

INSTITUTION SAINT-VINCENT

SENLIS (Oise).

SPEECH

DELIVERED

AT THE PRIZE-GIVING

BY MR LÉON HARMEL,

COMMANDER OF THE ORDER OF PIUS IX,

Deputy Secretary General of the Association of Catholic Workers' Circles,

ON 27 JULY 1889.



SENLIS

IMPRIMERIE EUGÈNE DUFRESNE

1889.

THIS EDITION

This is an English translation of the original French text, made for the website leonharmel.com in 2026. It follows the original sentence by sentence, without cuts or additions.

The text is given in full, translated from the 1889 edition. It has been typeset in the spirit of the original: title pages and headings follow the layout of the book; the illustrations have been cut out of the digitised document and restored.

The numbered notes are those of the original work; here they are numbered continuously from beginning to end.

Léon Harmel, le Bon Père du Val-des-Bois

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My Dear Friends,

What a joy it is for me to be back at Saint-Vincent! With what emotion I have walked once more through the cloisters, the chapel, the study halls, the classrooms and the courtyards of our beautiful college! I spent seven years here, the finest of my life. I cannot remember a single cloud that ever came to darken one of my days. All the good there has been in my life, the noble passions that have stirred my heart since the age of 18 and stir it still, all of that I owe to Saint-Vincent.

I have remained a son of Saint-Vincent, a son ever loving, ever grateful! (*Applause*).

You too, my dear friends, be happy to be pupils of this Institution. Be proud of your College, and may your College one day be proud of you!

It is not among you that useless men will be found; you will never wish to offer the sad spectacle that has so often grieved my heart as a Christian and a Frenchman: the spectacle of young men brought up as Christians who appear in society as men of inconceivable frivolity, as powerless souls. (*Cheers*). It seems that the more they have received, the less they are able to give; their minds and their hearts are overrun by a kind of *pauperism of the soul*. You have heard of economic pauperism: it is a moral disease which brings upon the worker a destitution beyond remedy, all the deeper when wages are higher. In the same way, young men who have received, intellectually, a hundred times what they need squander these riches with a carelessness and a prodigality whose only measure is the generosity of which they have been the objects. (*Applause*). That is a social crime which draws down the curses of Heaven, for the more we have received, the more we must give. We belong to the whole of humanity, and if God loads us with His blessings, it is above all so that we may be the agents of His generosity towards our brothers. (*Applause and cheers*).

As for you, my dear friends, this misfortune will not befall you if you remain worthy sons of Saint-Vincent. For then you will be:

The knights of Christ,

The servants of the People.

I.

Nothing is finer, nobler and at the same time more stirring than to show oneself everywhere and always the *knight of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. It is He who is our King and our beloved Master; He is the true King of France, as Joan of Arc proclaimed, the French heroine above all others, as St Louis proclaimed, who said of himself: “I am the good Sergeant of our King Jesus Christ.” (*Loud applause*). It is because France has turned away from Him that she has fallen into every abyss.

Human language is powerless to express the joys you will find in these peaceful struggles, where the fervour of an enthusiasm that never flags sustains the frailest courage. Believe our experience, and that of so many others who work with us: the obstacles are only apparent; in reality they are means that Providence uses to spur on our devotedness. Struggles are offered to us only to win us victories. (*Cheers and applause*).

Now all of you, young men, do you not feel in your valiant souls a thirst for triumph? Come with us, be the knights of Christ, and you will go from victory to victory. Your laurels will be immortal, for it is the angels who will weave your crowns. They follow with admiration these struggles on earth, which are the continuation of the first battle that Heaven witnessed. We have the same battle cry, *Quis ut Deus?* and our visible Leader, the Sovereign Pontiff, like Michael, guides our battalions, inspires us with his valour and foretells our victory. (*Applause*).

