

# The Religious Crisis in France.

Address Delivered by Rev. Father Fallon, O.M.I., Before the Haver-sity Club of Buffalo, N. Y.

(Continued.)

There remained now one further step for the infidel government of France to take in its bitter campaign against not only Catholicity but Christianity and the very idea of religion. The religious orders having been destroyed, the attack was next directed at the Church itself. This phase of struggle was inaugurated by the abrogation of the Concordat and the enactment of the so-called Separation Bill of 1905.

When the fury of the French revolution had worn itself away one of the world's great leaders arose to bring order out of chaos. His name was Napoleon Bonaparte. With the instinct of true genius he recognized that religion was a necessary element in social and national peace. He therefore opened negotiations with Pope Pius VII., the result of which was the Concordat of 1801. This treaty contains 15 articles. By its provisions Napoleon conceded full and free liberty to the exercise of the Catholic religion in France, which had been abolished by the law of 1889. Pius VII. on his part relinquished the title to the \$400,000,000 worth of church property that had been confiscated and to a great extent sold at that time. In return Napoleon agreed to place in the budget of public worship an annual sum amounting to less than 1 per cent. of the value of the confiscated ecclesiastical possessions. There is a vast deal of talk about a State-paid clergy in France. As a matter of fact the stipend paid to the French clergy was neither more nor less than the property stolen by the Revolution. With very few exceptions these clergy stipends ranged in princely magnificence from \$80 to \$240 a year. They were mean and miserly, but such as they were they constituted a sacred portion of the national debt and were a clear obligation guaranteed by a bi-lateral contract. Now comes the French government to end arbitrarily and without consultation the contract of a hundred years' standing to summarily cancel a just debt, to repudiate without shame treaty obligations; and, by a law that is a flagrant infamy, to re-confiscate all church property, and thus to perpetuate the gigantic and scandalous robbery of Catholics that must ever remain one of the foulest blots on the French Revolution.

And what a sorry jumble of inconsistencies is this Separation Bill of 1905. It deprives Catholics of their resources by confiscation; it regulates the organization of the church to which, nevertheless, it claims to be a stranger; it refuses Catholics the prerogatives guaranteed by the common law to all other citizens. It imposes on them a certain form of association to govern public worship; it ignores the Pope and acknowledges the diocese; it ignores the diocese and acknowledges the parish. In the parish it ignores the priest and acknowledges the laity. It regulates what number of the latter may band together and then limits their right to annual savings, of which it determines the amount, prescribes the investment, and designates the use. It prohibits the faithful from forming with their own money and by voluntary contribution a fund for religious purposes. All the generous gifts made during centuries to the Church for religious education and Christian charity are seized and, against the will of the donors, are turned to lay education and philanthropy, and all disputes concerning any of these questions must be passed upon by a lay judicial tribunal called "The Council of State."

These points are made with perfect clearness and remarkable moderation in the Papal documents of February and August, 1906. "Nothing," says Pius X., "more hostile to the liberty of the Church could have been conceived. For, with the existence of the associations of worship, the law of separation hinders the pastors from exercising the plenitude of their authority, and of their office over the council, when it attributes to the council of state supreme jurisdiction over these associations, and submits them to a whole series of prescriptions not contained in the common law, rendering their formation difficult and their continued existence more difficult still; when after proclaiming the liberty of public worship, it proceeds to restrict its exercises by numerous exceptions; when it despoils the Church of the internal regulation of the churches in order to invest the State with this function; when it thwarts the preaching of the Catholic faith and morals, and sets up a severe and exceptional penal code for clerics; when it sanctions all these provisions and many others of the same kind, in which wide scope is left to arbitrary ruling, does it not place the Church in a position of humiliating subjection, and, under the pretext of protecting public order, deprive peaceable citizens, who still continue the vast majority in France, of the sacred right of practicing their religion? In defiance of all justice, it despoils the Church of a great portion of a patrimony which belongs to her by titles as numerous as annals all the pious foundations consecrated, with perfect legality, to divine worship, and to offices of the dead. The resources furnished by Catholic liberality for the main-

tenance of Catholic schools, and the working of various charitable associations connected with religion, have been transferred to lay associations in which it would be idle to seek for a vestige of religion. In this it violates not only the rights of the Church, but the formal and explicit purpose of the donors and testators. It is also a subject of keen grief to us that the law, in contempt of the State, departments or communes, the ecclesiastical edifices dating from the Concordat. True, the law concedes the gratuitous use for an indefinite period, of these properties to the associations of worship, but it surrounds the concessions with so many and so serious reserves that in reality it leaves to the public powers full dispositions of them."

