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A National Catholic Press Month

Many important matters were dealt with by the Hierarchy at their recent meeting at the Catholic University in Washington—matters so important, indeed, that more than one commentator has remarked that the occasion formed an epoch in American Catholicity. It is probable that no action taken by the Bishops will be of greater and more immediate interest to the whole Catholic body than their decision to unite all the forces under their direction throughout the country from sea to sea in a national campaign in behalf of the Catholic press. They unanimously voted to set aside a whole month for purpose, early in 1921—a month still to be definitely named, but which will probably be either St. Joseph's month, which is March, or May, which is the month of our Blessed Mother, Patroness of the United States of America.

A definite program for this nationwide Catholic Press Month will be announced in due time, and will include special features of a practical kind, calculated to arouse the attention of our Catholic people as a body in a way that has not been attempted since the appeal of the Hierarchy to their faithful people to rally to the support of the government at the outbreak of the war, or since the issuance of the Joint Pastoral Letter a year ago, which was their summons to the clergy and laity to rally to the support of the Church as it took up the task of reconstruction made necessary after the social upheaval of the war.

The summons of the Pastoral Letter was a summons to the mind and the soul of our Catholic people. It was a statement of the fundamentals of the Faith; an expression of its holy spirit, and a summary of the philosophy deducible from Catholic principles.

Now comes the call to action. Now comes the practical application of the principles of the Pastoral Letter. Now comes the word from the watch towers of the city of the Lord to the armies in the field to move forward against the forces of evil that today menace the church and state alike.

Concerning the Catholic Press, the Pastoral letter said:

"The functions of the Catholic press are of special value to the church in our country. To widen the interest of our people by acquainting them with the progress of religion throughout the world, to correct false or misleading statements regarding our belief and practice, and, as occasion offers, to present our doctrine in popular form—these are among the excellent aims of Catholic journalism. As a means of forming sound public opinion, it is indispensable. The vital interests affecting the nation's welfare usually turn upon moral principles. Sooner or later, discussion brings forward the question of right and wrong. The treatment of such subjects from a Catholic point of view, is helpful to all our people. It enables them to look at current events and problems in the light of experience which the Church has gathered through centuries, and it affords the surest way to a solution that will advance our common interests.

"The unselfish zeal displayed by Catholic journalists entitles them to more active support than hitherto has been given. By its very nature the scope of their work is specialized, and within the limitations thus imposed, they are doing what no other agency could accomplish or attempt, in behalf of our homes, societies and schools.

"In order to obtain the larger results and the wider appreciation which their efforts deserve and which we most earnestly desire, steps must be taken to co-ordinate the various lines of publicity and secure for each a high degree of usefulness.

During the year that has elapsed since the Bishops spoke as above, active measures have been taken by the Hierarchy's own organization, the National Catholic Welfare Council, to act upon these principles. The chief step in this direction was the formation of the Catholic news and editorial service which now supplies nearly sixty of the foremost Catholic periodicals with news and special articles and other literary features gathered from many parts of the world.

And already the good effects of the Bishops' action are observable. The Catholic newspapers now give to their readers, in addition to local news and the contributions of their own staff writers and special contributors, the material gathered by the Bishops' central bureau which is organized along the same lines and performs the same type of service which such organizations as the Associated Press and the Universal Service for the secular press.

What reasons there may have been in the past to excuse or explain apathy thought, word and deed than the Catholic part of the Catholic public in supporting the Catholic press—if there the Church are equally America's most have been any valid reasons—they dangerous ones. Let America and the have ceased to exist. It is now unquestionable that the Catholic newspaper subscribers to the Bishops' press service have made a distinctive and

substantial improvement in their news columns and in the space devoted to special articles. In the first place, the new spirit of Catholic action observable in all departments of the church's activity in the United States has been notably powerful in the Catholic press. Proprietors and editors of Catholic papers and the Bishops controlling diocesan journals, have shown enhanced interest in the task of making their papers fully representative of Catholic affairs and Catholic movements. This has led to decided improvements in the handling of local news and local interests generally. And supplementing without in any way interfering with local developments and individual talents, the Catholic news service has brought to the fifty-six papers composing its membership news and special articles from all parts of the Catholic world. The Catholic News Service has its own correspondents in Rome, Washington, New York, Chicago, Paris, Dublin, London, Berlin, Vienna, Prague and elsewhere. The number of these correspondents is being steadily increased. Moreover, many of the best authorities and writers of the Catholic Church, both clerical and lay, have contributed articles on a wide variety of important subjects, and this special service is being constantly broadened. In short, the Catholic newspapers of the United States are not only worthy of the fullest measure of support on the part of the Catholic public, but they well repay such support because of the news and literary interest and value of their pages.

Fully realizing this fact, the Bishops themselves now call upon the clergy and their faithful laity to follow up this excellent beginning.

During the Press Month which will be named very soon—a month the spiritual intention of which the Holy Father will be asked by the Hierarchy to set aside for the Catholic press in the United States—the Bishops plan to have at least one sermon on the subject of the Catholic press preached from every pulpit in the land. Priests and our holy nuns, our innocent children, and laymen and laywomen will be requested to pray for the success of the Catholic Press Month. The great Catholic national societies will be summoned to aid the movement. Public meetings will be held with special addresses. Each Catholic newspaper will be expected to lead the movement in its own territory, under the direction of the Bishop of the Diocese. Practical plans for gathering subscriptions will be formed by the Catholic Press Association and the Press Department of the National Catholic Welfare Council.

Definitely and carefully, the program for this nationwide campaign will be formed. And with all the forces of Catholicity concentrated for intensive work, the National Catholic Press Month should become a great success—the mark of that success being a substantial and permanent increase in the circulation of our Catholic papers, so that they in turn may make themselves better and more worthy of increased support, and thus be able to fulfill their true function, which is to serve a popular medium for making known the purposes and achievements of all the multitudinous organized activities of the Church, to interest and inspire the faithful, to aid the Bishops and the men and women leaders in accomplishing essential social work and to meet their high civic responsibilities and ever to uphold those Christ-given moral principles which are the foundation of the Faith.

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The first distinctly religious newspaper published in America and perhaps in the world, was the Recorder, established in Boston in 1816, by Nathaniel Willis, a Congregationalist, whose son, Richard Storrs Willis be upon these principles. The first distinctly in this direction was the formation of the Catholic news and editorial service which now supplies nearly sixty of the foremost Catholic periodicals with news and special articles and other literary features gathered from many parts of the world.

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Archbishop Hayes

"America has no sincerer friend in the past to excuse or explain apathy thought, word and deed than the Catholic part of the Catholic public in supporting the Catholic press—if there the Church are equally America's most have been any valid reasons—they dangerous ones. Let America and the have ceased to exist. It is now unquestionable that the Catholic newspaper subscribers to the Bishops' press service have made a distinctive and

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