



THE GRAIL

THE GRAIL IN CONTEXT



In each age of the Church new growths, new initiatives, appear as signs of the creative meeting between the Church's inner life and the given moment of history. There can be little doubt that an epoch-making encounter is now going on between Christianity and the cultural patterns of a new historical era. As a result our own age of the Church is particularly rich in signs of developing life.

The conscious involvement of the laity in the destiny of the Church, the search for a dynamic and positive relationship between the Church and the modern world; the Church's renewed awareness of her tradition and the resultant ability to re-appraise certain positions and structures; the ecumenical ferment, the deepening of ecclesial consciousness — all these signs of the Holy Spirit's guidance help to form the soil out of which a movement like the Grail can grow. Without these, the Grail would not be what it is; and in turn, we dare to hope, the Grail gives these impulses towards life and expansion concrete and special means to be present and active in the body of the Church.

The Grail takes its place then as one of the movements of the laity within the Church seeking to integrate the fullness of the Christian message into the context of twentieth-century life and thought.

THE ORIGIN OF THE MOVEMENT

The idea of the Grail took shape in the mind of Father Jacques van Ginneken, a Dutch Jesuit scholar, in the years just following the first World War. It was the idea of a world-wide movement of lay women, making full use for the Church of the new possibilities lying before them as modern women, while living by a radical faith in God and a desire to share in Christ's redeeming love for the world. It was the concurrence of a deeply religious love of creation, a keen sense of the movement of history, and an intuitive grasp of the psychological and spiritual capacities of women, that gave birth to the Grail.

With the approval of the Bishop of Haarlem, the Grail came into existence in 1921. Originally known as "The Women of Nazareth", the small group planned from the beginning an overseas expansion, to start in Asia with Indonesian university women. But the succeeding Bishop asked them to give up this plan to work among the girls and young women of his own diocese. The new orientation was accepted, and the movement found a first expression in the youth organization called "The Grail". Bishops from abroad began to invite the movement under this name to their own dioceses, and so the sacrifice of the original plan bore its fruit in this first realization of an international Grail movement.

Having expanded to Great Britain, Germany, Australia and the United States by 1940, the Grail was driven underground in its home country during the occupation. (It had already been abolished by the Nazi party in Germany as early as 1938.) The new mentality of the postwar period brought forth new expressions of the movement, and a further expansion towards the rapidly developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. This expansion has continued and is moving steadily towards that universality which was the clear vision of the founding group.

WHAT IS THE GRAIL?

The Grail is a movement among women who recognize in one another a common desire to be associated intimately with Christ in His redemptive work in the world. Drawn from diverse cultures, races and nationalities, from every social milieu and from varying circumstances and states of life, they form in the Church a world-wide spiritual community committed to a personal following of Christ and to undertaking, in unity with Him, a life of service and sacrifice for the conversion of the world.

This conversion implies neither proselytizing nor convert-making, but rather *metanoia*, a turning to God in the depths of one's being. It is for this conversion of the hearts of men and women of our time, and the subsequent transformation of the world in Christ, that the Grail exists.

The influences of history, psychology and society have played their part in developing the concept and the scope of the movement. But deeper than all of that, the Grail finds its meaning and its inspiration as a women's movement in the significance of Mary's role in the Church and in the world.

The Grail is not "specialized" in its membership or in the nature of its apostolate. It is a movement open to all women who are drawn by the same values. One finds in it a cross-section of women from all circumstances and conditions of life: married and single, working girls, university students and professional women. Individuals who might otherwise have had little in common with each other find themselves united in friendship by a deep spiritual bond. This sharing of a great common ideal, this mutual collaboration in spirit and in work, among women of such diverse talents and qualities, give the Grail an unusual possibility for a widespread Christianizing influence.

THE SPIRIT OF THE GRAIL

Just as it strives for universality in its membership, so too the Grail takes its inspiration, not from any specific devotion, but from the totality of Christian belief. Its spirituality is rooted in the fullness of Christian life communicated to us by Christ in His Church. The actuality of the mystery of Redemption, revealed to us by faith, calls forth the desire to give oneself to Christ for the fulfilment of His work among men, while preparing in joyful hope for His return among us.

This urge for personal commitment to Christ is expressed:

- by the primacy of prayer in our lives, the affirmation that we give first place to God and to our relationship with Him;
- by a charity that seeks to be as universal as Christ's own, expressing itself in reverence for others and in a search for true community;
- by a readiness for service and sacrifice, making oneself and all one's talents and energies available for the accomplishment of God's work.

In the continually renewed effort to live in genuine and radical fidelity to the demands of the Christian message, these values receive special stress, as being at the same time inherent in the Christian view and an answer to some of the deepest spiritual needs of modern men and women.

PRAYER is an elemental necessity of life for each one of us, and not least for those who are caught up in the pressures and demands of modern living. For everyone in the Grail, stress is laid on cultivating the habit of prayer. In each one's day there will be some time set apart to enter into the living presence of God, to be directed towards Him with one's whole being, so as to discover in dialogue with Him one's true orientation to the world. Prayer will find its fullest expression in an active participation in the Church's liturgy, in the celebration of the Eucharist as the central act of each day, and in study and meditation of the Word of God in Scripture.

