

Dr. Zacharias, in the last issue of **BLACKFRIARS**, showed how the doctrine of this text was the only answer to internment, the way through; and we may see ourselves as in a vast internment camp guarded by scientists and industrialists. We may not capitulate to them. The surrender to evil by deliberate choice or by this modern impersonalism is no escape. It does not even separate us from the love of God—on his side. But capitulation or surrender does thrust us into the depth of misery, from our side. These persecutions, nakedness, principalities, can only separate us from the love of God by sin, and the separation lies on our side not on his. Penance will make us conquerors again, penance for the injustice in which we are now involved; personal mortification for personal crimes and blindnesses that are now separating us from the love of God. The world to-day is full of unsolicited opportunities of penance, and we cannot get away from it. The way through is the way of penance.

THE EDITOR.

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## ALCIDE DE GASPERI, PRIME MINISTER

THE nomination of the Christian-Democrat, Alcide De Gasperi, as Prime Minister of Italy, marks the breaking of the Liberal and anti-clerical tradition of Italian politics. It is true that the first to be "President of the Council of Ministers" (the historic Italian title), in March, 1848, was Cesare Balbo, a Catholic belonging to the Neo-Guelf current, but after him came a series of Presidents, Catholic indeed, but known as Liberals because they stood for the abolition of the rights and privileges of the Church. The true founder of Italian Liberalism—of a conservative type both politically and economically—was Camillo Benso di Cavour.

Once relations between State and Church were broken, and Catholics constrained to follow the system of political abstention (the *non expedit*), no more opportunities came for the nomination of a President openly professing himself a Catholic, outside the Democratic-Liberal Italian tradition, till the advent of the Popular Party (1919).

The first case presented itself in April, 1920, when the Popular Party had provoked the crisis of the Nitti Cabinet, but then the King chose Nitti himself to form a new ministry. However, through an imprudent move (his decree on the price of corn on the

eve of the reopening of the Chamber), Nitti was obliged to present himself to the Chamber as resigning, with all his Ministry. This time the King called upon Giolitti, indicated by agreement of the Right and Centre (including many members of the Popular Party), and Giolitti once more came to the top.

The next occasion was in February, 1922, when the Popular Party opposed the renewed nomination of Giolitti, whose party had provoked an extra-parliamentary crisis, withdrawing its support from the Bonomi Cabinet. This crisis passed into history with the title the "veto on Giolitti", launched, it was said, by Don Sturzo. In point of fact, Giolitti was not able to get round the refusal of the Popular Party to co-operate with him, since in August, 1920, and in May, 1921, he had promoted electoral alliances with the Fascists. According to constitutional rules, the King should have called upon the leader of the Popular Party, then De Gasperi, as Chairman of its Parliamentary Group. He preferred instead to try again with V. E. Orlando (a history that would repeat itself), who failed to form a government, and finally with Facta, who succeeded because the Populists, criticized by all as prolonging a dangerous crisis, ended by the compromise of which they had cause to repent.

Facta was a weak man, tied up with Giolitti, and he sought appeasement with the Fascists, who had become bold and were increasing their armed pressure. It was in July that the Populists sought a come-back by provoking Facta's resignation by a vote in conjunction with the Socialists and Liberal-Democrats. This time the King summoned Meda, who had already been twice Minister and was the most authoritative of the Popular Deputies, but did not offer him the office of Prime Minister; he summoned also Turati—the Socialist leader—but did not press him to enter the future Government (the Socialists were still holding to an abstentionist policy and Turati was not able to overcome the opposition of his party executive). Thus the candidature of Orlando came to the fore, and Orlando was unable to persuade the Socialists to take part in the Government, while he had to give way before the threat of a general strike, which took place later.

It was said that the strike had been instigated by secret agents of the Facta government (still in being, awaiting the crisis) and that the King, without waiting Orlando's definite answer, summoned Facta and ordered him to reconstitute the Ministry at all costs in the face of the threat of an insurrectional strike.

A year ago a friend wrote to tell me that the Socialists' Political Vice-Secretary, Arturo Vella, of Caltagirone, before dying had confessed his mistake in opposing Don Sturzo's plan in July, 1922, for a Coalition Cabinet of Populists, Socialists and Liberal-Democrats,

with Meda or else Orlando as head, and in having held to the socialist thesis of abstentionism and a general strike. If he had then followed the Sturzo plan, Fascism would not have won. Meda did not reach the post of Prime Minister, partly because of his natural reserve, I would even say timidity, but more because the King (whose anti-clerical spirit was well-known) saw in him the Catholic, and because the Socialists had not a clear vision of the danger, or, if they had, were swamped by the revolutionary tendencies that were corroding the fibres of their party.

Yet another memory. After the Matteotti murder, the Opposition Parties—Populars, Socialists, Communists and Liberal-Democrats—left the Chamber of Deputies and set up the opposition known as the Aventine Secession. They hoped that the King would dismiss Mussolini, who was accused of having ordered the murder, and that he would set up a provisional government, dissolving the Chamber. Such hopes soon failed. The President of the Aventine Assembly was precisely Alcide de Gasperi.

He, who with the Popular leaders, kept alive the flame of liberty during twenty years of tyranny and reconstituted the Party under the name of Christian Democratic Party, has now been able to overcome the most delicate point of Italian politics, affirming the moral and political parity of Italian Catholics as citizens, by taking over the first office of government.

There are many precedents of Catholics as Prime Ministers in the other countries of Europe. It is enough to note that Belgium, from 1882 to 1914, had a government of Catholics, while there has been no lack of Catholic Prime Ministers in Holland and Luxemburg, and even in Germany with Hertling, during the First World War, Wirth, Max and Brüning, in the Weimar Republic. Of these Max was of the Right-wing of the Centre, and Brüning, though Left in social matters, in the political field leaned towards the Right. So too in Austria Mgr. Seipel leaned increasingly towards the Right, too far to the Right, preparing the way for the Dolfuss solution.

The only Prime Minister who came unequivocally from the Christian Democratic ranks was Baron Pullet in Belgium, but his government lasted only a short while, through the manoeuvres of the bankers, who brought about the fall of the Belgian franc and impeded the loan that was being negotiated in London at the time.

The political affirmation of the ideals of a democracy founded on the collaboration of all social classes and on Christian morals is the most difficult, but also the most important, for the future of Europe.

LUIGI STURZO.