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CHRISTUS REX SOCIETY

By
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The Christus Rex Society was inaugurated at a meeting of newly ordained priests held in September, 1941. The primary object of these priests was to continue into the mission field the spirit of co-operation in study and in work which they had learned and had found so valuable in the social study circles of their student days at Maynooth. Fearing that the isolation of their scattered parochial missions and their individual inexperience would be an obstacle to their work for social reform, they felt the need for an organisation to foster mutual co-operation, to keep them in touch with one another in their social work, and to enable them to exchange ideas and to pool their experience. They were of opinion that an organisation of this nature would appeal to diocesan priests generally and would satisfy the widely-felt need for a means of communication and co-operation between priest social workers on diocesan missions.

This inaugural meeting was addressed by Revd. Drs. C. Lucey and P. McKeivitt, of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, both of whom welcomed the idea of a new organisation and gave invaluable suggestions for its constitution, programme, and methods. An organisation was accordingly set on foot, to be known as Christus Rex, intended ultimately to be open to all diocesan priests interested in social work. A committee was elected, to hold office for one year, and was charged with the responsibility of governing the organisation. A Draft Constitution was then drawn up defining the objects of the society, its methods and its membership.

The objects were stated to be (a) to promote among Irish diocesan clergy the study of the Church's social teaching, and (b) to encourage and assist priest in all forms of social work. As methods towards implementing these aims, the Draft Constitution envisaged firstly the holding of annual General Meetings of members at which social problems would be discussed, the practical experience gained by members pooled, and schemes for future co-operative activity by members elaborated. Secondly, the Constitution provided for the functioning of the Committee as an agency for keeping members in communication with one another and conversant with one another's work, by means of correspondence and circular letter; and as a bureau of information prepared to answer queries on social problems submitted by members.

Membership of the society was to be open to all diocesan priests interested in social work, and was to be secured by payment of an annual subscription towards the expenses of the society. Membership was, however, in practice limited originally to the priests

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Patron. After his lamented death, his successor in the Primatial see, the Most Revd. Dr. d'Alton, who as President of Maynooth had done so much to make the inception and early progress of the Society possible, consented to become Patron of Christus Rex.

Encouraged by this approbation and under this patronage, Christus Rex was able confidently to face its task of enlisting the support of the priests of Ireland in a nation-wide organisation for co-operative social effort. The first Priests' Summer School of Social Study was arranged and took place in Galway in August, 1946. The Lord Bishop of Galway, Most Revd. Dr. Browne, very kindly extended the hospitality of his diocese and lent his distinguished and active patronage to this first Summer School. The theme for discussion was "Justice for the Worker. —a study of the implications of Catholic teaching on the living wage. The week was opened by Solemn High Mass in St. Nicholas' Cathedral, Galway. Dr. Browne presided and preached a special sermon, in which he eloquently demonstrated the significance for social order of Christ's Kingly power, vindicated the Church's right to work for Social Justice, and warmly encouraged the Christus Rex Society and blessed its endeavour to promote the rights of Christ's Kingship in the social sphere. Dr. Browne also presided at the first meeting of the School and declared the proceedings open. At the various sessions, a gathering of over 70 priests from all parts of the country heard papers read by Revd. John V. Fitzgerald of Waterford, and Revd. Drs. Lucey and McKeivitt of Maynooth, and joined in fruitful discussion of the problems, theoretical and practical, raised by the principle of a Just Wage.

The Week concluded with the third annual General Meeting of Christus Rex. A lengthy agenda called forth a valuable exchange of views on the organisation and future development of the Society, The organisational framework was simplified by the division of now unwieldy Central Committee into two—a Central Executive Committee, to be responsible for the every-day administration of the Society's affairs; and a General Purposes Committee, on a broad representative basis, and responsible for major decisions on general policy. The Central Executive Committee is to comprise four members, Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen and Secretary. The General Purposes Committee includes the Honorary Patron, Most Revd. Dr. D'Alton; the Honorary President, Right Revd. Monsignor Kissane, President of Maynooth College; four Honorary Vice-Presidents, one to represent each ecclesiastical province; diocesan representatives and class-representatives. Although many dioceses are as yet unrepresented on this Committee, it is hoped that eventually the Society will have representatives in every diocese and that diocesan groups will ultimately form the cells of the organisation.

With regard to membership, it was made quite clear at this meeting that every Irish diocesan priest is eligible for membership of

Rex, provided merely that he be interested in social study and reform, and on the sole condition of paying a subscription to the society. The annual subscription remains fixed at 5/-, and provision was made for Life Membership, to be secured by payment of a subscription of £10-0-0. Members are requested to purchase the quarterly journal and to attend the annual Summer School and General Meeting of the Society. They are urged to use the means of co-operation and the channels of communication which the Christus Rex organisation provides, in order to further a united effort by Irish priests in social reform.

