

## A NOTE ON CATHOLIC ACTION

**BY** virtue of the proclamation embodied in the joint Pastoral letter lately issued by the Bishops, a new spiritual **body has come into** being in our midst. Where there was nothing **but** a welter of societies and organizations there is **to be one** unitary association which will co-ordinate their **manifold** activities and direct their energies. Like **most** feats of organization, it has been accomplished by the stroke of the pen, but, however real, the new-born organism will of necessity take time to develop to its full stature. Meanwhile it will be the duty of all serious-minded Catholics to study the previous history of the infant. This will not be very easy, at first, for there is a dearth of English studies in the matter, and there are a number of inaccurate notions current which will have to be dispelled before a correct estimation of the pedigree can be arrived at.

Roughly, it is correct to say that Catholic Action is the child of Pius **XI**, for it is thanks to his inspiration and encouragement that it first saw light in Italy. True, there were a few lay associations in existence when he ascended the pontifical throne, but the encouragement of Leo XIII and Pius X had failed to produce any but sickly offspring among the Italians who were as yet unaccustomed to the novelty of the situation. **As** elsewhere, the value and necessity of co-ordination were felt during the war, so that after the upheaval a new Italy proved more ready to place its Catholic activities under systematic organization. When, therefore, in February, **1922**, Cardinal Ratti, who had made so signal a success of his brief tenure of the See of Milan, was elected Pope, the stage was set for a bold gesture. Those who had laboured in the fields now farmed by Catholic Action had not long to wait. Pius XI turned **his** mind to *Azione Cattolica* as soon as his engagements allowed. By the autumn **the** Bishops were informed of his **plans**, and before the end of the year the *Giunta Centrale*

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—presided over by his Milanese friend, Luigi Colombo—had been erected within a stone's throw of the Vatican.'

From that day to this the fortunes of the A.C.I. have improved steadily. Certain difficulties were encountered in the years which preceded the Concordat, but by the terms of that treaty the Italian Government specifically recognized all the associations affiliated to it, and to-day the A.C.I. is gathering new members throughout the land and extending its activities in every direction.

With this practical demonstration of the value of lay co-operation flourishing so close to him, the Pope has been able to plan and recommend a wide variety of national schemes. A little study will reveal the divergencies which distinguish the organization of Catholic Action in various lands. When Germany and Canada, Portugal and Poland, France and the Argentine, as well as Spain, followed the lead of Italy, it was to be expected that the arrangement would differ in details. Nevertheless, there is a common stamp about all these national organizations, which is, in many respects, the most impressive feature of modern Catholicity, inasmuch as it indicates the universal success of a faithful obedience to the precepts of the Vicar of Christ.

'The Peace of Christ in the Reign of Christ' was the motto chosen by Pius XI, and in his first encyclical he said, 'We **look** confidently for the help of *all* good men to revive and spread the concern of the Early Church for the propagation of Christian principles.' Scarcely a day has passed without some reference to Catholic Action, as the voluminous documentation of the past twelve years testifies. Slowly and steadily and 'not without divine intervention,' the main ideas have become crystallized, so that to-day there is little left to do but to repeat them incessantly. Within the three points of lay effort, hierarchical authority, and apostolic work, an infinitely varied series of tri-

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1 A unitary organization which grouped all the available Catholic associations under national committees, with independent diocesan leaders—all lay folk—who enjoy the guidance of *assistenti ecclesiastici*, or chaplains, as we should call them.

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**angles may be** evolved according to the circumstances of the Church.

**Which** figure will emerge in the English scene is as yet uncertain. The multitude of active organizations extant precludes the growth of a complete unitary organization such as has absorbed the energies of less heterogeneous nations—while the very scattered groups of English Catholics will prevent the formation of political or economic blocks. If one were compelled to draw a parallel, it would be simplest to foreshadow an achievement partaking of the elements of the National Catholic Welfare Conference of America and the Action Catholique of France. Each of these organisms has had to adapt itself to conditions which are familiar to their country, and there is unquestionably much profit to be derived from a study of their development. The arduous task of creating a central bureau will doubtless occupy much time and energy for a while, but the delicate business of tracing the general lines of activity will keep pace with the progress of the initial staff work.

The late Bishop of Salford, Mgr. Casartelli, used to prophesy that this century would be known as the century of the laity. Pius XI has proclaimed this to be the Crusade of the twentieth century, and it is for the laity and the clergy to vindicate the wisdom of the confidence reposed in them.

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## CATHOLICS AND **THE** NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

**THE** period of the visible expansion of Catholicism in England which began with the Oxford Movement and the Irish Immigration may be considered to have closed with the nineteenth century. Through the converts the Church entered the professional and upper middle-classes, and through the Irish began to leaven the new industrial masses. But the old English Catholics, though a minority