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EDITORIAL

FATHER GASSONIANA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

XIII.

THE letter of a Spirit Lake, Ida., correspondent who writes:

“I would like to see a definition of the ‘Roman Catholic political organization.’ What is the qualification for its membership?”

arrives in time, just as we are about to consider the third of the general propositions implied, and last of the general propositions advanced by the Jesuit Father Thomas I. Gasson in his February 6 Boston speech against Socialism—the implied proposition that it is as a moral, as a religious, force that the Roman Catholic Church takes the field against Socialism.

Our correspondent’s closing question was an inspiration. It materially assists in framing the definition he requests, and, at the same time, refuting Father Gasson’s contention.

Everybody knows that the name “Republican,” assumed by the party of President Taft, has no bearing upon the principles of its membership: high tariff, colonies, imperialism, all of these leading policies of the party are nothing peculiar to republicans: monarchists there are who pursue the identical policies. Everybody knows that the name “Democratic,” assumed by the party of Bryan, has no bearing upon the principles of its membership: low tariff, free trade, anti-colonial policies, reciprocity agreements, etc., etc., are no peculiarities of democrats: oligarchs there have been and are that hold the same principles dear. Whatever the origin of political names, parties of long standing reach a stage when their names cease to be anything but mere terms for the collective designation of the party’s members, the same as the names of individuals—many a Long, unquestionably a name that originally fitted its bearer, is a short man; many a Small a tall man; many a Black a man of white complexion; many a White is often hard to distinguish from one of colored ancestry. So with the modern political organization known as “Roman Catholic.”

Originally, at a time when, with local Jewish exceptions, the devotional type of all civilized lands was Roman Catholic, the political organization named Roman Catholic derived its name from the devotional preference of its members. The fact that the one-time distinctive feature of the members of the Roman Catholic political organization, to wit, their devotional convictions, no longer is the feature of the membership of the modern body, is a fact pregnant with meaning. Roman Catholic devotional convictions no longer are the distinctive qualification for membership in the Roman Catholic political body. This one-time prerequisite has been gradually wearing out. It was no longer in force at the age of the Medicean popes, these themselves being adepts at speculative philosophy on divinity, if not actual atheists. To-day the membership of Roman Catholic political bodies is composed, not merely of devout Roman Catholics and of men who are Roman Catholic by profession only, but also of Jews, of Protestants of all the “57 varieties,” and of atheists of Roman Catholic, Jewish and Protestant extraction. Tammany Hall in this city is a type of the modern Roman Catholic political body.

Such a composite membership, composite on the very field from which the Roman Catholic political organization originally chose its name, pointedly points to the fact that devotional conviction was not of the essence of the body even at its inception; that the name “Roman Catholic” was a chance designation; and that the accidental circumstance, which originally determined the designation, having worn off in the course of time, the name is now left a mere “loose fit.” A further evidence of this evolution in the composition of the Roman Catholic political machine is furnished by the sight of the majority of the adherents to the Roman Catholic form of worship being, not within, but without the Roman Catholic political organization, and, in notable instances, its foes. Modern Italy, France, Portugal, the bulk of the Latin American republics—all of these Roman Catholic countries—illuminate the point by their pronounced and successfully maintained attitude of “No politics from Rome.”

Seeing that Roman Catholic devotional conviction is all but the essence of the Roman Catholic political body, what is the common bond that holds together its membership of so many “religions” and “anti-religions”? In other words, what is its essence?

’Tis not the wild-eyed Anarchist alone who sweepingly denounces as “devilish schemes” all modern social institutions upon the ground of the harm that these are seen to work. The Anarchist spirit that prompts such sociologically shallow

reasoning animates many others who are otherwise mentally well balanced. Among the institutions thus shallowly denounced as “devilish schemes” is the Roman Catholic political organization.

The men whom the philosopher Auguste Comte refers to as the organizers of what has become the Roman Catholic political body were no fiends, intent upon evil. As with religions, none of which teaches immorality, so with political bodies. The Roman Catholic political machine is no exception. The loftiest of purposes animated its construction, and may not, even to-day, be denied to many of its leaders. That purpose was to secure the welfare of the peoples, the peace of society.

