

## True Devotion to the Nation by Frank Duff

*In this essay from a half century ago, Legion of Mary founder Frank Duff diagnosed many of the ills plaguing the Irish nation. He saw it as a country which was devoid of patriotism and self sufficiency, evident in high levels of emigration and inability to produce goods for their own people. Duff's essay also discusses Communism and the antagonism that it held towards the Legion of Mary.*

*The centenary year of the Legion of Mary begins 7th September 2021.*

### THE SPIRITUAL AND THE MATERIAL

As Our Lady has that special part in Christianity, so she is the key to our problem of today:  
**True Devotion to the Nation.**

In the mystical Nazareth it is still a question of Mary tending her Son. She is not interested alone in feeding him and unfolding his mind. She is solicitous about every aspect of his life, his physical welfare, his comfort, his recreation, all things which would surround him and affect the life of the individual. She sees him in all people. She looks on his life as a whole. It would be intolerable to her that he should be afflicted in any department. It is certain that she would wish to remedy anything which was wrong. And this is the basis of True Devotion to the Nation.

Of course first things rank first. The essence of everything is the spiritual, the Divine things. But the body is inextricably entwined with the soul, and material things with the spiritual; each affects the other. It is not properly possible for us to concern ourselves only with the soul of a person. Love does not think along such lines of restriction. You love the whole person and you long to serve him in every way. It would constitute a peculiar position to talk religion to a person and to be indifferent to his misery. A natural mother would not act in that way towards her child, and neither would Mary towards her mystical child. We are supposed to be the agents of Mary, tending her child, united to her action. We must be as Our Lady to the community. But I insist there is no abandonment of our traditional scheme.

There is no dropping of our spiritual programme, but only an intensification of it. We have not relaxed our rule against the giving of material relief. In fact we have become progressively strengthened in regard to it. We believe it to be our bulwark against the mere humanism which has absorbed so much of the Catholic apostolate. Too much of the alleged apostolate of today is but a cult of the material even though a spiritual gloss be imparted to it. With sufficient agencies devoted to the giving of material relief it is vital that the Legion should remain constant to its aim of seeking first the kingdom of God.

True Devotion to the Nation is an effort to do this, and then to reach out to the 'other things'. This order of values is essential.

The spiritual must be the motive. The prevailing tendency is to rule out that motive and to commit the people's lives to secular and technical handling. This is not even a distant relation to Christianity and we must energetically try to impart true balance. But 'material relief' is to be correctly interpreted. It does not include that rendering of services to the individual and the community which constitute True Devotion to the Nation. While our great preoccupation is

the spiritual, it must not be viewed too narrowly, for that spiritual concerns all life. All life springs from it and ministers to it. If we have to distinguish between what is primary and secondary, it should not result in the neglecting of either. If we are dealing with the secondary aspects stressed in True Devotion to the Nation, it must not be to the detriment of the primary one.

We must not for a moment lose sight of the soul. It is to the soul that we are really addressing ourselves through the means which we use, each of which should be viewed as a lever to uplift faith, to promote moral good. Mary's own outlook must be ours. Whether she was attending to Jesus himself or to the more remote operations of running her home, she always had the interest of the Holy Trinity in clear focus. So in any situation where we are in doubt, think of her, how she would act, and she will give us true direction.

The legionary must see Jesus in his neighbour, who is all mankind, and then must serve him in every way, using each way to lead people on to proper levels of ~ religion. Too much of common Catholicism is a veneer. I do not say that it is insincere but it does not go deep enough to influence the ordinary life. Included in that process of Christianising must be the making of one's place more happy, more prosperous, more beautiful, more enlightened; the creating of employment, the stopping of emigration. One of the special means of aiding in that process would be the fostering of honest dealing in every shape.

So dislocating is defect in this department that I have wondered if a ten per cent improvement in common honesty would not bridge the gap which separates the improvement of the world from a modest comfort.

