

A MUCH-FELT WANT

AN INTERNATIONAL INDEPENDENT TELEGRAPH AGENCY

In a resolution of the press section of the seventh Austrian Catholic Congress, held last September, in Innsbruck (writes the Rev. M. J. Ahern, S.J., in *America*), the necessity of an international independent telegraph agency was emphasised; and the desire expressed that such an agency be called into being as soon as possible. Neither the necessity nor the desire was new. The latter has been given expression to in one form or other in the resolutions of every Catholic congress of recent years, and the absolute need of some such antidote and corrective to the poison of untruth, and to the irresponsibility and inaccuracy of the misstatements supplied as 'news' to the press of the world by the press bureaux at present in existence, has become increasingly evident with the elevation of these bureaux to the positions of enormous influence they at present occupy.

Recent events have only served to bring this into stronger relief. One has but to recall the accounts, always 'full,' 'complete,' 'accurate,' 'of eye witnesses,' etc., published in our newspapers and magazines of the riots in Barcelona; of the trial and execution of Ferrer, and of the revolution in Portugal. What with the wholesale calumnies of the clergy and the religious orders, the 'subterranean passages' and 'stacks of rifles' in religious houses, the suppressing of facts favorable to the Church and the exaggeration of the unfavorable, it seemed clear that an effort was made to picture things Catholic in as sinister a color as words could do, and the deeds of the Church's enemies as seldom falling far short of, when they did not actually attain to, the heroic.

In the European non-Catholic press the magnificent success of a Eucharistic Congress in London, Cologne and Montreal is dismissed with a few paragraphs, whereas the proceedings of an insignificant meeting of free-thinkers and anti-clericals fills columns. Significantly, in the reports of parliamentary discussions in the French, Spanish, or Italian chambers, the anti-clerical deputy or premier always 'proves'; the Catholic member on the contrary merely 'endeavours to refute' or 'tries to deny.' Then again, how infrequently are the comments of Catholic papers on a parliamentary or any other question, even one of most intimate concern to the Catholic Church, made the subject of a press despatch or news-item? According to the press-despatches, in a conflict between Church and State, the State is in nearly every case merely resisting the usurpations of the Church. An occasional clerical scandal will be magnified beyond belief and given wide publicity; not so, however, the repentance and retraction of the unfortunate individual, public though that repentance and refutation be.

Vatican Decrees and Encyclicals are Misconstrued and mistranslated—witness the case of the Borromeo Encyclical in the Liberal and Socialistic press of Germany. The Pope is apparently continually being displeased with his Cardinal Secretary of State and dismissing him. And so we might go on for pages! Enough has been said, however, to make abundantly clear how untrustworthy, misleading and—the expression is not too strong—diabolically distorted are the majority of the press reports of events within or affecting the Catholic Church. What has been said of a certain brand of history, that it is a conspiracy against the truth, may be applied with much greater propriety to a great part of our twentieth century news-supply. When it is not downright false or misleading, it is too often, to borrow an expressive word from our German cousins, *Tendenziös*.

This deplorable condition of affairs finds a ready explanation in the fact that where they are not in the hands of the Church's enemies, or are not financed by anti-clerical parties, the existing agencies are owned by people who are simply neutral or disinterested in Church matters, and are, to a large extent, controlled or protected by some one government or other; some of them, indeed, enjoying both forms of patronage at once.

A telegraphic news-agency that would be accurate and authentic in the news, which held itself aloof from such patronage, whose despatches would not be 'doctored' to serve the ends of any certain clique or international cabal, would be a boon not only to Catholics and the Catholic press, but to all who love truth, and to those newspapers who print the 'romance' news and the 'fablegrams' not from any inherent prejudice, but because they are ignorant of Catholic teaching, and have no authoritative sources from which they can draw their supply promptly and cheaply. Within the past year

A Notable Effort has Been Made

to furnish such sources for the Australian press by the recently consecrated Bishop of Auckland, New Zealand, the Right Rev. Dr. Cleary. An account of his excellently planned and organised enterprise was published in *America* of February 18. In England, too, the first steps have been made towards the organisation of an international Catholic defence league. And now comes the good news from Switzerland that a stock company has been formed there to conduct an international independent telegraphic

agency which will begin operations on the coming first of May.

The News Agency is no Mere Mushroom Growth.