The united hierarchy of France had already preceded the Holy Father in a protest addressed to the President of the French Republic. Referring to the clause of the act constituting the notorious associations of worship, being organized wholly independent of the authority of the bishops and of the parish priests would, in themselves, be a negation of the constitution of the Church and would pave the way for a schism. The essentially vicious character of these associations for religious worship consists in their creating a purely lay organization, which would be forced upon the Catholic Church.

But the French Government was deaf to every protest and spurned every proposal looking to conciliation and mutual agreement. It flung, stole the diplomatic correspondence of the Vatican which every law of international usage and courtesy held sacred, arrested the personal representative of the Pope in the French capital, and sent him under police escort like a dangerous criminal beyond the frontiers of France. That the Vatican may have made diplomatic mistakes is quite possible, though I utterly deny the fact. Still these mistakes, even if made, would have been but mean and cowardly and artificial pretexts for the barbarous legislation of the past six years, and for the blind and headlong construction of insulting penal laws, against the strongest moral and the weakest physical power in the world, the Pope of Rome. This course would never have been attempted if Pius X. had behind him the military forces of the German Emperor or the naval strength of Edward VII., or the "Big Stick" of Theodore Roosevelt. And to my mind it stands to the eternal disgrace of the opening decade of the 20th century that no powerful voice among the civilized non-Catholic nations of the earth was raised in protest against such evident and such persistent outrage and injustice.

That the Holy Father was right in his condemnation of the alleged separation bill was soon made manifest. On the very first Sunday after the act came in force, two anarchists in a parish church under- took to talk back to the priest. The same day in the Church of Grenoble, two well dressed men ostentatiously took chairs, turned their backs to the altar and remained so seated throughout the Mass. In the Cathedral at Rouen, a man in a frock coat kept his silk hat on his head and smoked a cigarette as he walked around the aisles of the church during service. As has been well said, this so-called separation bill leaves each Catholic church in France at the mercy of the receiver, the mayor's office, and the superintendent of police.

Now, if the French government had really wanted the actual separation of Church and State it could easily have obtained it. Mutual good will and good faith would have accomplished it. The Catholic Church is not wedded to any exclusive system in her relations with the States in which she is organized. She declares that there is a real distinction between the religious and civil powers. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" is for her a practical phrase. She declares the mutual independence of Church and State in their respective spheres and she furthermore declares that the duty lies on Church and State of living and working harmoniously together. Of course, her ideal people would live in unity of faith, and in such a state there would be absolute respect for the rights of the State; but she frankly admits that her ideal has not been, and is not apt to be realized in a world of conflicting views on matters of faith and divergent ambitions in matters of politics.

But such a separation as is aimed at in France, where each power is not only to act as though the other did not exist, but where hatred and persecution are the order of the day, she declares to be absurd, impossible and contrary to common-sense.

To prohibit by law communication with the head of the Church, to despoil the bishops of all authority, to harass the priests in the exercise of their ministry to close the institutions where young recruits are to be educated for the priesthood, to steal the endowments for charity and for masses for the dead—is this separation of Church and State? To confiscate 26,000 churches, 100 seminaries, tens of thousands of rectories, schools, hospitals and asylums—can it be possible that these

are the necessary elements and the accompanying circumstances of a separation of the spiritual and temporal powers?

M. Briand, the French Minister of Public Worship, frankly recognizes that the principle of the separation bill is anti-Catholic. Now, the man or the government that imagines that the Catholic Church will allow herself to be legislated for—or against—without being consulted, or that she will subscribe to the injustice of which she herself is the victim, is living in a fool's paradise instead of being in a madhouse. The whole course of this assertion, modern, is full of examples that prove the truth of this assertion. The pagan persecutors of Rome drove the first Catholics to meet the wild beasts in the arena, or to take refuge in the catacombs underneath the city. But the issue of the struggle is written in one sentence—"Sanguis martyrum est semen Christianorum"—the blood of the martyrs became the seed of Christians. Julian the apostate turned the full force of his power and ingenuity against the Catholic Church. His end came when casting his own blood up against the heavens, he said, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean." The reformation of the 16th century tore Germany, England and many other of the fairest countries of Europe from the bosom of Catholic unity; I am not prepared to say that the general result has been for the betterment of mankind. The revolution of 1789 drenched France with the blood of the purest and best Catholics, but it did not drown out the divine life of the Church. Lord John Russell met the reconstitution of the Catholic Episcopacy in England, with a high-sounding ecclesiastical title bill; to let her, but the Catholic Church lives an era of persecution by his Kulturkampf; he cast bishops and priests into prison; he proudly declared that he would never go to Canossa. But Bismarck is dead, and there is no power in Germany to contend successfully against the triumphant spread of the Catholic religion. The reason for all this, we Catholics say, is because the Church has within her the elements of divine life that can neither be smothered nor finally subdued.

