

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. VI.

APRIL, 1926.

No. 4.

The Twenty-Eighth International Eucharistic Congress.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER, St. Louis.

1. The History and Significance of the Eucharistic Congress.

“Cardinal Mundelein, as the sponsor for the Twenty-eighth International Eucharistic Congress which is to be held in Chicago, June 20—24, has issued a formal invitation to all the Catholics of all the world to participate in the proposed discussions, deliberations, and ceremonies.”

With these words Eugene Weare, special correspondent for *America*, introduces the last of a series on the next Eucharistic Congress. (*America*, Jan. 23.) In the preceding articles he prepared the readers of *America* for this “greatest of all Eucharistic Congresses,” determining its purpose and outlining its program.

He writes: “The readers of *America* need not be reminded that, from the earliest days of the Church, *the Eucharist has been the central fact of Catholic worship. It is upon this doctrine of the Eucharist that the whole structure of the faith has been built.* The living presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar may well be said to be the *be-all and the end-all of Catholic devotion and practise.* [Italics our own.] All else is incidental. Little wonder is it, then, that in the ages since Calvary we find pious Christians ever ready and eager to manifest, to stimulate to increased fervor, spiritual devotion to the Blessed Eucharist. The Eucharistic Congresses are the latest manifestations of this eagerness to pay tribute, by public acts of adoration, to the sublime Mystery. Because these Congresses have so pertinently appealed to the needs of our times, their growth and development have been little less than miraculous.” (Jan. 2, 1926.) Because the purpose of the Congress, its sole aim and *motif*, is purely a spiritual one, “nothing shall be permitted that might detract, even remotely,

from the chief end to be attained. Nothing is to be tolerated that might even suggest a profane or unworthy purpose. There is to be no commercialism and no suggestion of money-making, of barter and sale." The expenses are to be met by the Catholics of Chicago "out of a fund to be gathered among themselves by voluntary contributions and without any aid from those on the outside."

The second article acquaints the readers of *America* with the magnitude of the enterprise. "The program of the sessions calls for the reception of Holy Communion by all the 'Congressists' on the first day of the Congress. This idea was conceived by Cardinal Mundelein in the early days of the planning for the Congress, and its purpose is to provide a 'spiritual bouquet' to Our Holy Father of *one million communions*. To carry this out, to assure its full and complete accomplishment, all the Catholics of Chicago as well as the visitors will be urged to join in this stirring manifestation of faith. . . . The committee will see to the securing of the services of some 2,000 priests from outside of Chicago, who are to help out in the hearing of the confessions, in the celebration of the many additional public Masses that will be necessary to accommodate the great crowds, and in the task of distributing the communions." (Jan. 9, 1926.) On the closing day of the Congress a procession will take place on the seminary grounds, at Mundelein, Ill., where the faithful will be accommodated at five or six hundred altars to be erected in the huge gymnasium at the seminary and in the basement of its gorgeous chapel. To accommodate the large crowds of visitors, the hotels of Chicago have reserved room for about 40,000; but "dormitories will be set up in hospitals, public and private institutions, assembly halls, school-buildings, and public armories." The Arrangement Committee is located at Headquarters' Office, Twenty-Eighth International Eucharistic Congress, Cathedral Square, Chicago, Ill.

The third article goes still more into detail. The publicity work to be done before and during the Congress is enormous. "The committee in charge of this particular phase of the work is about to set up a working staff at Chicago. . . . The staff is to be made up of a group of professional writers, authors, journalists, and editors, whose task it will be properly to publicize the Congress in a dignified, creditable fashion. To aid in this, an effort will be made to secure the help and cooperation of both the secular and religious press in all parts of the world. In addition to the general 'running copy,' which will be prepared and issued as the occasion

suggests, there will be special articles, 'feature' stories, illustrations, pictures, etc., made available for newspapers and magazines and a special service for Catholic papers everywhere. Catholic American writers of distinction will be invited to join this staff as special contributors, and special foreign-language writers will be urged to supply the 'copy' for the foreign press in this country and the press abroad." But the work of the Publicity Committee does not end here. In the early days of the planning of the Congress the railroads, steamship companies, hotels, and travel agencies were anxious to advertise the Congress. "Advertising folders, booklets, posters, etc., were in course of preparation, many of which were not quite in keeping with the high purpose of the Congress and its profound religious significance. Thereupon the publicity committee of the Congress entered on the scene with a plan to standardize and make uniform all advertising literature and insignia bearing upon the Congress sessions. . . . The committee in charge of the music of the Congress sent out an appeal for an original hymn to be sung during the days of the assembly. In response to this there have come *thousands* of original compositions, from which one will be selected. A suitable musical arrangement will be adopted, and the combination thus secured will be the official hymn of the Congress. Thus it will be seen again that in all the arrangements for the Congress no opportunity is neglected to allow for the exercise and manifestation of Catholic art and genius in the promotion of the great purpose of the Eucharistic Congresses."

