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## The Mother Butler Guilds

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If the result of such an attitude — an attitude which undoubtedly influenced the two reviews discussed above — is to get more people to read the Gospels themselves, it will have borne splendid fruit. Yet it might also give rise to an excessively critical spirit. Surely there is still a place, provided the proper limitations are observed, for harmonies of the Gospels and biographies of Christ. Such works will always involve personal, conjectural reconstructions on the part of the author of the topographical and chronological framework of the events in the life of Christ. But it is difficult to see how any great harm can come of that. The evangelists themselves exercised considerable liberty in arranging our Lord's works and words to suit their own purposes. May not a modern author, even though ungraced by the charism of inspiration, follow the example they have set?

J. J. KAVANAGH, S.J.

### *The Mother Butler Guilds*

In the field of the lay apostolate there emerged four years ago a type of work for Catholic women quite different from those ordinarily known, such as teaching catechism, supporting free schools and charity clinics, fighting adverse labor legislation or visiting and counseling inmates of hospitals or welfare institutions. It is a very domestic and prosaic endeavor which makes use of the needle and thread and which involves the sewing of church vestments and altar linen. This evidently is not new in the sense that it has not been attempted before. It is new only in the sense that this is the first time, in the Philippines at least, that it was launched as an organized movement. The organization which promotes this kind of apostolate is known as the Mother Butler Mission Guilds.

The organization began at Marymount College in New York late in 1940 after the death of Mother Mary Joseph Butler, Superior General of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. An outstanding trait of this extraordinary woman was her great charity for the home and foreign missions. It was thus with the intent of propagating and perpetuating this charity that the Mother Butler Mission Guilds came into being.

The Guilds succeeded well in this intent; so well in fact that today the organization and its beneficiaries can be found almost anywhere in the world. Some missionaries in the remote parts of Mindanao claim to have been recipients of the Guilds' charity long before the establishment of the local Guilds.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this organization should take root in the Philippines. What began as playful banter over the use of needle and thread became, to the surprise of the protagonists

themselves, the mustard seed from which the apostolate grew. It is remarkable indeed how God makes use of small things as the cornerstone of big ones.

We venture to say big in this case, for the importance of the Guilds in the Philippines, and anywhere else for that matter, its service to the Church and its impact as a "social" apostolate (and more about this later) can hardly be overestimated. In size the organization has grown since its establishment on September 8, 1955, from a nucleus of seven members to twenty-three units with a total membership of approximately three hundred and fifty. These are the units of the organization in the Archdiocese of Manila alone, for there are now separate chapters in other dioceses, namely, Baguio, Lipa, Naga, Calbayog, Tacloban, and Vigan.

In structure the Guilds are like most Catholic lay organizations, that is, built up in units. Units, however, are small, ranging in membership from a minimum of eight to a maximum of fifteen. Unlike most Catholic organizations, the Guilds are not established on a parochial basis. Friends bound together by a community of interests may constitute a unit regardless of parochial affiliations since it is not the aim of the organization to help one parish in particular but poor parishes and missions wherever they may be. At the diocesan level, however, assistance is localized by giving priority of attention to poor parishes of the diocese.

It was indicated in the beginning that charity for the home and foreign missions is the objective of the Guilds and the method employed for the purpose is sewing. To this is added the procurement of sacred vessels and other altar equipment, the idea being to provide to the largest extent possible for the needs of the Altar of Sacrifice. The logical outcome of this activity, and what seems to be the will of God for the apostolate, is its branching out into a third phase of its work, namely, the fostering of vocations to the priesthood. This expansion was inspired by the idea that since the Guilds see to the needs of the altar, the greatest need of altars in the Philippines is more priests and this requires as much, if not more, attention than any other material need of the same. It is to this end that the Mother Butler Foundation was recently set up, as a subsidiary of the Guilds, on July 22, 1959. This Foundation has the specific function of providing scholarships for needy seminarians. This is done by inviting enrollments in the Foundation at the rate of a hundred pesos a year, renewable yearly at the same rate.

A criticism sometimes levelled at the Guilds is that their membership is limited to the wealthy. This is not true. The Guilds are not an organization of the wealthy any more than a parish church is a church for the rich simply because many of the faithful who worship there are rich. Such a church remains a house of God and a house of prayer for all.