In a few weeks, on 22 September, we shall go to swear to our beloved Father fidelity in obedience and in the struggle. The world of labour is at this moment setting out to lay at the feet of the Vicar of Jesus Christ the homage of working France. This meeting of the people and the Papacy will take place in the immense church of St Peter, before the whole world, astonished to see that the august Prisoner, without kingdom, without money, without soldiers, is more powerful than the Masters of the world who make the earth tremble under the weight of their cannon. (*Cheers*). Oh yes, it will be a marvellous sight. We wanted the Youth of France to witness it, so that they may carry away from this memory a manly resolve served by an indomitable courage, sustained by an enthusiasm that defies all discouragement. *Saint-Vincent* will be represented there, with its banner, with its venerated masters, and later, when you are my age, you will say to your grandchildren: “I was in Rome in September 1889! I was with the ten thousand! I acclaimed the social Kingship of Jesus Christ, and since that day my courage has never failed: I have remained a son of Saint-Vincent, I have remained a knight of Christ!” (*Repeated applause*).

II.

To be true knights of Christ, we must show ourselves the *Servants of the People*. Our Lord has marked out our path: He chose to be a worker; His calloused hands show us where His preferences lie. He came to teach the protection of the weak, to establish on earth the reign of justice and charity. The Church had patiently organised age-old institutions which were, for the people, like the citadels of their freedom, their dignity and their security. Now, ever since the Revolution brutally overthrew that magnificent edifice, the worker has once again been abandoned, forsaken, oppressed: because he has ceased to be the child of the Church, he has by that very fact been handed over to every selfishness, to every greed. Allow me to tell you an incident from my travels that will paint the situation for you.

I was called one day to speak to a group of about six hundred workers enrolled by socialism. These poor people were seeking the remedy for their ills in the founding of a cooperative production society. I gave them my advice, I explained to them the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to succeed, and the causes that have brought so much ruin upon attempts of the same kind. When the lecture was over, I was seated between the President and the worker Vice-President. We were in a very large café; facing us, men sitting packed tightly against one another, behind them a row standing, and further back another row standing on benches. At first come violent words, one after another, against the oppression of labour by capital; then, when the flood of words begins to subside, I answer gently, I show them the painful reality: they are not in the conditions that ensure success. After a long exchange of ideas, cornered by the relentless logic that destroys their passionate arguments one after another, no longer knowing what to answer, I can still see them raising their

arms to heaven and crying out in despair: “But we are abandoned! we are abandoned!” (*Great stir*).

That is the anguished cry that tears my heart, on my travels through France, every time I come into contact with working people. And because I love them passionately, because I have devoted to them my life, my health, all the fire and ardour that God has put in me, I want to come to their help, to save them, to give back to the Church and to the Fatherland these children who have strayed. I feel that it is possible. We must begin again what the Church did in former times. But we lack men; we do not find enough generous hearts to help us. Oh, come with us, you, my friends, who wish to be the knights of Christ; come with us towards these suffering crowds; bend down to every misery. You will learn joys unknown to the selfish and the indifferent; your heart will be enlarged, it will understand the great emotions of life, the noble passions that carry one over obstacles. Yes, my dear friends, come with us, and let us together be the *servants of the people*. (*Prolonged applause*).

III.

To make it easier for young men to fulfil their great social mission, the Association of Circles founded in 1886 the *Catholic Association of French Youth*¹. This Association recruits from among the senior pupils of the colleges, then from among students, and finally from among all young men who feel in their hearts the fervour of faith and patriotism. The groups, while keeping their autonomy, are bound together by prayer, study and action, and together form a social force that will become powerful in the service of the Church and the Fatherland. At the last general assembly, in Paris, we were delighted to see representatives of the principal cities of France: the group of lycée pupils especially aroused our admiration by its valour and its fearlessness: it showed that those who seem to receive less sometimes profit more.

Our Association is essentially *national*. It seeks to win over the destinies of the country the legitimate influence that belongs to men of faith. Quite close to our borders, we have a magnificent example. The canton of Fribourg was under the yoke of the radicals: the Youth Association, by its valour and perseverance, succeeded in restoring the social reign of Jesus Christ where persecution had been triumphant. In 1885 we witnessed an unforgettable and marvellous spectacle: we saw all the cantonal authorities, the President with his Council, the judiciary, the municipalities, the army with its officers, pay public homage to the adorable Eucharist, with a faith and an enthusiasm that recalled the finest days of the Church. That is our ambition for our beautiful country: to give back to it, together with its glorious Catholic traditions, the sceptre of the world that it has lost ever since it made itself the champion of the Revolution. (*Applause*).

1. 262, Boulevard St-Germain, Paris.