#### WHAT IS TRUE PATRIOTISM?

If this is fulfilment of duty to the Church and to one's neighbour it is, likewise, patriotism. This word opens up before us unknown, uncharted territory, for what is true patriotism? There is no model of it in the world. The nearest is the brand of self-sacrifice and devotion which develops during a war. But this is motivated by hate more than by love, and appropriately it is directed towards destroying. So it is imperative that a correct model be somewhere provided. This is doubly necessary having regard to the way in which the Modern State tends to widen its functions. Animated usually with the best intentions, it seeks to manipulate people's minds. It moves more and more towards thinking for each one, arranging his life in detail. By a creeping process it is appropriating to itself rights which Christianity has always regarded as belonging to the individual.

This could work out to a pure tyranny. The modern idea attributes to the 'State' a quasi-omnipotence. Governments honestly imagine that they have an unlimited power over the citizens. This could prove intolerable even if operated on lines of true democracy. But often enough it is a case of the dictatorship of a few persons. This has all the colour of the menace described in that novel "1984", which Big Brother looks into every room through a television apparatus and supervises everything for the twenty-four hours of the day. It is towards something like that dismal position that the State idea is steadily slipping. More and more is being taken into its scope. Possibly this may result in providing for every material need. But analysed, such an improvement looks dangerously like a comfortable slavery. And inevitably that evolution will clash with the Catholic Church which ultimately has to insist on certain rights for the individual, believing that God has given those rights.

"From the useful institution which it was, the national State has become the threat to civilisation that it now undoubtedly is". These words are not mine but Toynbee's. That tendency towards taking over by the State is largely due to the passivity of the citizens. Having been taught no sense of responsibility in respect of the defects around them, they do nothing towards remedying them. So it is inevitable that the State is forced to intervene in regard to the greater evils. Then the intervention and the inertia are both progressive. The citizen fades away into a cipher put into a computer which will decide what is to be done with him. If the people are shown a proper sense of responsibility, much of this would have been avoided and healthy communities would be the result.

Most of the graver problems are due to maladjustment of some kind, and would yield to principles of self-help and Christian behaviour. So there is no need for the individual to forfeit his rights to the State in order to be able to live. <sup>8</sup> But this is a truth which must be practically demonstrated. This is of such importance that God will help if we but play our part. The lack of a model in this particular case results disastrously in the absence of any idea as to what patriotism is. In the case of flying, for instance, the correct theory was present long before the practical model was attained. People understood what flying meant. They knew its laws and indeed everything about it. The one thing missing was an engine which could lift more than its own weight. The moment the internal combustion engine was discovered, the problem of flight was solved; all the laws and principles were ready. The usual procedure is that the idea precedes the working model, and eventually the model emerges. But it is different in that case of patriotism where there has been neither the proper idea nor the working model.

Then what is patriotism?

What are its basis, motives, scope?

This degree of uncertainty declares it to be an unknown quantity. It will be understood either as: a) That wartime formula; or as b) A sentimental conception without rational roots. As such it will be seen as a mere rivalry and rejected by sensible people; or as c) A device for exploiting people. Doctor Sam Johnson defined patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel. Therein lies the extreme importance of True Devotion to the Nation.

It is the practical working model which teaches us the correct theory of Christian patriotism and shows how it is to be applied. If it can be made to prevail, it would usher in a revolution infinitely greater than that produced by the discovery of the steam engine or electricity or atomic science, because it is in the superior moral order. One helping circumstance is that everybody is at least in a hazy way searching for such a thing; nobody is satisfied with those common conceptions of nationhood. For all its defects Ireland is in this matter the best off by reason of its having Faith. If we could ameliorate our position in a worthy and striking way, we would secure imitation for the world which seems to be wheezing to death in terrible convulsions. We would qualify as that Nation visualised in the Handbook of the Legion of Mary which solved its problems and as a matter of automatic consequence attracts the other nations to learn from it. Moreover, and more important, it would afford convincing evidence as to the power of Christianity, so much derided today as an obsolete superstition. There is a further reason why the Legion must enter on this new territory of True Devotion to the Nation. Big changes are about to accomplish themselves in the apostolate. Certain aspects of it have been seen to be based excessively on the economic and material.

