

at last achieve government of the people, by the people and for the people. We who are inherently capable of establishing a genuine international government among our own peoples owe it to ourselves, and to those who look to us for guidance and leadership, to take the first steps towards a democratic federal Commonwealth of Peoples in the cause of world peace. As General Smuts prophesied :—

‘What the infant League of Nations failed to achieve, the United Nations will attempt and will rebuild on deeper and surer foundations. We hope to build a Union which no Hitler of the future, not even hell itself, shall venture to challenge again.’

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS IN ENGLAND.

Strictly, there is no such body as *the* Catholic Parents' Association. The various parochial units may be linked with a central council, and, as in some dioceses, with a diocesan council, but in general each local association is self-contained, and has its parochial or district denomination. There is divergence in constitution and even in title, and that absolute uniformity is undesirable is evidenced by the declaration of the Bishops of England and Wales on 24th August last that 'The Hierarchy have given full approval to the formation of Parochial and Diocesan Associations of Catholic Parents under the direction of the Bishops of the various dioceses. But they do not approve the formation of the National Federation of Catholic Parents' Associations, nor of its appeal for funds.'

The Constitution approved for one English Archdiocese details the purpose of the Association thus :

- (a) To learn and teach the duties and rights of parents.
- (b) To promote and safeguard Catholic educational interests and the care of Catholic youth.
- (c) To encourage representation of Catholic parents on public educational bodies.

(d) To encourage the practice of family prayers in every Catholic household of the parish.

This is a fourfold aim whose effectiveness will be in the efficient carrying out of the primary provision. The average Catholic, even if he or she has remembered the catechism teaching of younger days, is not so deeply versed in Catholic doctrine as to have clear notions on parental duties and rights in education. How many Catholics could answer correctly three elementary questions on them? The fact of State education, moreover, has familiarised nearly everybody with an almost Communistic conception of the State as the universal parent. It is the old story of an anti-Catholic idea fraudulently winning assent as a principle through popular acceptance.

Though the first purpose of the parochial association is to instil sound knowledge of parental rights in education, this should only be the prelude to exhortations to pass on such knowledge to others, Catholics and non-Catholics. The Parents' Association member must learn to be an apostle; the worth of his membership will be real only in so far as he is one. Personal spreading of Catholic doctrine on the duties and rights of parents, combined with an explanation of the Catholic case in the present crisis, will form a sympathetic public opinion in our favour. Mass meetings that have not in view a training for such peaceful penetration become mere display. They will fail in the measure in which they are regarded as a substitute for individual effort.

It is the moral right of parents in education that needs to be emphasised, and not the reminder of their voting power. It may be argued that legislators think more in terms of votes than of rights. If that is so, then as a political gesture the Parents' Associations exhibit our weakness. For at the polls Catholics are in a minority.

It is essential for many reasons that the Parents' Association be not an aggregate political body. There has been much controversy as to whether the longer title 'Parents' and Electors' Association,' disallowed in some dioceses, tends to give it too much of a political colour. That 'and Electors'' involves something of a contradiction is the opinion of many observers. An association of parents testifying to their rights is a different category from an organisation of electors defending them. There is a confusion of ideas, even if in combination; and in consequence a weakening of aim.

It has been argued that a Parents' Association may suitably be the nucleus of a Catholic party in the country. Comparisons have been drawn with the Catholic parties on the continent. But Catholic countries or districts may well have their *ipso facto* Catholic parties;

Catholics in this country are of any and every party that does not oppose the Church. A party that depended for support on adherents to Catholic principles would be a certain minority. And since it could not compel support from all Catholics, it would tend to compromise those who legitimately belonged to other parties. If it did not in fact create a theoretical split between its own members and other Catholics, it would almost certainly cause mutual suspicion.

But there is a greater danger. The party, small as it would be, would need to attract sympathy in order to get a hearing. Non-Catholics who professed an adherence to the party's principles could hardly be refused membership. Its Catholic appellation would become meaningless from the admission of its first non-Catholic member. The admission to the Catholic Parents' Association of non-Catholic parents of Catholic children is different, from the fact that the Sacrament of Matrimony gives a shared duty and right in the education of the child. It emphasises, moreover, by its restricted requirement of qualification that the Association is non-political in intent. But the admission to any Catholic association of non-Catholics in general, however sympathetic they might be, exposes it to the danger of preponderant non-Catholic membership.

Even that, however, is not the greatest danger. Of all the parties nowadays to be opposed, the Communist is perhaps ostensibly the least formidable. But it must be remembered that Communism itself is a pseudo-philosophy, and permeates minds rather than inspires specific party membership. In the struggle between the forces 'for God' and 'against God' (in the words of Pope Pius XI) —and who will deny that it has already begun?—large contingents of pretended neutrals, and some even of the professed believers will line themselves up with the Communists against the Catholic Church. The Communist has in the Catholic Church an antagonist against which he cannot prevail, and he instinctively knows it. But against a party as such he has an enemy with which he can do battle on a lower plane; he sees an equality. He would rejoice to identify the Church with politics. He could put forward as an excuse for his campaign against a so-called 'Catholic' party that the Church had compromised her mission. He could thus gain adherents from amongst those who would have hesitated to join in his professed anti-religious campaign, but who would now recognise a common cause.

