

PAX ROMANA

BY

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FUNCTION AND IMPORTANCE OF THE CATHOLIC WORLD SECRETARIATE OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITY FEDERATIONS

by

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PAX ROMANA owes its foundation, at Fribourg, Switzerland, in July, 1921, to the University Catholics of Spain, Holland, and Switzerland, three countries that remained neutral during the Great War. Its founders hoped to help University Catholics throughout the world, and especially those in the war-scarred countries, by offering them some organisation through which they might meet, get to know each other, and work together to lessen the barriers of nationalism and of mistrust engendered by the war years. Their efforts have not been altogether in vain. In the seventeen years of its existence, Pax Romana has succeeded in uniting forty-five University Catholic Federations, representing some thirty-one countries, in Europe, in North and South America, and in Asia. Among the larger Catholic organisations and the different international unions of students, its position is well established. The greeting that is sent each year to Pax Romana Congress by Cardinal Pacelli, in the name of the Sovereign Pontiff, shows how it is esteemed by the highest ecclesiastical authorities.

WHAT IS PAX ROMANA ?

In these days, when every international effort is faced with all manner of difficulties, one might well ask why it is that Pax Romana should be so favoured with success. The explanation, I venture to think, is to be found in the very way in which it is organised. Pax Romana is not a society of individual Catholic University people; thus it is, for instance, no mere association of Catholic student pacifists throughout the world. It is rather a union or confederation of the University Catholic Federations in the different countries, such as the University Catholic Societies' Federation in Great Britain. Moreover, it seeks to fashion its essentially live and constructive policy upon the immediate requirements of the National Federations, which together give it life.

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Now, long experience has shown that it is an utter impossibility to form an educated Catholic opinion without a fully organised and well equipped University Catholic Federation. For, the full development of the Catholic student cannot be achieved if he is left isolated. He needs the help of a society with all the stimulus of good fellowship, good example, and infectious enthusiasm. Furthermore, in any given country, it is in the interests of such societies themselves to link up in order to exchange ideas, compare notes, and thus help one another all they can. One has only to call to mind the history of the University Catholic Societies' Federation of Great Britain to realise the immense benefit to such local societies of a national organisation.

Pax Romana fulfils a purpose similar to this on the international plane. Its chief task is to serve as a link in the same way between the various national federations. It is true that the federations remain completely autonomous, and, indeed, preserve intact their full individuality, corresponding—as it often does—to the characteristics of this or that nation and the traditions of its university life. Yet, it is clear that all these University Catholic Federations are faced with similar problems. How to secure the development of the Catholic undergraduate to full stature, spiritually, intellectually, socially, professionally, is alike the chief concern of every Catholic University group, whether it be in London, Rome, New York—or Warsaw! And is it not obvious that the leaders of such groups should be able to meet, to exchange ideas, to pool experience, to compare methods, and to help one another by friendly rivalry and loyal co-operation?

Especially does this co-operation appear necessary to-day, when the University Catholic movement everywhere is faced with conditions quite without precedent. The call to Catholic Action directed by the Pope to all lay people, and especially to educated lay people, has obviously assigned to University Catholics a task of immense importance. Then, the whole Christian world has recently become more deeply aware of the powerful influence of the professional life lived in accordance with Christian principles; and in the meantime the different professions, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and the rest, are all troubled by grave problems—problems which the secular instruction of a non-Catholic University is scarcely competent to solve. Again, in these hard times, Catholic students cannot, even if they would, remain indifferent to the far-reaching, social and economic questions of the day. Moreover, modern political movements, in many countries, make a special appeal to the enthusiasm of undergraduates, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Therefore, in a world of so much social, economic and political experiment, of so many unexplored problems, of so much unprecedented activity, it is not only advisable, but even essential, that those who bear the responsibility of leading Catholic youth at the Universities, should pool their experience and co-operate to the full.

THE WORK OF PAX ROMANA.

How, then, is this co-operation provided for within the framework of Pax Romana? Every year an international congress is arranged to discuss some single topic which appears to be the fore in University Catholic circles. Thus, in 1935, the subject was the religious education of the undergraduate; in 1936, the press, the cinema and the radio; and, in 1937, unemployment in the professions; while for the 1938 congress the topic will be the Catholic student and

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Communism. Various enquiries, circulars, and articles in the journal pave the way for these discussions.

