

The Significance and Value of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae

Correlates Ideals of Education With Life After Graduation--Catholic Womanhood Will Realize Ideals When Home and School Cooperate in Developing Sense of Duty, Spirit of Reverence and Habit of Obedience

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THE objects of this association are to bring into communication the various distinct Catholic alumnae associations, for the purpose of upholding ideals of Catholic womanhood and to formulate plans for the extension of Catholic education, Catholic literature and Catholic social work.

I find this statement as Article II in the constitution of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, adopted at the convention in Chicago, November 27, 1915. It is the outcome of much careful consideration on the part of Catholic women throughout the country, and it expresses the aims which seem to them most worthy of endeavor. About a year had elapsed since the meeting in New York, where the project of federation took definite shape; and during that time the movement had attracted such widespread interest that 150 associations of Catholic alumnae were represented by their delegates in the convention at Chicago. The various purposes which might call for cooperative effort with promise of success were thoroughly discussed, and the objects of the federation, as set forth in the article cited above were unanimously adopted.

The significance of this organization and of its scope can best be grasped through a survey of the situation out of which the movement developed. It is, in a certain sense, a special phase of the larger movement which in recent years has led to the establishment of various associations for the furtherance of Catholic interests. The need of uniting energies and efforts which formerly were scattered, though directed to the same common aim, has made itself felt and has become more urgent as new fields of activity were opened up. In addition to specifically religious purposes it was realized that education, charity and social work called for organized endeavor; and this has been secured by different associations each of which extends to every State of the Union. In all of these women have taken an active part, and it was quite natural that they should ask whether that part might not be given a more distinct character; in particular, whether women who had been graduated from Catholic institutions might not be able, or even in duty obliged, to cooperate in special lines for which their education had equipped them.

Year by year our Catholic high schools and colleges send out a considerable number of graduates. These young women have been educated by earnest teachers in the knowledge of the Catholic faith and the practices of their religion. They have heard what the church has accomplished for the good of humanity, the spread of civilization, the cultivation of the arts, the diffusion of knowledge—what leaders she has raised up for the relief of distress and for social reform; what zeal and devotion she has fostered; what organizations she has brought together in each age to supply its new needs, and what the results have been. All this has been impressed on the girl in her student days through her lessons in history, literature and science. She has been taught to look on the church not only as the spiritual kingdom established by Christ but also as a powerful agency that reaches to every department of human life and has work to do wherever the real welfare of man is concerned.

From her schooling the Catholic woman has learned to revere the great ones of her own sex, the heroines of holiness who found themselves nearest to God when they were doing for the poorest of His creatures. She has learned, too, that in the past women have had their share in such works as the founding of colleges, the holding of university chairs, the advancing of science, the settling of public affairs and the ruling of great nations—with the blessing and support of the church. She has learned, in brief, that there was a true feminism, with countless opportunities, in the ages of faith that found beauty in balance and power in virtue, without much shouting to proclaim or exaggeration to enforce the rights that God had given.

Nor are these prerogatives of her sex merely historical. They are exercised, she knows, by thousands of women, for the most part unnoticed by the busy world, and quite neglected by the world of noise and rush. She has lived in daily contact with them, has taken pattern of their deeds, has found them sympathetic with her plans and aspirations for the better things. She has not felt—the gratitude I have in mind—that her calling was for the religious state, but she has indeed resolved to do her true womanly share in spheres beyond the college walls. She has caught the inspiration to unselfish effort and she knows that this is the essential thing as well in the home as in the cloister, in social service no less than in the work of personal sanctification.

In the thought of such a graduate, the question must at once arise: What is this education to mean for the rest of my life? It is not simply the question that occurs to every educated person as to how her talent can most wisely be bestowed; but rather this: what specifically Catholic elements have been included in my training and to what pur-

pose? Out of that which I have received, what is there that I can give with best effect and highest profit?

In other words, she has her ideals; she sees them clearly enough from the inside, as it were, the side that reflects her school experience; what gives her pause is the other side, the bearing of her ideals upon actual life, their relation to the environment which she must enter and then their likelihood of realization in greater or lesser degree.

It is just here, I venture to say, that the federation has a preliminary but very important function to perform. It has, through careful study and deliberate exchange of views, to make clear for all its members those "ideals of Catholic womanhood," which it proposes to uphold, to emphasize their practical value for life right here and now in this country of ours and in all lands of similar condition. It is a process of focusing, with plenty of light on one side that needs to be converged on the other; and the lens is federation.

It is, of course, a good thing to get people to realize that they have, or by their antecedents ought to have, an ideal; consequently that they are not to fold their hands and drift with the other drifters. But supposing this, it is a better thing to make them understand that an ideal is either the most practical of the mind's conceptions, or no ideal at all. The fashion of thought which confounds ideals with dreams is not to be commended any more than is the error of those who imagine that the doing of only common things is proof of common sense. Probably mistaken notions about the nature and value of ideals is accountable for more than one failure. People who start out with the impression that the ideal is too fine a thing to be attained in ordinary life usually end by settling down to the much betwixt line of least resistance.