That the Church has the right to inform and direct politics is primary. As each of us is citizen of two States, the terrestrial State and the City of God, so each of our acts is a point liable to be affected by an at all events potential relation to the common good

of the terrestrial State and a relation to the common spiritual good of the City of the Saints, the supreme and sovereign custodian of moral values' (Maritain: *The Things that are not Caesar's*). But the Church's Kingdom is Christ's; it is not of this world. The Church has no direct mandate for temporal government. Her indirect authority over a party calling itself specifically 'Catholic' is morally no more than over any other party. The appellation 'Catholic' would signify only that its members nominally recognised this indirect authority, a recognition difficult to guarantee for every member.

The Catholic Parents' Association, on the other hand, is under direct ecclesiastical supervision. Its mandate is not the divine mandate of parenthood. The rights of parents are one thing; the right of Catholic parents to organise is another. It is necessary to emphasise this, for it has sometimes been assumed that because parents' rights are not in their exercise subject to ecclesiastical control, neither is parental organising.

So false a notion would create a clear-cut line between clergy and laity. The essential in corporate Catholic activity is in perfect co-operation between priest and people; all must act together for the common good of the Church. The specious argument has in some quarters gained support that we must demonstrate to the country that we are not priest-ridden; that to do this the laity must act on their own initiative. Parents must prove, it is said, that their demand for Catholic schools is not priest-inspired, but arises from their own parental determination. Whatever 'priest-ridden' may mean, the average English Catholic is the last to be so. And you do not demonstrate an accusation to be false by putting yourself in a false position. You do not, for instance, show the absurdity of the charge for absolution by never paying the priest anything. You do not refute the error that we give divine honour to Our Lady by giving her no honour at all. The demand for the due recognition of parental rights in education is the joint demand of priest and people. They are rights rooted in nature, and sanctioned by Christ. Separate priest and people in demonstrating Catholic doctrine and rights to the world, and you attempt to sever Christ's Mystical Body.

Parental organising is not a parental duty as such; indeed it has been facetiously remarked that some local organisations seek to stress parental duties and rights by taking parents away from the family to attend meetings. The Parents' Association is a lay body whose only sanction is the approval of the priest.

The lay committee may not act independently of the priest; it has only the status that the priest's ratification of its decisions gives it.

That this ratification is sometimes assumed or implicit is probable. But apart from its disciplinary necessity, there is another consideration which must be borne in mind where the Association is concerned : its ' democratic ' make-up. This is an age in which ' democracy ' is vaunted as if it had divine sanction. Democracy, however, as understood to-day, can be responsible for the grossest kind of tyranny and its culminating failure is in its paradoxical acceptance of the yoke of modern dictatorship.

It is chiefly in such extremes that democracy is *de facto* harmful. Nevertheless, its philosophy is at the root of much of the evil of our times. Its basic assumption—that authority to govern is derived from ' the people '—is false ; yet the average Catholic in this country has come to regard it as sacrosanct ; his reverence for the word itself tends to be such that in the parish and elsewhere *vox committee* is for many *vox Dei*. There is no need to stress the danger, from this outlook, of rival or divided loyalty.

Democracy as we know it is only a parody of the true democracy of grace. The Church needs not the infusion of democratic methods to bring her up to date, not even in parochial organisations. For she herself is the one true democracy. Every one of her living members, because each is another Christ by grace, shares the Kingship of Christ. The promise ' Ask, and you shall receive ' is made to every soul, even to the sinner. The promise will be redeemed according to the measure of the giving of Christ.

The democracy of grace is, by prayer, irresistible in its demands for ultimate justice, though this will be delayed, at least universally, for want of a sufficiency of collective perfection in the Church's members. The first requirement for securing justice is personal sanctity, if not in fact, at least in aim, in those who demand justice. Any Catholic association that ignores the necessity of spiritual ideals is bound to fail because only prayerful action is effective for good.

It has been said of the Parents' Association that it has not a spiritual object. If that is so it can hardly hope to secure the spiritual welfare of the Catholic children for whom it is so solicitous. If, as some think, it is good to have a parochial association which, because it is not specifically pious, may attract the indifferent Catholic, its attraction must be only for the good of his soul.

The attack on our schools is only part of a larger campaign against the Church. Each parish will need a body of zealous and knowledgeable Catholics who, under the direction of the parish priest, can deal with the various problems that may arise with the local authority, if ever the provisions of the Education Bill come to be implemented. Enthusiasm, where it exists, can hardly be kept alive

by the holding of meetings in interminable sequence, where the same things are said over and over again, and the schools question alone is discussed.

Enthusiasm must be more fundamental; it must be apostolic. There needs to be a parochial Guild, religious in intent but without onerous religious obligations. The sanctity of the family and its preservation would still be the reason for its existence. It would seek to further Christ's interests by instilling reverence for family life. Parochial meetings could be held to discuss all kinds of problems as they affect the lives of Catholics. Parishioners would be encouraged democratically—the Spirit breatheth where He will—to air their views and to ask questions; and the priest would be present to keep the discussion doctrinally correct.

Local school problems could be discussed and resolved. These, as well as the personal suggestions of parishioners, would provide methods for the conversion of our fellow-countrymen, which, if practicable, could be acted upon. There could be an exchange of notes about results. The anti-Catholic letter-writer to the local paper could be dealt with; and even letter-writing in the Catholic cause initiated. Local anti-Catholic activity could be watched and reported upon, and its frustration planned. There is no end to the useful activities in which such a parochial association could engage. Above all, days of prayer for special objects could be organised.

It may be that when the present schools crisis is only a memory, parochial Guilds of the kind will be labouring for the preservation of family life and the conversion of England, which alone can finally give us peace in the war for our schools. If so, the credit will be to the Parents' Associations, which will have given them birth.

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