The Youth Association is also a work of conquest, a work of *apostolate*. All of you, young men, who feel noble aspirations in your hearts, be apostles: apostles at college, apostles in your families, apostles wherever circumstances may carry you. Today the world is divided into two camps: the camp of Jesus Christ and the camp of Satan. The enemy of mankind has unfurled his standards with a boldness he never had before. One must choose; one cannot remain neutral. Whether you like it or not, you will be apostles or apostates. He who is not for Jesus Christ is against Him. You will not wish to be apostates, so you will be apostles. You will join the Youth Association, and from your college days you will be initiated into this great national movement that is gathering generous hearts everywhere. You will prepare yourselves to take part in our struggles; you too will feel this breath of Resurrection passing over souls, raising up down-cast courage, kindling generous fervour. You too will hail the dawn of deliverance, the rising again of the Fatherland! You will feel the old blood of the Franks boiling in your veins, and you will cry out with us: Long live Christ who loves the Franks! He has never failed His people, but His people have failed Him, and our generation will see the end of this national apostasy. (*Warm approval*).

In answer to our call, you will not plead the examination syllabuses, knowing that the more a soul is enlarged in goodness and beauty, the more capable it becomes of assimilating every branch of knowledge. Besides, experience has done justice to these petty objections. We know colleges where our Association has been established for several years: not one of the young men who belong to it has failed an examination. Modern industry is rightly reproached for degrading the people by limiting the horizon of their life to matter. May not modern education be reproached for degrading youth by confining its aspirations to a superficial knowledge, in which confused and ill-ordered heaps offer the mind nothing but chaotic views? Lift up your souls, French and Christian Youth, keep your hearts on high, and be

assured that by doing so, far from harming your studies, you will double your power of learning. (*Applause*).

Finally, another characteristic of your Association is *enthusiasm*. Our valiant friend Hervé-Bazin, taken too soon from the affection of all, left as a testament to the youth of Angers an admirable book: “*Le jeune homme chrétien*”.² In it we find these very true lines: “To have enthusiasm is to fasten to one’s shoulders two white wings with which one flies, like the dove, high above the ground, towards the heavenly horizons.”³

“It is Christian enthusiasm that preserves virtue, enthusiasm that sustains long hopes and enlarges thought, enthusiasm that sets souls on fire, purifying them, and carries them up to God like pure torches.”⁴

Enthusiasm prolongs youth through the years and, thanks to its noble fervour, the evening of life is crimsoned with the fires of dawn. (*Cheers and applause*).

Ah! the fact is, our cause is immortal! The Church our Mother keeps her youth through the centuries; all that we do with her shares in some measure in her lastingness; all that we do without her soon falls into decay. That is why the clever men, who would cast over the name of Jesus Christ the veil of human wisdom, have led us and will lead us again into bottomless abysses. Do not follow these prudent men; be enthusiasts, that is to say, passionate for the complete truth! (*Applause*).

Remember our fathers in the Faith. They had every obstacle before them: the laws, the customs, the judiciary, the army, the Caesarean colossus that gripped the world in its arms of iron. How did they manage to overcome so many piled-up impossibilities? Did they raise soldiers, amass treasures, win over their persecutors? No.

2. *Le Jeune homme chrétien*, by Hervé-Bazin, published by Victor Lecoffre.

3. Page 257.

4. Page 259.

They proclaimed the truth in all its reckless untimeliness. And just as the walls of Jericho fell at the sound of the sacred trumpets, so at the sound of the truth boldly affirmed everywhere, the idols were shattered, the colossus collapsed, and from the ruins scattered on the ground our fathers built the magnificent edifice of the Christian Commonwealth. (*Cheers*).

You are called to work these wonders; that is why you will be the knights of Christ, the servants of the people, the heralds of the complete truth. In the midst of our world, which is collapsing under the weight of its sensualism, its impiety and its injustices, rise up, proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ, and fearlessly make every echo ring with that sacred name! It is through Him that we shall conquer. We are preparing the future; God is working with us, and when the din of the terrible cataclysm has died away, when the dust of this immense collapse has settled, we shall marvel to see the new edifice that God will have built with our efforts, and we shall hear the acclamations of the nations hailing the new advent of justice and charity through the social reign of Jesus Christ. (*Long round of applause and prolonged cheers*).