It is well then that this Federation of Catholic Alumnae has emphasized the importance of striving for something that is noble enough to arouse enthusiasm and yet so closely bound up with the actualities of existence that the opportunity to realize it is never wanting. The fact that so many educated women have united and agreed upon certain things as worthy of attainment is in itself a success and it is also a source of encouragement to further endeavor.

There is more diversity than is commonly thought among our educational institutions and among the types of women which they produce. This is due not so much to differences in courses of study or methods of teaching as to the influence of certain characteristic traits which make one order of religious teachers different from another. Unconsciously the pupil takes on habits of thought, attitudes and even ambitions that are inculcated more by daily circumstance than by direct instruction. So along with the alma mater devotion there goes a conformation of the spirit which at times might seem to be of more serious import than the essential being of the spirit and of the life which it supports.

None the less when all the differences have been duly estimated one finds that they are but various patterns wrought upon the same substantial foundation of Catholic life. The identity is far more significant than the diversity. The same beliefs lie back of all, with the same ethical standards, religious practices, attachment to the Church. And yet here in the essence of things which differ only by the outward signs, lies the basis on which the federation is to build. The "ideals of Catholic womanhood" are, first of all, Catholic—a truism no doubt and yet not too obvious for emphasis.

It is, however, obvious to say that among their ideals loyalty to the Catholic faith comes first. This is the main purpose of Catholic education. It is the most valuable asset that the graduate receives, and it is implied in everything else that her school or college has to give. Doubtless, too, it is uppermost in the girl's own mind as she looks forward to her later career. But it is not universally regarded with esteem. By many it is considered a fable, if not a downright hindrance to the enterprise of life; it is not "progressive." Our graduate soon feels the need of adjustment not by yielding to external pressure, which would really be weakness; nor yet by refusing to have any part in the action and thought of the day, which would be idleness; but by discovering the wants which only her faith can supply and the errors which it alone can correct. As concerning these things the frivolous have nothing to say; but to thoughtful men and women of every creed it is becoming more and more evident that in spite of our progress, or perhaps just because of that progress, we are come to the point where the world needs renewal by faith. We have tried everything else, run through many philosophies and adopted all the reforms, only to find that our problems are bigger than ever. Have our Catholic women understood, and with practical effect, that their faith is not for their own salvation alone, that by reason of it they are debtors to all the world?

The world, however, will not be paid with words. It is old enough to know that counterfeits are of easy circulation. It looks to deeds for the stamp of genuineness. But deeds are done by in-

dividuals, and the life counts for more than the profession. There is, of course, much acclaim for the resolutions and the measures of reform and the solemn promises that emanate from powerful organizations. And this is as it should be. But there is always the danger that the individual will come to lean too much on the organization and forget to reform just where reformation, like charity, ought to begin.

This federation, on the contrary, will seek to strengthen each of its members in loyal adherence to her Catholic faith, both for her personal welfare and for the common good. It will insist that each shall live up to the standard—"by their fruits ye shall know them." And it will emphasize the practical truth that example is the most eloquent of preaching.

For the intelligent graduate there is nothing new in this insistence on loyalty; she has heard of it in all the years of her schooling. Precisely so; but what the federation does is meant to offset those influences which so often produce indifference and doubt. These are not as a rule of the violent sort. They exert a more gentle pressure, appealing to the natural desire for recognition, approbation and prestige. They create an atmosphere; and in this atmosphere there is sorely needed a breathing space for faith. There is needed, in other words, the consciousness of a standard higher than social usage or general opinion, and of its acceptance by a body of educated persons. The federation recognizes this need and provides for it by bringing into communication all those who are united by the bond of a common faith.

But, it will be asked, on what is this "communication" to lay stress? In what concrete form shall loyalty to faith appear? Where and how shall it bring to realization those ideals of Catholic womanhood for the maintenance of which the federation was organized?

Womanhood finds its immediate sphere of action in the home; Catholic womanhood has its sphere of power, of activity and of influence in the Catholic home. There is no other sphere that has greater need of a life by faith or richer opportunity. There is none that suffers more when the light of faith goes out or that accomplishes more when that light burns brightly. And the home at this very time needs protection against encroachment from many quarters.

Let it be understood once for all that the Catholic woman is to be the centre of a Catholic home; otherwise it will be useless to talk of "ideals" in any other sphere. It surely is not a happy state of things when the child has to go away from home to get its ideals of right living, and less happy still is the condition when the home life counteracts what education tries to accomplish.

There is reason to fear that in our anxiety to make the school do everything we are really giving it too much of what belongs of right to the home. "In loco parentis" is a serious reminder for the teacher, and it cannot be repeated too often or too earnestly, if the work of teaching is to be done with a sense of responsibility. But the "locus" is a variable that depends on what is assigned to the parent and that approaches zero as the home influence decreases. The function of the school is to help and strengthen the home, not to set it aside; and even where the home is not what it ought to be, the aim of the school should be to correct and supply what is wanting, but not to displace the home.