Many of them repudiate any programme of trying to win souls. If in certain places the Legion is taken up instead of those other apostolates, it will be required to undertake works which they had specialised in. Through True Devotion to the Nation the Legion is enabled to attend to them inside its own framework of motives and method. There is another reason why we must work True Devotion to the Nation vigorously. Perhaps it is due to the Legion's vivid projection of the apostolic idea that there is a surge of new' societies and humanitarian projects around us. Most of them have no religious note in them. Add on new efforts by Communism. So that if we do not go at once into that field we may find it largely taken over by those agencies. This would be serious as presenting that position deplored in the Legion Handbook where we had been anticipated and out-soldiered. Also it would mean that certain works are being left at the mercy of purely human motives. How far will these bring us?

## NO NATIONAL IDEALISM

But a paramount reason lies in the necessity of the country which is the taking off ground for this project - Ireland. Let us be frank about it: there is nothing in the country which could be described as national idealism. There is a poor realisation of duty or service of the community. It would be a great mistake to think that our problems are mainly economic. Actually there is much money flowing, hundreds of millions of borrowed money among it. It is difficult to get labour. There is much drinking and misconduct. There is insufficient public spirit. There is a determined and partly unnecessary emigration. There are jobs available but the people are determined to go. Patriotism should be showing itself in some sort of dutifulness towards one's country, at the very least in a willingness to stay in it. But that is not in evidence.

Some aspects resemble anarchy.

Definitely there is at work a malady, which, if it is to be cured, will kill us spiritually and probably nationally. - A group of us have just come back from a short trip which involved the staying in a different place every night. I would not say that it evidenced a consoling religious position. In two of the places eleven people were at Holy Communion in the morning, of whom we were seven. In another at Sunday's Mass the priest appealed that everyone should go at least monthly to Holy Communion, and he pleaded that people be not ashamed of being seen going to the altar rails! This in the era of daily Communion! That rural inadequacy compares badly with the Adjutorian degree which the Legion is proposing to the people, namely, daily Mass, Holy Communion, Rosary and 12 the saying of an office.

With backing, that programme could be made to sweep Ireland. In those localities one felt that the life of religion had reached an irreducible minimum, and, that it is not presenting the true face of Christianity. If there are any idealistic impulses stirring in those communities, these are not derived from religion. Nor are those places capable of withstanding a moral or religious attack. Yet they are leisured, nothing stirring in the early part of the day, and thus affording scope for the Adjutorians, the Patricians, etc. The Patricians is a positive necessity; it is an efficient way of teaching the adults their religion. Need I add that there are no praesidia in those places? All that sounds bad. But we are far from being the only victim's of a misunderstood civilisation. All the other countries are suffering similarly, or far worse.

In a recent issue the London Times published a survey of conditions on the English countryside. It shows a like unsavoury stagnation, but deprived of the religious note which at least we have. Beer, weekly bingo, and a discontent with one's surroundings: these constitute

a fine formula for the warping of human material. A better order does not spring up of itself. There must be some force to animate it. But not all such forces are good. For instance, a Communist cell would be an energising influence. It would be a bad one, but it would certainly set things moving in various ways. It would start every sort of hare; plans to reform, schemes for taking over the property of the "rich", promises to give something to everybody. And somewhere in the picture would be the weaning of people from that enemy of progress, religion! That stirring, that animating must be done. But it must be approached on correct lines, that is, for Christian ends and out of Christian motives.

My formula for that animating principle would not exactly constitute a sixty-four dollar question, because you all know the answer. It is a well-worked Praesidium. I do not suggest that the Legion is the only animating principle. But it is the only large-scale, recognised one which carries the religious motive to its full logical conclusion. It does not base its apostolate on a vague appeal to Christian humanitarianism which could mean absolutely nothing. Even unbelievers constantly have that word 'Christian' on their lips. The Legion proposes as motive power the doctrine of the Mystical Body in all its detail, including, of course, Our Lady. This doctrine obliges us to think in terms of every person in each place and of all aspects of life there, cultural, economic, recreational and of development in every sense. Commonly the absence of unemployment is regarded as denoting prosperity, so that the people do not bestir themselves towards development. That apparent prosperity is fictitious because those places are providing for their children by the simple method of emigrating them. The resulting position is the opposite to true prosperity. For a community, like a family, should normally provide for its children. This can only be done by a continuous development of industry in all its forms.

All this must not amount to selfish localism. It must be expansive.

People solving their problems in a small country place must at the same time be thinking of the whole country. More than that, there should be a holy internationalism. Here I point to the movements which the Legion has produced. They emerged in a particular place, but an essential thought was: how are we going to apply this to the whole world?

