

THE AREA OF CATHOLIC CONTROVERSY

THE area of possible controversy among Catholics is of course wide—as wide as the life of the man who is head or member of a family and a citizen. Controversy has been common enough among members of the Church in the past. It is inevitable when essentials of the Faith are concerned, and has rightly gone beyond mere words when schism or heresy raised its head, as in the time of the Albigenses. More recently, bitter debate has been justified when the implication touched some basic principle and Rome felt called to intervene, as with the Jansenists or, in the more definitely political sphere, with the *Action Française*. There are lower fields of controversy, aesthetic, literary and purely political, where there is difficulty in finding justification, where the well known dirty-linen metaphor stands as a warning against entry, and where as a general rule debate should be restricted as far as reasonably possible.

There have been one or two examples recently of foolishly provoked controversy among Catholics, and in view, for one thing, of the persistence—the extreme urgency in these days—of the call for Catholic Action which first sounded in Rome, it may be worth while reflecting on the position in general terms and as discreetly as possible.

The Church in her comprehensiveness, her field of care being the world and her flock mankind, recognises without any tinge of expediency all forms of Government. Her laws will not sanction revolt except under most stringent conditions. She is well equipped and willing to give advice to the nations: *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* touch not only directly the relations of Capital and Labour but implicitly international relations and world peace. She has banned a world movement, Communism. She intervenes officially, from Rome direct or through her representatives on the spot, when a State lays violent hands on the things of God. She has blessed the work of the

League of Nations—the first tottering infant steps of the peoples towards ‘ the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world ’; towards ‘ the Peace of Christ in the Kingship of Christ ’ eventually.

The League is a tremendous experiment on the most intricate compound of complexities it is possible to conceive. It has already done a vast amount of good work in humanitarian, economic and other spheres. Unfortunately the world generally does not pause to consider this, perhaps because of the loosely acquired impression, almost universally held, that the sole object of the League is the maintenance of peace. That definition of its purpose is ultimately true enough, but it obscures the method, which is the development of peaceful collaboration in various directions among States so as to reduce the risk of conflict. There has from the beginning been a deplorable blank in the representation in the League of the Western Hemisphere; the representation of the Eastern Hemisphere has only quite recently been completed, or practically completed. In these circumstances it is very regrettable that such a serious test of the strength of its co-operative control should come at this time with the outbreak in the Far East. At this point definite contact is reached with the subject of this article.

In their issues for the same week recently, two well known English Catholic journals dealt editorially with this outbreak and with the intervention of the League of Nations. One supported the action of the Assembly of the League in adopting the Report of the Lytton Commission, condemning Japan for refusing to seek a peaceful solution, and sketched in broad and interesting outline traditional Catholic teaching as to war, conquest and so on. The other took the political standpoint and, with a suggestion of reservation, defended Japan. There is no difficulty in seeing which was influenced by expediency (a curse of the age where questions concerning justice and morality come in). That apart, however, what is the Catholic, with the average knowledge of the ordinary man, to make of it? It may

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be hoped that, with his everyday experience of the security which a highly developed system of law gives him, and with the present world conditions before his eyes, he will reject the ancient formula, might is right.

In the more restricted sphere of national politics there has recently been bitter controversy among Catholics, which with the exercise of some discretion might well have been avoided. The matter was *sub judice* in respect that there remained some possibility of it being brought to arbitration by the Governments concerned. The controversy was carried to deplorable lengths, with the consequence that the whole position was worsened.

Arising out of the original circumstances in which the dispute just referred to took its rise, there is another matter concerning the political relations of Catholics in these two islands that has not received among English Catholics the attention which it demands, because it is never, or hardly ever, referred to in the daily newspapers and because it is so closely related to the more extensive and complex main subject. It can, however, and ought to be isolated for examination. It concerns the intolerable conditions under which the Catholics of Northern Ireland live. By deliberate gerrymandering they have to a large extent been disfranchised, and they exist from day to day under the menace of active terrorism in the midst of fully armed anti-Catholics. Catholics have been able to put party aside when the interests of the Church were threatened, as in the matter of education—notably in the days when the fanatical bigot, Clifford, led the attack, and even more notably on a recent occasion. They willingly extend their sympathy to persecuted Catholics in Spain and Mexico. The Northern Ireland question comes into this category.