Here, then, we have a problem, or rather a whole series of problems which the federation may properly undertake to solve. Home and school must be brought into closer cooperation for the upbuilding of Catholic life. What can education do toward making the ties of family more secure? How can the home life be made so pure and wholesome that it will correct and even prevent the evils from which social and public life are suffering? These are questions that cannot be answered with merely abstract or theoretical considerations. To get at their meaning, which is the first requisite, it will be necessary to discover the facts of the situation to ascertain the defects that actually exist and, if possible, to remedy them by removing the causes. It may be that both causes and conditions are different, according to the section of the country which is under consideration; and again it is possible that in any section one may have to note the difference between city and country, between conditions that have long prevailed and others that are of recent origin. A careful study covering these various points would furnish the data that should serve as guidance in formulating plans and drawing them out in detail.

The importance of correlating school work with external conditions and needs has been quite generally felt, and in consequence much attention is now given to arts that are of service in the home and to many other lines of vocational training. This is all very practical, no doubt, and yet the fact remains that many a home where "domestic science" was perfect has fallen into ruin, and that many "vocational" have been followed, with all the mastery of skill, to utter destruction. There is more in the making of home than the science of things domestic. Or let us say perhaps that there is a domestic art which includes the whole art of

living. And then one is tempted to ask whether the school gives adequate training in those things which endure when all other forms of domestic science have failed. Is there not a domestic wisdom that is more essential than the knowledge of food and frill and furniture? If so, then the school ought to say: "Seek ye first such wisdom, and all these things shall be added unto you." But the school must also see to it that the seeking be not in vain.

The "art of home making" is often referred to in a way that would lead one to regard it as something to be acquired later on—a sort of post-graduate attainment, involving much knowledge of the world, of human nature in general and of some individual in particular. And so we are accustomed, year by year, to hear of the abyss between school and "real" life, over which commencement orators are supposed to throw the bridge. The educator, however, knows that the school experience is just as much a part of "real life" as that which later years afford. And it is for this reason that we are trying to adjust education to the demands of business, of industrial and professional activity, of public life and of social service. How far has the same or anything like it been accomplished in developing those qualities of character which are the basic principles of domestic wisdom?

Since the discovery was made that the play of children has, psychologically, a more serious meaning than was formerly supposed, there has been a tendency in some quarters to make the whole business of education a sort of pastime. To the educative value of play there has succeeded the rather uncertain value of playful education. And this notion, when it goes beyond a given point not yet as clearly given as it ought to be, results in the elimination of serious thought and effort. The boy who has played his way through school is likely to become a mighty problem for the presidents and faculties of those colleges which still insist that athletics ought to allow some intervals for study.

In the grades also, while learning is never to be made irksome, it should not become so amusing as to leave the pupil without the sense of duty and of responsibility. He hears continually of the power and opportunities which knowledge provides. Would it hurt him to get some idea of the obligations which that same knowledge entails? It is not necessary, we may assume, to "enrich the curriculum" with a separate course on duty; but might not a more practical training supply what is needed in this direction? Its aim would not be to make the school a joyless place, but rather to develop in the child, according to his measure, the habit of putting duty before all else—a habit that will prove very useful in his maturer years.

The Catholic ritual for the sacrament of marriage prescribes that the parties who are about to be married shall be "carefully instructed regarding the right and Christian manner of living in that estate." The zealous pastor, moreover, is not satisfied with the brief formal instruction which is usually given during the ceremony; he profits by every opportunity in advance to make the engaged couple realize the seriousness of the obligations they are going to assume. Now it is plain to see that admonitions of this sort will have effect in proportion as the sense of duty has been developed in the childhood and youth of the parties. If there has been no such development the most impressive marriage service will count for little; nor is much to be hoped from the "sudden realizing" of obligation after married life has begun. And yet the building of the home, for weal or woe, depends on the estimate which the builders have formed of its sanctity and of the duties which it implies.

Herbert Spencer in his criticism of the education which he found in the schools of England complains that while much attention is given to the breeding of fine animals little or no attention is paid to the proper raising of children. Perhaps it is the recognition of this inconsistency that has led to the introduction in some of our schools of a teaching which, so its advocates assert, will do away with the manifold evils that spring from ignorance of certain subjects. At any rate neither Spencer nor the believers in this particular "hygiene" would seem to have noted the more serious inconsistency of an instruction that emphasizes the physical but neglects the spiritual aspect and needs. The real hygiene, and in this case the only effectual one, must be drawn from principles of a different sort and source. There is still room, even in modern life, for reverence, and the need of it is nowhere so conspicuous as in the attitude toward marriage. But evidently it is idle to speak of the "sanctity of the home" or of the "sacredness of the family tie" in the hearing of those for whom the idea of holiness, either subjective or objective, is void of all practical content.

It is equally useless to bewail the weakening of parental authority unless something be done to revive the sense of responsibility and the spirit of reverence in the form of obedience. An old fashioned thing, of course, this obedience; but so, for that matter, are sunlight and air. As soon as we get sub-

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