CHARITY expresses itself in reverence towards other created beings, persons and things. Reverence towards persons acknowledges the dignity conferred upon every human being by the fact that Christ died for all and intends for all the glory of His Resurrection. Every human being, therefore, takes on a sacred character, marked out as it were by the blood of Christ. For those who take part in the Grail this implies a conscious cultivation of respect for the uniqueness of each person — in our daily living together, in work, in recreation, in conversation, in casual contacts as on the deeper levels of personal meeting. This respect implies also standing in word and in action for

brotherly relations among peoples, for justice to oppressed or minority groups, for the restoration of peace and unity.

Since the fruits of the Redemption extend through man to the whole of creation, the right use of material things, the appreciation of work and technique, the pursuit of an integrally human and Christian culture and its expression in literature, the visual arts, music and the mass media, have an important place in the movement.

Charity means also the cultivation of community as the expression of our intrinsic solidarity in Christ. The creation or restoration of true Christian communities may well be one of the most urgent responsibilities of our time. This concern leads to involvement in the vital work of ecumenism, in the struggle for interracial justice, in social action, in the efforts towards world peace, in the search for deeper, more genuine bonds of understanding between peoples of different cultural origins. It asks an involvement in the complex problems of the family, the parish, the factory, the office and the school. It requires the effort, in all conditions of life, to bring into existence a sense of community based on regard for the uniqueness of the individual and his spiritual and human needs.

READINESS FOR SERVICE AND SACRIFICE means a continually renewed willingness to place our talents, our energies, our resources, at the service of the Kingdom of God. It may mean choosing our profession, or exercising the one we have, so as to serve the greatest need, regardless of our own security or advancement. It can also mean sometimes putting aside for a while our own special interests in work or study for the sake of taking a responsibility in another line. It means the cultivation of versatility in our interests and skills, so as to be able to help in many different situations; it means learning the honest exchange of genuine teamwork. It means being available, to those who call upon us for understanding, for encouragement, for help.

Fidelity to these attitudes will lead to sacrifice, which draws its meaning and its strength from the Cross of Christ. The readiness to serve can be sustained only by a deep personal desire to know and to follow Him in His own availability to the Father.

In seeking to cultivate deliberately these basic Christian values, we feel that we can as women make a special contribution to our time and to the growth of the Kingdom of God.



HOW ONE PARTICIPATES IN THE GRAIL

The first and fundamental requirement for belonging to the Grail is the desire to know and love Christ, and to commit ourselves freely to Him, consciously taking our part as laity in the mission of the Church to the modern world. In the Grail we find a specific way of expressing this commitment, one which calls for a full exercise of our personal responsibility for the apostolate, and which still unites us spiritually and practically with like-minded women throughout the world.

What participation in the movement asks concretely of each one depends very much on her state of life, her situation and her personal inclinations.

Of everyone it requires:

- a thorough acquaintance with the Grail, what it is, what it seeks to accomplish, what it does;
- an affirmation of the values to be lived out faithfully in one's life, in unity with all;
- participation in programmes of formation initiated by the Grail for its members.
- an active association, wherever possible, with the work of the movement, in a centre or team or in personal contact with other members;

Those who can take responsibility in the corporate activities of the Grail may do so in the following ways:

- taking part in programmes or activities initiated in one's own locality;
- in full-time service for a definite period, in overseas service, for example, or as a volunteer for varying lengths of time in a Grail centre or team.

Married members take an active share in the work of the movement as their circumstances permit. They also meet among themselves for mutual inspiration in the fulfilment of their particular vocation as wives and mothers, and to stimulate one another towards a more effective participation in the life of their communities.

For some, participation can mean the possibility of a life-time dedication in response to a personal vocation to serve Christ in the nucleus of the Grail. The nucleus is a defined community within the movement consisting of women who, in dedication to Christ in virginity, are responsible for the spiritual integrity and continuity of the movement.

All together make up the Grail movement: single women, married women and women in the nucleus of the Grail. By their collaboration in mutual appreciation for each other's vocation all are fully engaged in realizing the depth and breadth of the lay woman's vocation in the Church in the twentieth century.

WHAT GRAIL TEAMS DO

The work of any given Grail team is determined by local needs, and fosters the full contribution of women to the Church and to the human community. Each specialized work is integrated into the context of Christian life as a whole, and teams are often involved in two or more related fields at the same time. Some of these are:

Training programmes of spiritual and practical formation for the apostolate

Overseas service training for professional women

Community work with women in developing areas

Adult education and leadership training in rural and urban communities

Medical-social services combined with personnel formation

Recreation and cultural activities for children, young people and families

International student programmes of social and intellectual exchange

Operation of book and art shops as Catholic cultural centres

Religious education in the spirit of the modern catechetical movement

Building Christian unity by means of educational and cultural programmes

The Grail works in each case with the approval of the local ordinary.

PUBLICATIONS FOR MEMBERS

Published by the International Secretariate :

The Grail Review (quarterly)

Destined for members and friends of the movement, it provides basic articles on the main lines of work and fundamental points of spirituality.

Occasional numbers in French, German, Portuguese.

The Grail International Newsletter (10 times a year)

A means of exchanging recent news of programmes, new initiatives, moves of personnel and other information among teams and centres.

The Grail Documentation Bulletin (3—4 times a year)

Basic documentation on various fields of apostolate for those working in them.

Other publications :

Bulletin of the Religious Education Council, Grailville. (5 times a year)

Book reviews, articles, news items for those working in religious education.

Ecumenical Notes, Philadelphia Grail Centre.

Provides a similar service in the field of ecumenism.

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