In connection with this sacred sympathetic bond that unites all members of the Church throughout the world, it may be permissible to glance at certain possibilities in the international sphere that may take active form in the near future. The spirit of war is very active on the Continent and the devil's cauldron may boil over at any

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moment. It is impossible to forecast the evil consequences, but considering the constituents that make up the contents of the cauldron and the presence in the background of a Communist anti-religious State, the ultimate catastrophe might be the destruction of the civilisation of Western Europe. A danger point is the Polish Corridor, where the conflicting claims of Lutheran Prussia and Catholic Poland meet. There is obvious prejudice among politicians and publicists in England against Poland. Another danger point is in the German confederation itself. If the dispute becomes intensified, we may see an intolerant and militarist Prussia using force to prevent the secession of the Catholic South and Rhineland. Catholics in England should beware of false propaganda.

In matters of this kind in the political field, as indeed in all serious and legitimately public controversy, what calls for demonstration is objective truth. Catholics should always bear in mind that such demonstration is sometimes a difficult and hazardous business, even to a highly trained intelligence. Further, it is not to be forgotten that time (which may be taken to mean the hand of God) works wonders. Take the question of the temporal power, over which there was at one time much controversy in the Catholic world, largely induced by nationalist and political prejudices. To the seeing eye the recent final settlement is the objective result of the operation of a Divine pledge. No wonder the Church has acquired a reputation, as unique as her constitution, among friends and foes, of being able to wait. A consideration that emerges from all this is that there can be no complete divorce of politics, including economics and sociology, from the higher moral categories, and that because Catholics are better instructed than others in respect of the latter, there should be little occasion for controversy among them. There would be even less if we had a Catholic daily newspaper. It is really not altogether futile to hope for such a vehicle of truth.

The dirty-linen metaphor applies more readily when the debate is concerned with alleged indelicacy or indecency

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in the literary sphere, particularly in the congested area occupied by the novelists. Here a very serious responsibility obviously rests on the editor and his reviewers. There is, unfortunately, no doubt that adverse criticism on moral grounds may serve, if it reaches a substantial portion of the reading public, as a most efficient advertisement. Even if the public that reads the criticism be small, harm is likely to be done. Silence is then golden. No doubt public protest, if adequately authoritative and widely supported, as in a recent instance, is justified when a deliberate attempt at pernicious and partly disguised propaganda is made through the printing press in a form intended to reach youthful hands. Such protest, however, would be worse than useless in the case of a novel, and indeed in view of the number of objectionable novels which make the bookstalls groan it would not be a practicable safeguard at all. Excessive zeal where delicate judgment is required is dangerous. Undue scrupulosity has over and over again been condemned. Legitimate delicacy may often find it difficult to draw the line beyond or below which the golden silence should be broken. It is all very difficult, but when a Catholic novelist gives cause for scandal, charity will suggest that the lapse is due to a deplorable lack of fine judgment, and private protest from an authoritative quarter seems to be the most obviously effective and advisable remedy.

English Catholics have to live in a dubious political and social atmosphere. They cannot avoid contact with dangerous things, including very many books, periodicals and newspapers, largely produced in mass by relatively non-moral writers and publishers. They find no reliable guide in the average reviewer, equally non-moral. Literary criticism as a whole has been steadily deteriorating for over thirty years. The chief and very deplorable cause is obviously the extraordinarily mean cash nexus that runs in the form of advertisement from the publishers through the reviewers to the proprietor of the newspaper or periodical. The Catholic proprietor, reviewer and publisher, being

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concerned with definitely Catholic work, do not come into these general classes; nor do many morally-guided non-Catholic and Catholic reviewers who are engaged in the wider part of the field. The Catholic reader is not without his or her responsibility and there is just one word to be said in that regard: there is reading matter produced by Catholic writers and publishes, as instructive, interesting and amusing as can be found in the book shops, and more than sufficient to satisfy the most rapacious and omnivorous mental appetite.

There is one efficient method of counteracting the stupendous danger of evil literature: it is that censorship which by direct command of the highest of all authorities has been imposed as a duty on the home. In the home, too, by the way, may be found means for the solution of most of the problems that daily afflict our leaders, clerical and lay. The home, organised on the lines laid down by the dictates of the Church, provides the sure foundation for concrete and extensive Catholic Action.

CHARLES VALLELEY.

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WE are shadow, we are matchwood, we are masks, not men,
Distort, distract, we death-engendered cry,
'O, Christ, have mercy on us lest we die,
Ah, lest we vanish.' What profiteth then
This echo to Thee? See, we sin again,
We fail, we fall! How judge, how suffer Thy
Lover-folly, Christ-Heart? Love we, ask nor why—
Thee, Lord, Maker of us—where nor when.

Here's whom Thou lovest, weigh him, purchase him,
Bargainer, here i'the mart (the price is high—
Sin has a corner in him) Hell's sheriff by
Stands; must Thou, Prince, Peerless, catch his eye?
Bid wounds? Bid blood? Shatter couldst all, make fly
Stall, tackle and murder-merchant, limb from limb!

BERNARD KELLY.