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The French Federation of Catholic Groups in the Law Courts

AMBROSE J. FAIDHERBE, O.P.*

I. The Origin

DURING WORLD WAR II an organization of Catholic lawyers was formed in Oflag IV D, a German prison camp for captured officers. Upon their liberation in June 1945 the former prisoners resolved to preserve the association that they had formed and to extend it to all parts of France upon their return to private life.

They first contacted the Catholic Group of the Palais de Justice in Paris and with their help and cooperation called a meeting of representatives from other prison camps and the leaders of already existing groups of Catholic lawyers.

Their purpose was clear: to create a federation whose basis would be constituted by already existing groups which would foster the creation of new groups which the former prisoners hoped to create in their respective regions. Thanks to a spirit of cooperation by all present, this purpose was fully reached in two long sittings where the different points of view were proposed, discussed and reconciled in an atmosphere of great friendliness and a deep desire to carry together the vivifying presence of Christ through the jurist world.

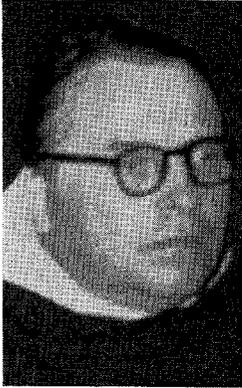
On Sunday, the 7th of October 1945 there were present in the Dominican Priory of St. Jacques, Paris, the representatives of the Paris group, of the Scout Magistrates and the Marseilles group, together with Mr. Dubosc from Le Havre, Mr. Bolo from Nantes, Mr. Delmotte from Valenciennes, Mr. Boulange from Boulogne-sur-Mer, Mr. Jourdain from Amiens and many old prisoners from IV D.

First of all, a Mass united all the people in common prayers, then animated discussions followed with a report about the progress made in Paris, in Marseilles and in the Oflags. The result was a project for a French Federation of Catholic Groups in the Law Courts.

This Federation was approved in November 1945 by the Annual Meet-

*Entered Dominican Order, 1918, ordained, 1927. Editorial Secretary of *La Vie Intellectuelle* on social and international questions, 1929-32. Students' Chaplain at University of Dijon, 1932-38. From 1938 to 1952 Chaplain to the Faculty of Law, Paris. After the war appointed Chaplain-General to the French Federation of Catholic Groups in the Law Courts. Author of *La Justice Distributive* (1934), numerous articles in *La Vie Intellectuelle* and *Les Cahiers du Droit*. Doctrinal director of the latter review. Since 1939 one of the Chaplains organizing the Students' Pilgrimage to Chartres.

ing of Cardinals and Archbishops. At the request of the representatives meeting on



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the war, became associated with the new Federation.

October 7, Reverend Ambrose Faidherbe, O.P., Chaplain of the Catholic Group of Paris, was appointed as general chaplain. His assistant was the Reverend Father Isaac, O.P.¹

Shortly thereafter the Catholic Group of the Law Courts in Lille, founded before

II. Purpose

The essential purpose of the Federation is to promote Catholicism in the legal world and in French organizations and institutions.

Its secondary purpose was to provide legal aid for certain needy social classes. The Loire group devoted itself particularly to the relief of prisoners, the Marseilles group in the harbor district to the care of juvenile delinquents and foundlings, and the legal councillors' organization in the Paris group to promoting the welfare of the working classes.

III. Members

The Federation is opened to all the magistrates, barristers, solicitors, notaries, clerks, court ushers, judges in the commerce courts and their employees who have a law degree.

¹ Father Isaac was at that time a Professor at the Dominican College of Saulchoir, at Etoilles near Paris. At present he is a student in Rome and his work with the Federation has been temporarily interrupted.

Actually, nearly all the members are at present barristers or solicitors. However, there are a few magistrates (in Paris and Marseille in particular), law Professors (Marseille and Aix), several notaries, and even some persons indirectly linked with the profession (at Le Havre, for instance, the secretary of the Bench President and the welfare officer for the prison).

On the questions of recruitment, organization and methods of action, the Federation advises each group to adapt itself to its particular sphere and time.

It should be noted that in France there is an already important group of Catholic Magistrates, animated by a national group of scout magistrates. The Federation is in close contact with its leaders.

Each of the legal professions has its own problems; other problems interest two or several professions and finally some problems are common to all. This demands a great freedom in the foundation and development of each group. In the same town, sometimes general meetings are organized, sometimes closed meetings according to the members of the group.