Thus, it is one thing to say that there are rich members in the Guilds (and what organization excludes them?) and another to say that it is an organization of the same, with the oblique implication that the organization exists *exclusively* for them.

The Guilds make no effort to conceal the fact that they aim to reach those who have money, but at the same time they make it clear that membership is not limited to one kind alone. This is made explicit to would-be members in a briefing given them before joining the organization. The Guilds do undertake, as a deliberate policy, to channel talents, leisure, and means to sources of grace and to safeguard their wholesome use; and in doing so, try to encourage membership at a certain level of society where such resources abound without necessarily confining membership to this level alone.

If this be so, must censure result simply because many of the affluent seem to be directly concerned? If there is a special apostolate for teachers, doctors, or writers, may not housewives with leisure constitute a like group with the same potential to exercise a special kind of apostolate? In the Guilds, the end, which is charity, serves the means, which is the sanctification of the members, and vice-versa. For just as there is great need today for charity, so there are great opportunities for housewives with both means and leisure to do all manner of good works and thus restore Christian practices to their rightful place.

In this lies the "social" impact of this particular apostolate. Its value as social action tends to be consistently underestimated because sewing vestments and fostering vocations are quiet and unobtrusive and very domestic activities within a very limited sphere of influence—the home. Perhaps too there is too much emphasis laid nowadays on the notion that social action must be directed at the down-trodden and concerned with the general amelioration of the masses. Yves de Montcheuil, S.J., in *A Guide for Social Action*, says that by the expression "social question" we have become too accustomed to mean the question of the working class alone. He suggests that we widen our vision. We must consider the social problem *as a whole*, and this includes the problem of the middle classes. We may conclude from this that a very definite problem involved here is created by certain temporal activities in family life that tend to undermine or destroy supernatural life.

Granting, therefore, that the impact of the Guilds' apostolate is only in the home, is not the home the first unit of society that needs to be Christianized? Sewing, even if it is sewing sacred vestments and linen, is, to be sure, too small a force to counteract ideologies and practices that threaten the stability of family life, but it is at least a factor to be reckoned with in restoring sanity and sanctity in the home. Numerous hours which without the Guilds might

have been frittered away in harmless but pointless pleasures are now devoted to apostolic work. The Guilds' "social impact" is that these hours are pleasantly, fruitfully and *holily* occupied.

The work of propagating the Guilds, despite its remarkable growth in four years, is not without its difficulties. Chief among these is the general resistance to adopt anything new as an organized movement. Often permission to found the organization meets with the typical reply. "We already have too many Catholic organizations for women; your apostolate can be carried on by them." The rebuff stings, but I suppose we must expect it.

On the whole, however, the Guilds have fared pretty well. They are trying hard not to lose sight of the fact that all forms of apostolate must rest on a spiritual foundation, that no activity that does not rest on God is of any avail. On the other hand, a practical and intelligent approach to the apostolate has not been overlooked. A definite plan was conceived to make the work fit into the pattern of living of present-day housewives and the manner of propagating the work was studied to avoid unnecessary hit-or-miss procedures.

Needless to say it is on a balance of the spiritual and the practical that the future of the Guilds depends. On this score, the organization can only try, as St. Ignatius says, to work as though everything depended on oneself, to pray as though everything depended on God.

CLARA O. CORPUS

## *The Free Farmers Re-examined*

The previous number of this quarterly reviewed a study of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) written by Miss Sonya Diane Cater.<sup>1</sup> When a study is as superficial, biased and irresponsible as this one is, it does not in itself merit serious consideration. However, since the real nature, aims and operations of the FFF have not received wide publicity, Miss Cater's dissertation may be grossly misleading to the sociologists, anthropologists, economists and other intellectuals for whom it is written. Moreover, the tone of the dissertation seems to be typical of certain Americans whose attitudes are—to put it mildly—not conducive to maintaining cordial relations between the Filipino and American peoples. For these reasons I believe a rejoinder to Miss Cater is in order.

The most significant error in this dissertation is the observation that the FFF engages in too many activities which it cannot sustain,

<sup>1</sup> *The Philippine Federation of Free Farmers: a case study in mass agrarian organization.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1959.