The journal "Pax Romana"* is published ten times a year. Thus, in each month of the academic year, it gives its readers a full account of Pax Romana, the achievements of the affiliated federations, and the work of its sub-secretariates.

The sub-secretariates were established to be of use to the federations, in matters of special importance for their work, by collecting information, particulars of courses of study, and suggested bibliographies. Pax Romana now has five general sub-secretariates,—women-students, missions, "Pro Oriente," University Press, and social work—and four professional sub-secretariates—medicine, pharmacy, law, and literature. At the annual Congress each of these organises separate meetings, so that students of the same faculty may discuss problems of special interest. Thus, at the forthcoming Congress this year, medical students are to study the problem of Public Health and official doctoring; law students, the laws against Communism in the different countries; women undergraduates, the problem of Communism in the Universities, and so on.

The Congress is now preceded by a Study Week for the leaders of the different federations, so that these may examine thoroughly the various problems of Catholic Action among University people. The Study Week of August, 1938, will be devoted entirely to the student apostolate of social work among the working class, especially among those attracted by Marxist ideas.

Thus, though each federation keeps its own way of doing things, this pooling of the experience of such a large number of them cannot but have a beneficial effect on the work of each.

Meanwhile, throughout the academic year, the General Secretariate (19, Place du College, Fribourg, Switzerland) tries to keep in touch with the different federations, helping those in need with suggestions, advice, and literature, and sometimes even by a personal visit. There have been cases where Pax Romana has actually given material assistance to Catholic students of distressed countries. Indeed, its inception was bound up with the united effort to help German and Austrian students who, just after the war, were in dire circumstances. I recollect that on that occasion it was the University Catholics of Great Britain who made the largest contribution to the fund. Just now Pax Romana is launching a similar appeal to help the Catholic students of Spain in their immense task of restoring the buildings and libraries destroyed in the Civil War, so that they may soon take their place again in the religious and cultural life of the country. Without a centre like Pax Romana, it is difficult to see how a united effort of such importance to the whole educated Catholic world could be made.

The part that Pax Romana is called upon to play in the many countries where Catholic University students are not yet fully organised is still more important. In some countries the mere fact that Pax Romana can admit only national federations to membership has itself proved a powerful incentive, leading existing local societies to form a federation. This was more or less the case in Great Britain. In other countries, Pax Romana has encouraged the foundation of University Catholic federations, as, for instance, quite recently in America, where students of the Catholic Universities have just

* It costs three shillings, and cheques, etc. should be made payable to "Pax Romana," crossed "Lloyds Bank," and sent to The Manager, Lloyds Bank Ltd., 1, Malvern Court, Onslow Square, London, S.W.7.

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founded the National Federation of Catholic College Students. In many more countries, Pax Romana has itself taken the initiative in forming University Catholic groups; and, to give but a few examples, the Catholic student federations of Greece, Finland, and Bulgaria were the direct result of its intervention. Finally, in countries where there were several federations of Catholic students (as, for example, the five student federations of Czechoslovakia for Catholic Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, and Ukrainians), Pax Romana has actively supported their co-operation. It has thus helped to bring together educated Catholics of different nationalities within the same country. And in certain parts of Central and Eastern Europe, this is no small service to the cause of peace.

Lastly, Pax Romana was able to give considerable help to large numbers of Catholic students studying abroad. For a long time these were completely isolated. Pax Romana got most of its federations to look after them, so that they now have access to University Catholic societies, where they are welcomed and may gather new ideas. On their part, the bigger federations agreed to set up foreign visits bureaux to arrange exchange, au pair, and paying guest visits, thus facilitating Catholic student foreign travel by placing visitors in Catholic families or hostels, often on particularly favourable terms. In Great Britain, the Bureau for Foreign Visits, directed for many years by Mr. H. J. Parkinson, has arranged visits for hundreds of students from abroad, who have thus had the opportunity of meeting English Catholics and acquiring an insight into the true culture of England. Similarly, a number of English students have been placed abroad in France, Germany and Switzerland. Thus, Pax Romana has itself become, in a special way, the federation of Catholic students abroad, and has been particularly helpful to them.

