

Confidential Communication to the Archbishops

[*By Request of His Eminence James Cardinal Gibbons.*]

TO THE MOST REVEREND ARCHBISHOPS:

For a generation at least, the conviction has been crystallizing in the minds of Catholics, both clergy and laity, that there is need of an authorized Catholic agency at Washington, whose purpose will be to safeguard Catholic principles from being undermined, and Catholic interests from being disregarded through Federal legislation, that is inspired either by irreligion or open antagonism to the Church.

Events in recent years especially have painfully demonstrated, that, whereas the Catholic body by reason of its numbers and its prominent men is one that ought to be taken into account by the national government, we have been in relation to the forces that stand in opposition to us somewhat like China at the mercy of Japan. Unless some definite program be initiated, unless some systematized organization be formed, we have reason to fear that our condition will become analogous to that of the Church in France.

The fact that the danger to Catholic interests has not seemed imminent in the past, accounts perhaps for the strange anomaly, that while we have an authorized bureau to protect our Catholic Indians, the hierarchy has no agency to protect Catholic Americans.

Our experience at the outbreak of the war made us feel acutely the necessity of some organization with a systematic method of action to meet successfully the difficulties that confronted us from systematic opposition to the Church. In the beginning our efforts resembled a guerrilla warfare,—priests, heads of seminaries, bishops, and archbishops,—each animated with the highest motives, each doing his best as he saw how, but oftentimes running counter the one to the other. The Federal Government was at times in a state of lamentable confusion, as to what Catholics really wanted. Through our organization, however, we were able to obtain the exemption of our priests and seminarians from military service, and a just percentage of Catholic Chaplains.