But the Christus Rex organisation is not framed on narrow or exclusivist lines. Though its Constitution fits it primarily to serve the needs of the diocesan clergy, it is nevertheless anxious to profit by the experience and learning of other priests and to secure their co-operation in the labours of the social apostolate. It remains conscious that the diocesan clergy are only part of the Catholic priesthood, and that many of their problems are shared by priests of religious congregations. The Society will, in its programme and publications, keep constantly in view the bonds which link all priests together. At its Summer Schools all priests, religious and diocesan, will be equally welcome, the interests of both will be catered for, and they will, it is hoped, contribute equally to the School's success. The Christus Rex quarterly journal will include religious among its contributors and will rely upon the support of religious houses not less than of the presbyteries.

At the General Meeting, the Draft Constitution was, with a few unimportant changes in phraseology, enacted as the definitive Constitution of Christus Rex. An addendum was made by the meeting, empowering the Central Executive Committee provisionally to interpret and, where necessary, to modify the terms of the Constitution, pending the decision of the next General Meeting.

In the discussions relating to the future organisational development of Christus Rex, the chief emphasis lay upon the evolution of diocesan or deanery groupings of the Society. Suggestions were advanced for the formation, functioning and programme of such groups. Illuminating information was provided on the achievement of a deanery group already active in Cork. This group selected youth organisation as the subject of their first investigations. The results of these investigations, collated at their monthly meetings, have been embodied in a valuable survey of Catholic Youth Organisations in the City of Cork. The exchange of ideas and experiences thus made possible and the spirit of co-operation thus engendered prove the usefulness of periodic meetings and discussions between priests of the same diocese or deanery. We have working here a working example of the type of diocesan organisation which Christus Rex hopes progressively to promote.

As its more immediate instruments of policy, Christus Rex

relies upon the Annual Summer School and the quarterly journal. The General Meeting decided to change the venue of the Summer School from year to year. It is hoped that thus the priests of every Irish diocese will have the opportunity of seeing and judging for themselves the society and its work, and that the truly national character of the society will be emphasised. Themes for study will be chosen with a view to their topical urgency and practical importance, and speakers qualified no less by practical experience than by theoretical knowledge will be asked to contribute papers. The Society will endeavour to direct the study and reading of its members during the preceding year to the subject of the next year's Summer School, and thus to ensure that at the School discussions will be based on an informed grasp of the questions at issue. These discussions which will form a very important aspect of the Summer School, will be concentrated on specific questions arising from the general theme, and will endeavour to reach a clear formulation of the Catholic and priestly attitudes towards these problems. In this way, constructive work may be done by Christus Rex in the interpretation and application of Catholic social principles.

With these aims and these instruments, the Christus Rex Society faces the future, confident that it can fulfil a useful and indeed a necessary function for Irish priests interested in social reform. The priests of Ireland have traditionally been ever found in the forefront of the popular movement towards social justice. The priests of Ireland are still found to be the inspiration of every effort for genuine reform of social conditions among their people. Genuine reform of the social order depends upon the intelligent interpretation and wise application of the principles of the Papal Social Encyclicals. Priests alone, whose mission it is to teach the whole Christian message, can provide authoritative guidance for the interpretation of Catholic social teaching, and effective leadership in its application. That the social teaching of priests may compel attention and their leadership of social reform become nationally effective, they need a medium for the formulation of a common programme, a mouthpiece for the enunciation of their united policy, an organisation to co-ordinate and unify their efforts. Christus Rex hopes to supply this need and to give to the priest social workers of Ireland the strength which organisation alone can give.

The Central Executive Committee of Christus Rex will provide a unifying link between the scattered labourers in the social apostolate. It will strive to collect and make available to members of the society expert knowledge and advice on social questions. The annual General Meeting will give priests the opportunity of elaborating a common policy of social action and of focussing their study and directing their activity towards the solution of the most pressing of our social problems. Deanery and diocesan group-meetings of priests, as these gradually develop, will enable priests to join in investigating local problems from the standpoint of Catholic principle

and in applying appropriate remedies. The annual Summer Schools of Social Study will give the priests of Ireland a medium for the study and the dissemination of Catholic social teaching, a forum for the exchange of ideas upon social questions and a common platform from which to promulgate true canons of social reform. The quarterly journal will provide authoritative expositions of Catholic principles and salutary guidance in their application to topical conditions. It will provide priests with a mouthpiece through which their voice can become widely influential and effective in the cause of social reform.

Christus Rex can do a great work for the priests of Ireland. More truly be it said, the priests of Ireland can do a great work for social reform through Christus Rex. Christus Rex appeals to the priests of every Irish diocese who are interested in social reform, to become members, not merely subscribing to the Society's funds, but actively co-operating in its work. United in an organisation such as Christus Rex, priests can far more effectively than would otherwise be possible, contribute towards making the reign of Christ the King really operative in every department of our Irish society, so that Ireland, as a model Catholic nation, may be 'a light' unto the revelation or the nations.

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