

PARISH ORGANIZATION

THE undersigned members of a Committee appointed in 1929 by a considerable body of prominent Catholic laymen, anxious to further the cause of Catholicism in this country, desire to draw attention to the following points.

(1) The most insistent cry of the present time is the call to common action in the Church. The Holy Father himself has appealed to all Catholics to take part in *Catholic Action*, an appeal which, on numerous occasions, has been re-echoed by His Eminence the Cardinal and other members of the Hierarchy. Indeed, one of the most urgent needs of the moment is *corporate* action and a sense of community on the part of Catholics, and the Committee venture to suggest that such corporate action is required, not merely in the outward sphere of social work and intellectual defence, but also in the internal sphere of parochial co-operation, with a view to relieving the burden of the clergy, to more active support for the parish priest, more generous help for parochial objects, and a greater sense of individual responsibility for the life of the parish.

(2). For long past individual Catholics have been aware that, despite the most self-sacrificing labour of the priest, the vigour of parish life has too often fallen far short of the standard that might be attained. The laity appear in large part tepid and apathetic, the active-minded do not properly co-operate, social and charitable activities are carried on by a small number of individuals instead of by the effective team-work of the mass, and leakage is inadequately examined and combatted by common action. All this may be traced to the absence of any system which impresses on the parishioners a sense of their corporate responsibilities

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and duties towards the life and work of their parish. The awakening of the parochial conscience in this regard should do much to relieve the clergy of the greater part of the temporal cares and anxieties which under present conditions absorb an undue share of their time and energies.

(3). At the same time, the present lack of organization which is responsible for the apathy of the laity in parochial matters, is also the cause of serious difficulties, the victims of which are the clergy themselves. Instances are known of the priest being overwhelmed by financial worries, of being faced on appointment by harassing and unsuspected liabilities contracted by his predecessor; of disputed ownership of assets of the Church; of ineffective or excessive expenditure; and, generally, of the failure to make adequate use of the man-power and financial resources available in a parish.

(4). The obvious remedy for this lack of system and its consequences would seem to be a return—at least partial—to the organization of parochial life such as existed before the Reformation (see the writings of Cardinal Gasquet), and such as, in fact, exists in different forms in many parts of continental Europe at the present day. It means an organization whereby the clergy are prepared to take their parishioners into their confidence in the administration of the temporal affairs of their parishes and to concede to them a voice in these affairs; whereby the laity will assume such responsibilities as should properly be shouldered by them, and will thereby become possessed of a full sense of corporate, yet personal participation in the Church and her life and works.

(5). The Committee, on behalf of the body which had appointed them, submitted in the winter 1929-30 a Memorandum and Petition to the Hierarchy of England and Wales on the whole question, drawing

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attention to the drawbacks above recited and begging for the setting up of a Commission of Enquiry by whom the whole subject might be explored.

(6). The Committee are glad to be able to announce that the Hierarchy, assembled in Low Week this year, have confirmed a decision given already in the previous year, viz. : that, while their Lordships had no power to order the establishment of a Council or of such a Commission of Enquiry,

‘ Any Parish Priest is free to form a committee to assist him in the temporal concerns of his parish, subject to the consent of the Bishop which, if wisely sought, would not be refused.’

(7). Although this decision, communicated to the Committee as early as April, 1931, was in no way confidential, the Committee did not see fit to publish it then, as they wished to make sure of the type of council that would conform to the Canon Law. They also hoped that it might be possible with the help of representatives of the clergy to agree upon a model scheme to be recommended for adoption. This, however, has not proved practicable, and the Committee, therefore, see no further reason for delaying the publication of this statement.

(8). The Committee are aware that the suggested Councils could not be set up everywhere at once. In many places the requisite conditions are far from being realised as yet and until the idea becomes more familiar it may be difficult to obtain the services of parishioners of the type desired. They are also aware that in some cases the clergy are averse to trying the experiment, although external conditions may be favourable, for fear that the remedy might prove worse than the disease. But the Committee venture to observe that the greater part of such apprehensions either rest on a misunderstanding of the object in view, or

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could be met in the constitution of the Council and the rules of procedure by suitable safeguards of the canonical rights and responsibilities of the parish priest.

(9). The Committee are in possession of a considerable amount of information on various types of councils abroad (and a few in England), and they would be happy to place their knowledge at the service of any parish which would like to go forward on the lines of their policy. They are aware that there are a number of clergy who are favourable to their views and who, they feel, would be warmly seconded by their parishioners in any practicable scheme. They are convinced that there never was a time when the mobilisation of all the material resources of Catholics was more necessary than the present and that the laity will only do their full share of the work of the Church in England when definite duties and responsibilities are formally assigned to them.

(Signed) RANKEILLOUR, *Chairman*
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