IV. Organization

This is a Federation, which means that each group is entirely free for its organization, its recruitment and its method. Thus the Marseille group is a declared association² while the Paris group is a group of

² "association declaree conformement a la loi de 1901"—two or more persons may associate in a non-profit enterprise. If its aim is lawful according to the general laws of the country and to good morals no official authorization is necessary. However, the founders of the association can declare it to the "prefecture" (official authority of the department) or the "sous prefecture" (arrondissement). It is necessary to file the information including the name and address of the headquarters of the association, its aims, and the names, ad-

Catholic Action, but it will be soon completed by a Catholic group of Jurists, who will be a declared association.

The Federation is directed by a *Committee* with a *Chairman*, Mr. Querenet, a barrister in the Paris Law Courts (former member of the Bar Council), a *vice-chairman*, Mr. Dubosc, a barrister in Le Havre (town councillor and vice-major) a *general secretariat* assumed jointly by Mr. and Mrs. Bonduelle, both barristers in Paris, and a certain number of members representing the different groups.

The Managing Committee is specially organized to foster the creation of new groups, to give information to the existing groups and, if necessary, to coordinate their action, to be the link between the Federation and the Cahiers du Droit, the Legal Section of the Catholic Centre for French Intellectuals, and the foreign organizations, etc.

The Federation has a review in common with the Office du Droit (Legal Committee of the French Federation of Catholic Students and Legal Section of the Catholic Centre for French Intellectuals): the *Cahiers du Droit*, the only French review looking at the legal problems from a Christian point of view.

V. Activities

Since each group is left to its own initiative the activities are extremely diversified. However, the following may be mentioned:

1. Prayers: the members of the Federation are invited to be before God the representatives of their own surroundings and of the surroundings in which they are inter-

dressés and professions of the officers. Such an association (association déclarée) has an official personality before the law courts. It can contract, hold and administer property and funds of the association necessary for the administration of the association.

ested (e.g. delinquents or prisoners). Private prayers will be directed toward this intention. Masses are also offered on the occasion of the reopening of the courts, on the feast of St. Ives, and for deceased members of the courts.

2. Religious formation of the members of the group: promoted through monthly meetings, private retreats and a corporate Communion and Mass at Easter Time.

3. Common Study of Professional Problems: the studies are extremely diversified: problems of moral life in general, private moral life and spirituality, reformation of the institutions, new laws, working out of bills, study of the institutions, a Christian criticism of new laws, working out of bills, study of the social doctrine of the Church, of opposite doctrines (liberalism, socialism, communism), study of post-penal works, etc.

4. Private or common action on a local or general plan, ranging from a private example given by one's professional life to a newspaper campaign or intervention before the Ministry of Justice or the political groups. A few interventions of this kind have already had important consequences; their result depends more on the competency and personal influence of the members than on their number.

5. Public Lectures: sermons for the reopening of the Courts (Le Havre) or at the St. Ives Mass (Paris, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Limoges, etc.); lectures [e.g. marriage in civil and canon law] (Paris-Boulogne); justice and charity (Paris, etc.).

6. Formation of the young: (Paris) youths, including law students, receive religious instructions.

7. Social services: In November 1954,

the Federation sent to the French groups and to the foreign groups working with it a plan for "Adoption" established by the Office du Droit, the Jurist section of the Catholic Centre of French Intellectuals (the members of this section are law professors), the leaders of the Federation and of the Paris group.³

VI. The Present State of the Federation

1. The Paris Group

Five sections of Catholic action: after a study of legal and moral problems for some years, since 1947, they are mainly devoted to the religious formation of their members but apply themselves to the study of professional questions when necessary.

Two sections of Catholic Action for the young: future barristers, young men attached to the prosecutor, solicitors' clerks, are encouraged to bring the principles of Christianity into their professional lives by means of discussions on the questions that inevitably beset beginners.

All sections of the Paris group meet once a month. Their meetings include meditation in common and conclude with a late Mass at 11:15 P.M.

A few members of the group take up legal work in working districts or in the suburbs. Others visit centres for the care of juvenile delinquents.

The group helps the editorial staff of the "Cahiers du Droit." Since April 1945 the Cahiers have published thirty-six issues. Number 26 is a summation of the first twenty-five issues.