The Roman Catholic political machine was organized at a season when Greek and Roman civilization, together with the power for social order that they imparted, had crumbled to ruins, and simultaneously hordes of barbarians inundated Europe. Aiming at social peace and popular welfare, the founders of the Roman Catholic polity grappled with the problem before them. Unfortunately for the human race the sociologic premises from which these well-meaning men proceeded were of the falsest. The principle thus evolved was radically wrong. What was that principle?

It may be reduced to a mathematical formula, presentable in simple figures:—

Say, society consists of 100 adults, male and female. Of this number, so the formula runs, fully three-fourths, 75, are unfit for self-rule, or self-government. They must be rendered harmless to themselves, and to others. The remaining 25 are, to various degrees, fit for self-government, or rule. But the full number is not needed, 5 will suffice. What shall be done with the superfluous 20. Their ambition will push them to enter the circle of the select and elect. Left to themselves these 20 will work as much mischief as “The 75,” if left to themselves. The alternative is, either social disorder, or the incapacitating of “The 20,” along with “The 75,” from participation in rule. There being nothing else to do, the methods adopted to render “The 75” harmless to themselves and to society, must be the methods applied to “The 20”—DIG OUT THEIR BRAINS—destroy their individuality and self-reliance. To use sociologic terminology, the social system aimed at by the founders of the Roman Catholic polity was the paternal system, with the masses of the population held in the status of wards to a select few. The title of “Father,” given by the Roman Catholic polity to its officers, and reappearing in the title of “Pope” (from “papa,” father) accurately reflects the paternal spirit of the governmental system.

Thus, receiving the propelling impulse for its supposed necessity from its barbarian and dominant surroundings, was launched the Roman Catholic political

system, an institution that became, as it could not choose but become, the scourge of man while it held power; and that to-day, crippled though it is by advanced enlightenment, continues a hindrance, if not a menace to Progress.

The principle, laid bare by the above mathematical formula, is the essence of the Roman Catholic political organization. That is the bond that holds together its present membership, however heterogeneous in point of “religion” and “anti-religion.” No longer limited to the one and only method for the BRAINS-OUT-DIGGING process available at its birth, the Roman Catholic political organization now utilizes, as occasion may prescribe, besides its original, the numerous new methods that the changed times render available. The methods have been improved, by enlarging the repertoire, to suit both the “religious” and the “irreligious” tastes of the present conglomerate membership of Jews, Protestants, Catholics and Atheists; the purpose has remained the same.

The Roman Catholic ecclesiastical affiliates of the present non-sectarian Roman Catholic political organization tire not of repeating: “The Roman Catholic Church never changes; as it is now it ever was.” This is a prevarication. The meaning intended to be conveyed is that devotional Roman Catholicism is perpetual—this is false—devotional Roman Catholicism has undergone many and radical changes. What these ecclesiastics have in mind, as a mental reservation, is the Roman Catholic political organization—that has not changed—its principles and purposes are to-day what they were from the beginning.

In sight of the above historical review, and keeping in mind that, while men of evil purposes gather in all political bodies, evil is not the purpose of these bodies, but good, “good” understood by such light as they have, the definition of the Roman Catholic political organization can be best drawn up by the following bird’s-eye view of the political field:—

On the political field of the land there are three leading political groups—all three non-sectarian:

The Republico-Democratic group which holds that the people’s welfare depends upon conserving things as they are. This is the conservative element.

The other two leading groups are both revolutionary, both holding that as things are they should not, and cannot remain—

One of these two is the Socialist group, which endeavors to push society onward, by popular enlightenment. This is the progressive-revolutionary element;

The other is the Roman Catholic group, which strains to pull society back by

“digging out the brains” of “The 75” and of “The 20.” This is the reactionary-revolutionary element.

Not as a moral force, but strictly as a political force, does the organization, for which Father Gasson takes the stump, enter the field against Socialism, hence against all other political parties in this and other lands.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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