Just now you are witnessing this legionary instinct at work in the *Peregrinatio Pro Christo* and the *Viatores Christi*".

Under the *Peregrinatio* movement at present (1970s) about 2,000 Irish legionaries give their holidays and holiday money each year to go on mission projects in Britain. And already this movement has caught on in places as far away as Haiti, Venezuela, United States, Canada, the Philippines and will soon be imitated elsewhere. Under the *Viatores Christi* movement some 200 Irish lay people have already gone to work in missionary countries. To the extent that we progress with True Devotion to the Nation it will \**Viatores* was part of the Legion system then similarly be utilised for the benefit of the world.

Is it necessary to point out that this sort of thing, done all over a country, builds up into Christian patriotism? Necessarily that Christian love must concentrate initially on the people one meets, but it must ambition .to help everyone. If patriotism is basically religion, then the Legion is perhaps the best organisation to implement it because it unites the two ideas.

EXAMPLE OF COMMUNISM

There is also a primary psychological consideration to be reckoned with. Man is not meant to be alone. In the individual resides an extraordinary quality of helplessness. It must be supplemented if he is to be made effective even in the mildest degree.

This defectiveness is at its greatest in the moral order. But the gaining of a helper makes all the difference. A few working together stimulate each other on to courage and conquest. As a special exemplification of this I again give the case of Communism. A handful of them can take possession of and control a nation. They accomplish this by binding themselves together in a tight, single-minded unity, and then by striking at any unity outside themselves. Thereby they throw the population into individual isolation and consequent helplessness. The mechanism for this is universal spying and fear. No one has any real communication with others and therefore cannot lean on them, is afraid even to express his thoughts to another. That effected, the highly organised few can do what they like.

It is because they correctly recognise in the Legion a counterprinciple that Communism fears the Legion.

The Legion works for religion instead of against it, for unity instead of division; exhibits the martyr-spirit instead of weakly yielding. True, the Legion cannot avail of the Communist mechanism of secrecy, spying and fear, but love and grace will outweigh those things.

If a sufficient number be induced to assert themselves, it becomes impossible to suppress a whole people like a flock of sheep. In what way is the foregoing applicable to a merely nominal Christian community? Suppose a Communist cell to be operating there. It would not have the power to force its will by direct action. In these circumstances it would not sail under its true colours. It would work with supreme effectiveness by creating a wrong atmosphere, one of cynicism, quiet pressure, jeering at any sort of idealism, at patriotism as a narrow, outmoded sentiment; at religion as a superstition which has been disproved by science; and so forth. Religion can be put completely on the defensive in places like those previously pointed to where there is no praesidium, no Patricians, and where the people are ashamed to be seen going to Holy Communion! Surely there is some malign activity there! I do not say that Communism is at the bottom of all those rotten attitudes. There are other agencies. It is a matter of life and death that we organise on proper lines. The Praesidium is the perfect stimulant for that. It brings together persons on a basis which more or less excludes really unworthy elements, that is, it summons them to prayer and disagreeable tasks. Then it educates them in the full Christian philosophy, doctrinal and practical. Soon they understand each other and this is the beginning of action.

They realise, too, that their ideas are held by many in the community. In this feeling of unity lies strength.

If that Praesidium works faithfully according to its principles, it can accomplish good. Better still, it can enable good to overpower evil. Definitely there is some moral force in the Legion which make it effective in dealing with the cynical, materialistic and falsely intellectual brigades. It commands a hearing for its views and it expounds its spirituality and idealism without timidity or human respect. We do not find the legionaries ashamed to be seen going to Holy Communion! But I repeat that without the Praesidium those same compelling and essential ideas would be submerged by all that cynicism and mockery and materialism which exercise a withering effect on the mediocre Catholic. It goes without saying, however, that the Praesidium must be given its chance by leadership and encouragement. I think that the

place without some form of organisation equivalent to the Legion is in peril. For there is no doubt that the materialistic and evil aspects are gaining ground. If the Legion were to be eliminated at a stroke, I believe that the effect on Ireland would be like the breaking of the dykes which protect low-lying land, that is, the oncome of a deluge. In the second place, I contend that the proper working of the Legion would cause good to prevail and would lead on to a Christian order.

