

# ROME'S MULTI-PURPOSE YOUTH CENTRE

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It is not always clear what the Vatican does with its money, but in one instance the destination of a large sum is obvious to anyone who visits the growing, and rather daunting, suburbs around the main road to Tivoli. There, in the midst of Rome's industrial area, a residential centre for young workers is taking shape.

The centre is not yet complete, but for six months or so it has been functioning as a place in which young immigrants can find lodging and youths living in the neighbourhood find an opportunity to take courses in specialized industrial training.

The initiative owes its origin to the habit of commemorating in some substantial way the eightieth birthday of a Pontiff. In this case the funds used for building the centre came from the contributions of the Roman Catholic world to mark the eightieth birthday of Pius XII, the last Pope but one. When the collection was made the general intention was to use the proceeds for some work of social character.

## African Students

It was Pope John XXIII who decided that the funds should be applied to a combined hostel, training college and community centre under the administration of the Opus Dei movement. This Roman Catholic association, founded nearly 40 years ago in Spain, holds that Christianity can as well be practised in conditions of an ordinary working life as in a life of religious retirement and contemplation.

The movement is strongly established in Italy as in other countries. Much of its activities have been concentrated on university students. The new centre is aimed directly at young people who will be workers in the narrower sense of going into industry or, in some cases, of taking up the teaching of industrial skills. This is particularly the case with students from Africa and Latin America who are expected to form a regular part of the residents.

The centre is expected to be finished in three or four years. The residential block is almost ready. It rises to eight storeys and can accommodate 192 young men. For the moment there are about 70, and their presence is part of the experimental period of testing the arrangements and the outlook adopted in approaching their problems, so there

will be a fund of experience by the time the whole centre is in full operation.

The ages vary from 15 to 25; the younger ones are studying or serving apprenticeships and the older men have regular work in Rome. They are all Italians except for three Africans and two Spaniards. Most hold some form of scholarship or bursary, and the majority come from central and southern Italy. Largely they are chosen from poor families as well as for their revealed or potential qualities.

The school for specialized industrial training, which will eventually have a block of its own but for the moment is housed in the immense basements of the residential block, serves quite a different set of young people. The 150 pupils come daily from the surrounding area. Many of them are sons of immigrant families, again coming from the poorer regions of central and southern Italy. When the school has its own building there will be places for 500 pupils.

This school and the gymnasium adjoining it represent the aspect of the centre's work aimed at providing hitherto non-existent facilities for the local youths. The same will be the case for the library which has yet to be stocked with books; the half-finished church intended for parochial purposes; and the projected playing fields. There is already a thriving course in football organized by a professional trainer.

Discussions and social gatherings for young people and their parents form another aspect of this plan in offering communal facilities to a neighbourhood in which both population and housing—in some cases shanty towns—have outstripped social services.

Finally, looking beyond the neighbourhood itself, there will be a hostel capable of accommodating 52 people for the benefit of organized groups of visitors to Rome from abroad or other parts of Italy.

So far about 800m. lire (£450,000) has been spent on the project. The funds were sufficient for the construction of the centre, but for its running costs and overheads the administration will have to rely on help from outside. It naturally has the active interest of the Vatican and might be considered among the most striking recent examples, certainly in Italy, of attempts to apply the Roman Church's social theories in a section of Rome in which social initiatives of any kind are lagging.