A committee of four influential Swiss Catholics—Herr Jakob Rohner, a well-known manufacturer; Dr. Geser-Rohner, a lawyer and cantonrat of the Canton of St. Gall; Dr. F. Lampert, Professor of Canon Law in the University of Fribourg, and Herr G. Baumberger, chief editor of the *Zürcher Neueste Nachrichten*, has for more than a year been quietly conducting a thorough investigation into the matter; the possibilities and the difficulties have been thoroughly discussed, the views of personages high in Church and State ascertained, and everywhere the project has met with the most enthusiastic approval and endorsement. Milan has been selected for the location of the central bureau, with branches in Rome, Munich, Zurich, Vienna, Budapest, Warsaw, Cologne, Brussels, Paris, and Madrid. The branches in London and New York and in other important centres will follow as soon as they can be efficiently organised. It is well to remark, to prevent possible confusion, that the new agency is an independent undertaking from the 'Central-Ankunftsstelle,' of which a description was given in a recent number of *America*.

The selection of Milan as the seat of the head office has not been made haphazard, but is the result of a thorough study of the conditions in that and other cities, particularly in Vienna, which was at first proposed for the purpose. Milan unites to the advantage of being sufficiently close to Rome, that of excellent railroad connections and an unsurpassed long-distance telephone and telegraph service. There are, for instance, through rail routes by way of the Simplon and St. Gothard tunnels to Paris and London, over the Brenner pass to Munich and the cities of Southern Germany, with direct lines thence to Cologne, Brussels, Amsterdam, etc., on the north-east, and to Dresden, Berlin, and Northern Germany, and thence to St. Petersburg and Warsaw on the north-west; over Venice and Trieste to Vienna, thence to Budapest, Belgrade, Constantinople; over Marseilles to Madrid and Lisbon. These excellent connections are invaluable for the rapid correspondence service, which will be one of the features of the bureau. The telephone and telegraph service from Milan is even more excellent in extent and efficiency. The advantage of this to the new bureau is so evident that comment is superfluous. The agency will use as telegraph and cable name the word 'Iuta,' formed of the four initial letters of the German title: 'Internationale Unabhängige Telegrafien Agentur.'

In the choice of its director-general the agency has been singularly fortunate. Dr. Ludwig Kaul, a German, although still young, is a journalist of great and varied experience, and has a knowledge of every important European tongue. For some years he has conducted, with conspicuous and yearly increasing success, a private telegraph agency in Zurich, called the 'Helvetia,' along the lines of the new venture. The 'Helvetia' becomes on May first with its plant, correspondents, and patronage, part and parcel of the latter. This must be considered a singularly fortunate circumstance, for it relieves the new international bureau of the thousand and one anxieties and difficulties incident upon every new foundation, and enables it to concentrate all its energies on widening the patronage and in increasing the efficiency of an already existing and admirably-planned organisation.

The Intense Interest Which the News of the New Foundation

has aroused on the Continent and on all sides and the co-operation already secured leave little room for reasonable doubt that the I.U.T.A., within a short space of time, will count among its subscribers the entire Catholic press of Europe, as well as a large and ever-increasing number of the independent publications, to say nothing of the parliamentary, ministerial, and private patronage it will in time receive.

All kinds of news will be supplied, ecclesiastical, financial, political, economic, scientific, artistic and literary. The magnificent and truly heroic work of Catholic missionaries in all parts of the known world, a work that has been too little appreciated even in the Catholic press, and is almost, if not totally, ignored by the non-Catholic sheets, will be fully reported by the new agency. Anyone who is at all familiar with the periodical and propaganda literature of the various Catholic missionary associations knows what valuable contributions these missionaries are making to various sciences, such as geography, anthropology, ethnology, botany, to say nothing of the tens of thousands they have led into the paths of civilisation and the light of the Gospel.

No country would seem to offer a more promising field to the new agency than the United States. Whatever the reason may be, whether it is that they have grown more tolerant, or out of a wholesome fear of the largely increased influence of the Catholic Church on public opinion during the last few decades, our great newspapers and magazines seem concerned to give as little offence as possible to the Catholic body, and, merely as a matter of business, they prefer to publish accurate news about Catholic matters to the extra, often great, expense of supplying the correction later, on the protest of some influential Catholic personage or association. To such publications the I.U.T.A. will supply all they desire, and will supply it as promptly and cheaply as any one of the existing agencies. On those,