The final article is a glowing tribute to the Arrangement Committee for its magnificent work. The plans are truly stupendous. First, the writer impresses upon his readers once more the purpose of the Eucharistic Congress. "The Congress is something more, and beyond a local, or diocesan, or even a national demonstration. It is *Catholic*; the appeal has gone forth to the *Church Universal*; the gathering is to be international and universal in both scope and pretension. The invitation to participate in this glorious manifestation of faith is extended to all, the lowly as well as the great, the pious and devout as well as the erring and the halting. All are invited and urged to play their part, however small and inconspicuous, in this public tribute to Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar." "It is planned to have the Congress open on Sunday morning, June 20, with the reception of Holy Communion by all the Catholics present in the city. Thus it is hoped to gather the one million communions which are to be offered as a spiritual

bouquet to Our Holy Father, Pius XI." "At high noon on the same day, at the Cathedral of the Holy Name, the formal opening of the Congress will take place. The Cardinal Legate will be formally received in a solemn church ceremony, with all the pomp and splendor of our Catholic ritual." — "On Monday, the second day of the Congress, there will be the Children's Mass at the Stadium on the lake front. Something like 160,000 people may be accommodated within its lines. An altar is to be erected at one end of the Stadium, and the children's choir of 50,000 voices will be seated in the center plat. The celebrant of the Mass will be one of the visiting cardinals, and the sermon will likewise be delivered by a cardinal. With the aid of the microphone, the amplifiers, and the 'loud speakers,' it is promised that every word of the ceremonies, as well as the sermon, will be rendered audible to all the vast multitude within the radius of a mile. The general subject selected by the Holy Father as the theme of all the discussions is: 'The Holy Eucharist and Christian Life.' The most eminent scholars of the Church in all lands have been invited to prepare papers for the discussions of the Congress, and notable orators will be called upon to address the various meetings on some particular phase of the general subject."

"All the large assembly halls of the city have been secured for the sectional meetings. In those parts of the city where there are great groups of foreign-born Catholics it is planned to conduct the discussions in a foreign language. . . . In the sections where there are great numbers of German Catholics the discussion, or a great part of it, will be held in German." — "On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday mornings a solemn Pontifical Mass will be celebrated at ten o'clock on the grounds of the great Stadium. Monday has been set apart as Children's Day. Tuesday will be assigned to the laity, with a monster open-air meeting and rally, under the auspices of the Chicago unit of the Holy Name Society, at the Stadium on Tuesday night. Wednesday will be devoted to Catholic Higher Education. On Thursday, the great open-air procession of the Blessed Eucharist will be staged on the seminary grounds at Mundelein, just outside the city limits." — "It is the procession which is always the outstanding event of a Eucharistic Congress. Along the shores of the lake, starting from the gorgeous chapel, the procession, rich and colorful, with all the pageantry of the ages and all the splendor of Catholic art and ingenuity, will wend its way with our Eucharistic Lord. In the 'line of march' will be princes,

prelates, and priests, the rich and the great, the poor and lowly, in a common tribute to the Sacred Host. A hundred choirs stationed at intervals along the road will catch up the chant of the solemn hymns to blend in unison with the quiet tread of the marching feet. It is not unlikely that 250,000 people will participate in the open-air procession at Mundelein." The writer closes his description with the remark: "The Chicago enterprise is easily the most pretentious and, at the same time, the most intricate of all. As you go into the details of the whole undertaking, you begin to doubt the possibility of it all until you meet with the men who stand in the background. Then, when you get to see something of these, you begin to understand. I may be mistaken, but I am willing to risk the prediction that theirs will be the most glorious triumph of a century."