Such are the principles of True Devotion to the Nation and there in the Praesidium is the machinery to put them into operation. I contend that they must work, because they are based on grace and the love of God. Those simple strivings will be effective where statecraft and governmental power are helpless.

#### AN EXAMPLE

As a crowning evidence of what can be accomplished by the balanced scheme of True Devotion to the Nation, I give a case in Ireland where the circumstances of an entire district, twenty two miles long, were so uniformly deplorable that it would seem reasonable to call it hopeless. Since the previous century it had lost nine tenths of its population, and the flow of emigration persisted. No marriage in the preceding five 19 years, and only two children born. With an ageing population extinction seemed to be certain. Every feature of failure present; self-help absent, family feuds so general that even sports did not exist; schools under closing order. Disheartenment such that it had become the very atmosphere, paralysing energy and good intention. The Parish Priest declared that it would require a miracle to revive the place, but he added: "I believe in miracles". Building on his faith, True Devotion to the Nation was set to work in conditions which represented a supreme test for it.

What happened in the next five years forms an epic of all-round restoration.

I do not term it miraculous because I would think that, though startling, it is really in the common order, only waiting to be evoked by proper procedure. It is not the will of God that communities be extinguished or languish in misery.

A model sufficiency is available to all who reach out properly for it: neither too much nor too little, as the Liturgy petitions. God has pity on the multitude and wants to save it. But human co-operation must enter in: such is his law and he insists on it. When that self-help animated by faith offers itself, it can effect marvels of restoration. This process need not be a slow one; it can be rapid and such was the case in that territory. In five years a new spirit had declared itself. The place had put itself 20 on the tourist map. Early vegetables were being profitably grown. A knitting industry had been launched. Every aspect of its defect had shown striking amelioration. The revival has taken in all sections of life, the spiritual, the economic, marriages, culture. There is no doubt that it will remain so and do better still, provided, of course, that the same positive thinking is maintained.

It is probable that this animation (not necessarily of-the same kind nor in the same degree) could be accomplished everywhere by the same methods. Obviously too it can be put in motion in every place simultaneously. Then is there not the presumption that any country could be rendered economically sound and otherwise reasonably healthy in a comparatively few years? And it would be a case of true health, because the spiritual and moral consideration would be prominent.

## TOURISM

When it comes to choice of schemes, I am not sure but that for us the heart of the matter lies in tourism. Some have taken a different view and reckoned that it lies in the land, in the exploiting of the bounty of nature. So I say that we must not depreciate the one for the other, not omit the one for the sake of the other. Obviously we must think in terms of everything which affords a possibility; there is no necessary antagonism between the different expedients. Tourism can reach its greatest heights where the land is unsuited to agriculture. As well it asserts itself comprehensively, germinating other industries.- It should be our desire not only to help our own country economically but also to show it forth in an advantageous light. The doing of this latter work must comprise everything from cleanliness to making the most of the scenery and also exhibiting the customs, history and religion.

On the economic plane tourism has a particular value to Ireland. Many countries have to import the food which they supply to the tourist. For Ireland it would mean the saving of the costly exportation of its produce, some of it at a loss. But note: accommodation is the first requirement, scenery taking second place. Therefore the effort should be made to induce householders to cater for a visitor or two. In Scotland this is much developed. One is struck by the prevalence of the sign 'Bed and Breakfast'. It is essential that the accommodation reach certain qualifying levels. Another aspect is that if people can be induced to take in visitors, it makes them improve their own homes and raise their standards. Moreover, they should be encouraged to do what they never do at present, that is, tell the visitors about religion.

This the visitor is anxious to hear as lending 'character' to their holiday, but it is denied to them out of a mistaken delicacy, a reluctance to interfere with their beliefs. That could be a costly error from the Catholic point of view. For the amount of appreciation foreign visitors show when trouble has been taken to explain such things to them is often quite touching. It embellishes their holiday. They go away and talk about how much they have learned. It would be much as if we were visiting India and somebody took the trouble to bring us around the Buddhist temples and explained them to us. But there would be this difference between the two transactions that God may seize upon the contact at home as a means of bringing the Faith to the visitor.