

OUR CONCEPTION OF FEDERATION*

A GREAT CATHOLIC MOVEMENT

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It has been said that no movement can be permanently successful unless it is built upon public opinion thoroughly satisfied of the need of it, and it is certainly true to say that the Catholic Federation can never be permanently successful until it is built upon a Catholic opinion thoroughly satisfied of the need for the Catholic Federation. From the beginning of the movement people have asked, and will continue to ask: 'How far does the Federation partake of the nature of a political party, and how far will it make it difficult for me to hold my political opinions?' This is a straight question demanding a straight answer, and the success of the movement depends to some extent, at least, upon a satisfactory answer being provided.

The Federation and Politics.

'How far does the Federation partake of the nature of a political party?' In the first place, the Federation claims to be a Catholic movement, and any movement to be Catholic must possess that spirit of comprehensiveness which characterises the Church herself. The different schools of political thought which are acceptable to the Church will likewise be acceptable to the Federation, and the members of those schools who are to be found in the Church must likewise be found in the ranks of the Federation. Are any of those doctrines of Conservatism, Liberalism, Laborism, and Irish Nationalism which are admitted by the Church to be banned by the Federation? The question only needs asking to answer itself. But to put the matter clearer, we might ask another question: What would be thought of any of the great political parties of this country—the Liberal party, for instance—if it were to urge its members to belong to one of the other parties? Yet this is precisely the line the Federation takes.

The Federation is not concerned with the political convictions of its members, but, on the contrary, says to them: If you hold political opinions, get inside the particular party which advocates these opinions; enter that party, not as a Catholic, but as a citizen, and act with it, heart and soul, unless and until the party makes it impossible for you by introducing questions which are hostile to Catholic principle. Then the Federation expects you to run up the Catholic flag, to rally your co-religionists in your party under that flag, to fight the opponents of Catholicism inside your party, and, if necessary, to vote against your party at the polls.

Taking the Catholic Labor Man as an Illustration, we find him fighting against secular education and revolutionary Socialism inside his party for the last eight years, and, when necessary, voting against his party. Yet he knows that the Labor Party is bound to justify its existence by working whole-heartedly for those social reforms—in many cases they are merely the ordinary decencies of life—which he needs so much. But he also knows that although Catholicism in the twentieth century does not ask Catholics to make sacrifice of their lives in amphitheatres, it asks them to make sacrifice in a very matter-of-fact, unromantic way. It is still asking him, Can he drink the chalice? And he is aware that it is still expecting him to answer the question in the affirmative, even when that question is put in the prosaic form of asking him to vote against his party.

If, then, those schools of political thought which are acceptable to the Church are also acceptable to the Federation, it is also necessary to show that members of those schools are actually members of the Federation. Otherwise, we might lay ourselves open to the charge that we are confining ourselves to theory. If we take as an illustration the composition of the Manchester, Salford and District Committee of the

Federation, which is the legislative body for that district, we shall find that the delegates may be grouped as follows:—(a) Irish Nationalists, who are the largest group, consisting of Irishmen, born or reared in Ireland, or of Irishmen of the second and third generation, who, perhaps, have never seen Ireland, but who hold the principle of Irish Nationalism with conviction; (b) Liberal group, about equal in point of numbers with (c) Labor or Trade Union Group; (d) Conservative Group, which is the smallest, and (e) the non-political group, the number of which it is difficult to estimate; it consists of men and women whose political views are not sufficiently pronounced to justify their being labelled. The existence of these diverse political elements inside the legislative body is sufficient proof that the Federation does not partake in any sense of the nature of a political party, and indicates most clearly that religion is its sole bond of union. The impossibility of imagining any political creed which could hold that legislative body together for 24 hours is obvious enough, and it is still more obvious that any party which partakes of the nature of a political party must also possess something in the nature of a political creed. Hence the Federation not only is not, but cannot be, political. When the Federation is prepared to propagate political principles—however desirable those principles may be in themselves—which it is not the duty of the Church to propagate, then, at that particular moment, the Federation partakes of the nature of a political party. At that particular moment, also, the Federation ceases to be a Catholic movement. The *Manchester Guardian*, during the November elections of 1907, said: 'We deprecate the formation of political parties upon religious lines.' So does the Federation. It went on to say: 'But we do consider that religious bodies are exercising their proper functions when they enter into political contests with the object of preventing certain religious principles from being trampled under the feet of the combatants.' That description will serve the Federation very well.

When the Federation Interferes.

We have effectively interfered upon those grounds, and they are the only grounds which justify an interference. If political parties do not desire our entry into political contests, they have the remedy in their own hands, by ceasing to menace Catholic interests. The Federation has other work to accomplish, and it is anxious to proceed with it as soon as political parties make it possible for it to do so.

To come to our second question: 'How far will the Federation make it difficult for me to hold my political opinion?' Again taking the position of the Catholic Labor man as an illustration, what is his difficulty? He finds, we may suppose, an apparent difficulty in reconciling his labor principles with his Catholic principles. If the principles his party advocates are obviously opposed to his Catholic principles, he is bound to leave his party. But the policy of any political party, at a given time, may be out of harmony with the principles of that party. The party may have got into the hands of a clique, who are pushing, not the principles of their party, but their own particular fads, the propaganda of those fads thus becoming the policy of the party at that particular time. This is the present position of the Labor party, and the position which is occupied by most political parties at some time or other in the course of their history. Of course, if the obnoxious policy has become by lapse of time so thoroughly identified with the party programme as to make its removal a practical impossibility, the Catholic member of the party occupies the position that he would occupy if that policy were a principle of the party. But until that position is demonstrated, the Catholic is justified in remaining inside his party and attempting to upset the policy. That is the existing difficulty of the Catholic Labor man. But that difficulty has not been created by the Catholic Federation. The difficulty has been created by people inside his own party, and the Federation says to him: 'The difficulty already existing, we offer to you the Federation, which will provide you with opportunities for consultation

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