The group each year organizes a retreat in the Dominican Convent of "Le Saulchoir," a friendly meal, a Mass for the dead members of the Law Courts, a retreat and

a Mass for Easter Communion, a Way of the Cross in the Sainte Chapelle on the evening of Holy Thursday, the solemn Mass of St. Ives at the Sainte Chapelle, a day out in the country in June with a dialogue Mass and sermon in a village church.

Finally the members of the group have a non-denominational pictures-club, with a meeting once a month.

2. The Marseille and Aix Groups

They have very carefully studied the problem of foundlings and of juvenile delinquency, either on a bill plan or on the practical plan in Marseille, and have had important results.

They meet in winter, section by section, each studying different aspect of the same problem and end their works by days in common at La Sainte Baume during the Easter week.

3. The Lille Group

They have a monthly meeting. They have established contacts with the neighboring towns: Roubaix, Douai, Saint-Omer, etc. Their work for 1954-55 included:

- a) the conception of human justice in the Old and New Testaments,
- b) the Catholic barrister as seen by the Catholic magistrate,
- c) the Catholic magistrate as seen by the Catholic barrister.

4. The Le Havre Group

Organizes retreats for the members; each year a solemn Mass for the reopening of the courts. According to local traditions, the President of the Bar takes charge of the organization of the St. Ives Mass.

The group has two meetings a month to which the wives of the members are invited.

From 1946 to 1954 the discussions were concerned with faith, the Holy Ghost, prudence, charity, work in a Christian life,

³ Cf. 36, Les Cashiers du Droit, 1, 1955.

studies and exchanges on juvenile delinquency, divorce, professional secrecy, behavior of the members of the legal professions towards each other, the role of the wife in her husband's professional life, penal instruction, property, children, housing problems, etc. This group also tried to remedy the misery in the prisons.

5. A few lawyers from *Valenciennes* organized in September 1947. A retreat was attended by twenty-five lawyers from Valenciennes, Cambrai, Duoi, and Avesnes, but they have not formed a permanent group.

6. **The Nice Group** since its creation has had a retreat every year at La Sainte Baume and for two years has organized very popular retreats at Christmas time with the help of other groups of Catholic intellectuals. For the last three years the group has organized a Mass for the Reopening of the Courts and a Mass for St. Ives, attended by many members of the legal profession. Among the professional studies may be mentioned: the prison system, divorce, the hyoscine, (scopolamine—a chemical used to produce partial anesthesia [twilight sleep] in obstetrics), and lectures on Pax Christi, and the European Federation.

7. **The Catholic Group of Nantes**, founded three years ago, took up the activities of a St. Ives group already existing during the war. They twice organized a retreat for Easter.

The professional studies in the first year were: Charity in the Law Courts between members of the profession, towards the accused, towards prisoners (the prison chaplain was present at this last meeting). The second year they studied divorce, with its material and moral consequences, how to reduce the numbers of divorces, and the

doctrine of the Church on that subject. The theme for the year 1954-55 was "Neglected Children and Juvenile Delinquency."

8. **Limoges** has had a group since February 1954 after a meeting organized by the leaders of the Federation. Two months later, Professor Henri Mazeaud gave a lecture on "Christianism and Civil Law." At the beginning of November the group had a Mass of the Holy Ghost (Red Mass).

9. Groups are constituted in Alger, Dijon, Laon and Vesoul.

10. Foundations are being prepared in Cannes, Meaux, Montpellier, Poitiers, Reims, Rennes, Strasbourg and in the main towns of Morocco.

11. Outside France, the St. Ives group of **Luxembourg** has been visited twice by the general chaplain and the general secretary of the Federation. Both went to Liege in March 1952 to a meeting followed by the creation of a Catholic Group there. The same thing happened in Bruxelles in June 1954. We hope to have foundations also at Louvain, Fribourg and Geneva.

12. The Federation is a member of Pax Romana (International Movement of Catholic Intellectuals) and of its Legal Secretariate. This Secretariate organized the October 1-4th, 1953 international meeting of Jurists at Royaumont and Paris which had as its theme: The family in the legal order. *Les Cahiers du Droit* have published the proceedings of the Congress together with the discussions and general reports.

The next Congress will take place in Castelgandolfo near Rome from October 2-4th, 1956, with this theme: "The Respect of Human Personality in the Application of Penal Law."

The different groups have already begun to study this question.