How has this condition of affairs come about in France, is a question that arises naturally in every thinking mind. I shall endeavor to give a few of the natural causes. France is not in the world a more absolute and despotic monarchy. Neither the Czar of Russia, nor the Shah of Persia, nor the Sultan of Turkey controls a more complete centralization of power than does the cabinet of France. For the highest positions of state down to the minutest details of the most distant command, by an host of officials, by the power of the army, and by state controlled railways, the French government reaches a multitude of homes and directs the actions of millions of willing agents. It controls the press, it affixes to the public buildings—only such documents or speeches as are pleasing to it, it has the custody of the ballot boxes. These are some of the natural reasons which make it easy for a minority to control a majority.

But over and above all these causes stands the everlasting conflict between good and evil, and the frequent temporary triumph of evil in the world. Hatred is more active than love, and it oftentimes happens that those who hate accomplish their purpose, while those who love rest idly by.

And this whole question is not so much a contest against the Catholic Church as against Christianity and the very idea of religion. As long as five years ago, Mr. Briand, speaking at a public meeting of the National Education League, used these words: "We must affirm our democratic faith, our lay faith; we must declare that we shall have all the lies and all the tyranny of belief." Mr. Ferdinand Buisson, former Minister of Public Instruction, and actually president of the National Education League, has the following words in his book, "Religion, Morality and Conscience": "In all this story about God and the world which Catholic dogma presents to us—there is not one single word which does not provoke, I will not

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say indignation, for in order to be indignant one would have to believe, but a mute and melancholy denial. With its ideas about the necessity of redemption and of expiatory sacrifice, the Christian moral system presents nothing more nor less than a coarse ideal, against which our century revolts, and which would throw us back to thousands of years. The only possible results of all rational education must be the evolution of the religion of the past into the irreligion of the future. Mr. Delpech joins with his colleague in the following tirade against Christianity: "The triumph of the Galilean has lasted for 20 centuries; it is now his turn to die. The mysterious voice which once on the mountains of Epirus announced the death of Pan, to-day announces the end of that false God who promised an era of justice and peace to those who should believe in him. The deception has lasted long enough, the lying God in his turn disappears."

Mr. Viviani, actually Minister of Labor in the French Cabinet, betters the denunciation of his fellow-infidels in these terms. "All of us then, by our forefathers, by ourselves, have been attached to the work of anti-clericalism and irreligion. We have met the weary laborer, as he knelt after his day's toil, looking up at the clouds, and have told him that he was dreaming false dreams and dwelling on senseless unrealities. We have snatched the human conscience from belief in a future life. Do you think that the work is at an end? No. It is but beginning."

But it remained for Mr. Briand, who is the head and front of the present separation bill, "to give full vent to the vilest expressions of unbelief in his address to the school-teachers at Amiens:—"The time has come," he said, "to root up from the minds of French children the ancient faith which has served its purpose, and replace it with the light of the Christian idea. We have hunted Jesus Christ out of the schools, out of the University, out of hospitals and asylums, may even out of prisons and madhouses; it now remains for us to hunt him out of the government of France."

These horrible and blasphemous words have been put into effect. A decree of 1904 prohibited the use of the crucifix in the courts of justice; the conscience of every Christian ought to have been sufficiently violated by this infamous decree, but the infidel government of France doubled the outrage by ordering the decree to be enforced on Good Friday, a day sacred to every man who bears the Christian name. Article 28 of the law of separation forbids absolutely all religious signs or emblems in public places, and on January 5th of this year the atheistic hatred of the French cabinet reached the height of absurdity when it ordered that the time honored motto, "God protect France," which is stamped on all the gold coins of the nation, should be removed from them on their return to the treasury and that it should be replaced on the new coinage by the specious and often falsified device "Liberty, equality, fraternity."

Upon what does the Catholic Church rely in this gigantic struggle? Neither upon the strength of her laity, nor zeal of her clergy, nor the sympathy of the world. Her strength comes from a far different source. A little child was born in Bethlehem 1900 years ago. A few days after His birth the aged Simon pointing to Him prophesied that He was set for the fall and for the resurrection of many, and for a sign to be contradicted. The cruel Herod in his efforts to end the life of this helpless, inoffensive babe caused the death of all the children under two years in Judea. But there was a protecting hand over the divine Infant. This child when grown to man's estate made no promises to His followers of exemption from persecution. Rather did He say: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; the servant is not greater than his master." Again He asked the question, "If in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" And it is His own voice we hear in the awful yet consoling words, "The hour cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doth a service to God."

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