Such, then, is the great feast of idolatry for which the Catholic Church is now making preparations. It comes at a time when the Holy Year has made the minds of the public receptive for Romanism. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* defines Eucharistic Congresses as "gatherings of ecclesiastics and laymen for the purpose of celebrating and glorifying the Holy Eucharist and of *seeking the best means to spread its knowledge and love throughout the world.*" (Italics ours.) The Eucharistic Congress is, therefore, a vast scheme of missionary propaganda. Hence the pomp and splendor displayed at these gatherings. Unable to impress the multitudes in better ways, the promoters of the Eucharistic Congresses make falsehood and idolatry parade the streets in the glimmer of ecclesiastical magnificence.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says: "The real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is one of the principal dogmas of the Catholic faith and is therefore of paramount importance as the most precious treasure that Christ has left to His Church, as the center of Catholic worship, and as the source of Christian piety. The main advantages of these congresses have been in the concentration of the thoughts of the faithful upon the mystery of the altar and in making known to them the means by which devotion towards the Holy Eucharist may be promoted and implanted in the hearts of the people. The promoters of the Eucharistic Congresses believe that, if during recent years devotion to the Holy Eucharist has become more wide-spread, if works of adoration, Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament, and the practise of frequent Communion have spread rapidly and extensively, *it must be ascribed in great*

part to these gatherings." (Italics our own.) Such, then, is the importance of the Eucharistic Congress. It concentrates the attention of the people both within and without the Roman Church upon the idolatry of the Mass, with the object in view to gain adherents to the Church.

That the Roman Catholic Church recognizes the significance of the Eucharistic Congress for proselyting is shown by the rapid progress which this institution has made, the popularity which it has gained, and the ever greater proportions which it has assumed. The first Eucharistic Congress was held at Lille, France, June 21, 1881. It owed its inspiration to Bishop Gaston de Segur. At first the idea was merely local, and the Congress met with few adherents attending its services. The second Congress took place at Avignon, in 1882, and the third at Liège, in the following year. The fourth Congress, which met at Freiburg, in Switzerland, in 1885, was the first to attract larger crowds. The fifth Congress, held at Toulouse, in France, in 1886, was attended by 1,500 churchmen and 30,000 laymen. The sixth Congress met in Paris, in 1888, and the seventh at Antwerp, in Belgium, in 1890. The attendance at this Congress reached the number of 150,000 persons. In 1893, the eighth Congress met at Jerusalem. At this Congress the reunion of the Eastern Catholic Church was advocated. At the sixteenth Congress, which was held at Rome, in 1905, upon the express wish of Pope Pius X, the Pontiff himself celebrated Mass, gave a special audience to the delegates, and was present at the procession that closed the proceedings. This Congress also induced him to issue the decree *Tridentina Synodus*, on December 20, 1905, which advised daily communions. The eighteenth Congress met at Metz, in Lorraine, in 1907. The German Government suspended the law of 1870 forbidding processions in order that the usual solemn procession might be held.

The nineteenth Congress was held at London in 1908, the first under the auspices of, and among, English-speaking members of the Roman Church. For the first time after three hundred and fifty years the Pope sent a legate, Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli, to England. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* writes of this Congress: "No such gathering of ecclesiastics had ever been seen outside of Rome in modern times, and English Catholics prepared to make it locally even more memorable. The seeds of 'the second spring,' one of them aptly said, awakened by the tears and blood of persecution and strengthened by the prayers of the remnant of the faith-

ful in the dreary years of the penal laws, bore flower and fruit." However, upon the protest of the Protestant Alliance the procession had to be suspended, and the "sacred host" could not be carried through the streets of London, as had been planned.

In addition to these general congresses there have grown up, in all countries where Catholics are numerous, local gatherings of the Eucharistic Leagues. These have been held in France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy, England, Canada, Australia, and the United States. The first of those held in the United States took place at St. Louis, in 1901, the second at New York, in 1905, and the third in Pittsburgh, in 1907. The purpose of these gatherings is the same as that of the general Eucharistic Congresses. They differ only in this, that the gatherings of the Eucharistic Leagues are local in nature and of lesser prominence.

America (Jan. 2, 1926) writes: "For the first time, American Catholics, in the person of the Catholics of Chicago, will entertain the 'Congressists' on the occasion of this *glorious demonstration of faith*. [Italics our own.] This is why the Catholics of Chicago have so enthusiastically bestirred themselves. Theirs is the determination that nothing shall be left undone to make the forthcoming Congress, under American patronage, the most outstanding and attractive of all and well worthy our twenty millions. I know it to be a precarious undertaking, but I am willing to risk the prediction that they shall not fail. . . . It is no exaggeration of the facts to say that never before, in any nation, has there been a congress so carefully planned or so extensively arranged."