THE INSPIRATION OF PAX ROMANA.

This work for foreign student travel represents a small yet real contribution towards the realisation of the Peace of Christ, which was the first aspiration of Pax Romana. A sojourn abroad during the impressionable years of study is especially fruitful in giving Catholic youth a wider outlook and a deeper culture, in the shape of a more true vision of the needs of every nation and the need for taking into account the higher welfare of mankind as a whole.

Similarly, all the other activities of Pax Romana further international understanding and co-operation. First, the annual Congress, which brings together many hundreds of young educated Catholics from different countries, affording them a fuller knowledge and understanding of the Catholic life of the country which plays host. Thus Congresses have been held in most of the European countries; in Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Holland, Poland, Great Britain (at Cambridge, Oxford, and London in 1928), Spain, Germany, France, Luxemburg, the Vatican, Czechoslovakia. And, next August, Congressists will be received in Yugoslavia. Then, the monthly journal, "Pax Romana," with the other publications of the secretariate, helps considerably not only to interest educated Catholic young men and women in the Catholic culture of other countries, but also to create an atmosphere of international understanding and Christian fellowship among the educated Catholic youth of the whole world. And the inclusion in Pax Romana of students of the Greek Unorthodox Church and of the federations of Latin America or the Far East, is a constant reminder of the universality of the Catholic Church, which for University Catholics thus becomes a living thing!

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Pax Romana is, therefore, the union of University Catholics in Christian fellowship, with the immediate object of seeing that the different University Catholic Federations have the opportunity of helping one another in a real and practical way, but also with the essential idea of leading educated Catholic youth to extend Christian charity to the full dimensions of the Universal Church. Thus Pax Romana, as it grows, pre-figures in some way that great family of nations which the educated Catholic youth of to-day is called upon to found on the most lasting, and therefore on Christian, principles. It is already a tiny yet living cell of that fuller Christianity to which this generation aspires.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PAX ROMANA.

Lastly, a brief word on the rôle of Pax Romana as one international organisation among many. Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox students long ago formed a powerful international union in the Student Christian Movement. Jewish students, Socialist students and other similar student groups are also powerfully organised on an international basis. If Catholic students had remained without their organisation in Pax Romana, they would have been unrepresented in the work—sometimes very useful—that is being done on an international plane, especially by such bodies as the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation of the League of Nations. In the student committee of this body, Pax Romana exerts considerable influence; and by its wise yet sincere participation it makes known, in non-Catholic circles, the work that is being done by Catholic students. It is thus helping to refute those prejudiced people who look upon Catholic bodies as mere pious associations that do nothing of importance in the way of social work, and nothing of value in the professional field. And the more the many forces antagonistic to the Faith organise on international lines, holding world congresses, launching campaigns, and disguising their dangerous tendencies under “non-sectarian” slogans, the more does Pax Romana, purely as a Catholic “internationale,” become of the highest importance.

CONCLUSION.

Enough has been said to show, then, how Pax Romana upholds the interests of University Catholics, both by its support of the national federations, and by its own direct action in international concerns. It relies upon all educated Catholics in their turn to give it their intelligent support. In all this work Great Britain, with its constant devotion to international efforts, is specially called upon to play a great rôle. Pax Romana turns to the British Federation, then, with a confident appeal to interest itself more and more, by coming in greater numbers to our Congress, by subscribing in larger numbers to our journal, and by securing new members for the “Association of Friends of Pax Romana,” which was founded to bring to our movement the moral and financial support it calls for.

The re-organisation of the University Catholic Societies’ Federation of Great Britain will make the local societies more “federation conscious.” Pax Romana is but an extension of the Federation. It will, therefore, in its turn, encounter an ever-increasing, devoted co-operation on the part of the University Catholics of Great Britain, who will thus continue the splendid tradition of the beloved President of Pax Romana for 1928, Professor E. Bullough, who gave so much to enlarge and strengthen Pax Romana, and to make his country known and loved abroad.