all the abilities of every Catholic to the war effort.

When the country needed help to enlist community resources so that the displacements of war might not work havoc in men's souls and in their lives, the United Service Organization was founded and the National Catholic Community Service was the Member Agency of the Catholic people to participate in this aspect of war work. The U.S.O. is known now familiarly and affectionately around the world as the friend of those in the service of their country. It is a typically American organization for it recognizes differences; the six agencies which are united in this effort were not intended to lose their identity and all to be forced to conform to one set pattern (Our enemies use such tactics). America has room for

diversified opinions—men respect the thoughts of others although they do not understand them. The N.C.C.S. is as Catholic as any Catholic American home—any American would feel at home in its clubs and expect to have his ordinary needs cared for, and a Catholic would find there those additional ministrations which satisfy his unique religious requirements.

The N.C.C.S. serves soldiers, sailors, marines and air corps men—men and women war-workers in overburdened Communities—women in the Service—and the wives and sweethearts of the servicemen.

We can hardly imagine an American home anywhere in this land which would not welcome those Americans who have been displaced by war-service or by war-work, and yet service men and women and war-workers would be reluctant to stop in and make demands on the ordinary home. Where the war impact has caused abnormal conditions, the U.S.O. is set up as the community home where all may have an opportunity to shield and shelter the strangers within our gates. This is the American way of bringing a home to all those who are forced by circumstances to be absent from their homes; this is the American way of reaching arms of mercy across the continent and enfolding all our loved ones in their charitable embrace.

The number of Catholic young men and women in the Service of their country and on the assembly lines of our war industries is exceedingly large in these United States. This is not too difficult to understand when we remember that Catholic families are comparatively large—it was revealed recently that from Brooklyn, N. Y., 10 Catholic families had each given 6 sons to their country's service; the tragedy of the loss of the five Sullivan brothers is still fresh in all our minds. The Chaplains have already reported to you on the Catholic Hour and in other ways the response of these young people to their religion, when a priest is able to be with them; the National Catholic Community Service assists these Chaplains and helps to satisfy the religious needs of this constantly growing army. Because their needs are not only material but spiritual a priest is assigned as moderator for each of the centers. The Catholic has been trained to share his most intimate confidences with the priest and to follow his mature and experienced judgment in religious matters. Spiritual difficulties and sin-laden souls may be righted through the use of the Sacrament of Penance. What peace of mind comes to the Catholic parents who receive a letter from their son or daughter telling them that they have righted things with God! Even the tone of a Gov-

ernment telegram announcing the death of a beloved son is softened when the memory of this preparation assures them of his eternal safety with God. Instruction and Counsel in religious matters can be given over a cup of hot coffee or in the midst of a boxing show or a basketball game; much helpful advice can be proffered (and without repugnance to the listeners) as a priest sits through a movie with them or observes the gyrations of the latest jitterbug artists. Neglected Confirmation can be remedied, marriages properly prepared and witnessed, frequency at the Sacraments encouraged and arranged, and the whole stream of religious knowledge and practice widened and deepened. The priest usually finds himself a most welcome visitor to their group, he understands them, he respects their confidences, he is empowered with the spiritual means to renew and increase grace in their souls—the priest is a friendly bond with their homes, he is the familiar chain which ties them to God—he is loved—he is used—and that is reason enough for his fatherly interest in these clubs.

Do others feel displaced as such attention is meted out to the Catholic visitors? No, each receives exactly what he chooses. The wide and mature experience of the priest is available—they need but to ask

for it, as they soon learn. They are encouraged to give religion first place in their lives according to the light of their own consciences.

In addition to the religious aids which are available in these clubs, there is a constant program of wholesome recreation which drives away homesickness and brings forgetfulness of military routine and gives an outlet for the normal zestful activity of young people. Our hostesses, knowing the weakness of every man, young and old, have prepared and served oceans of coffee and mountains of food like mother used to make.

In our work religion is understood to be an intelligent design for living and not a matter of an hour's endurance on a Sunday morning. The young men and women, whom we serve, are doing a great deal of serious thinking and they must come to some reasonable solutions or they become bitter and frustrated. God, and souls, and religion must fit into the pattern of life or we are existing in a madhouse. The war and fighting and death must have some deep spiritual significance or everything is hopeless. In the charity-in-action of this work a new stress is placed upon the second of God's two inclusive commandments—the love of neighbor—and a new understanding is achieved of the reason for this human love in our love of God.

Building upon these firm foundations, tolerance and cooperation receive a new interpretation and meaning. That the service men and women understand and appreciate these clubs is evidenced by their own words.

From England comes this comment: "Six weeks ago I visited your club, it was the first time in my life that I was personally introduced to charity, ate charity, slept charity, lived charity—this sort of thing gives us, who are now fighting, new hope that there's going to be a lot of charity around in the world we are trying to build for our tomorrows. God bless you all and keep you helping us boys." From Africa a very frequent visitor of old writes: "Your U.S.O. brought home to me the real meaning of equality and fraternity. There we had an organization operated by the National Catholic Community Service that represented only one of the many religions of the world. It must be said that to your organization, there was only one thing important, the comfort and peace of mind of a soldier. Be he Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Atheist, Heathen, or what; be he black, white, brown, red or even yellow, it made no difference, we were all the same and in the same boat. Equality, fraternity, these two words never fitted any other organization more than they do your

U.S.O. From you I learned their true meaning, and a lesson never to be forgotten."

Never a day goes by that someone who has been benefited by the U.S.O. does not write back to these clubs to give emphatic expression of gratitude. They will always remember the kindness that greeted them in the strange land of being away from home; the U.S.O. was their other-home, their travelling-home, their home near the camp. The virtues that we expect in homes of Americans must always be prominent in these substitute homes—we want these future fathers and mothers to understand what their country values, what they are fighting for, and what must be present in their post-war homes. The National Catholic Community Service is endeavoring in its own way to impress upon everyone who comes into contact with it that religious living—paying to God and to every man what is their just due—is the only stable foundation for our beloved country. America must show the way; we must not only feed and clothe the bodies of a war-shattered world but we must understand and direct and

service the souls of a bewildered populace. The Spiritual works of Mercy are more important than the corporal works of mercy—the soul is of infinitely more value than the body. It is a deposit in soul-dividends that National Catholic Community Service is making now, it is an investment in soul-bonds which is being made by devoted staffs and faithful volunteers and generous contributors. The fighting fronts of the world are manned by boys who carry happy memories of the home-fronts where it touched and sustained and supported them—their U.S.O. Clubs. May the virtues that must be practiced in order to carry out this assignment effectively, sparkle and impress and attract so that they are woven patterns of future living. The National Catholic Community Service is alleviating suffering, dispensing charity, nurturing patriotism, deepening spirituality, in short doing God's work among men. And He, the Omniscient and Omnipotent God, for Whom all this is being done, will be His own reward to those whose hearts and hands bleed with charity towards those who need it.

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Fourteenth Year—1943

The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 41,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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