

this source that have flowed rationalism, naturalism and materialism —poisonous and destructive systems which, under different appearances, renew the ancient errors triumphantly refuted by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church; so that the pride of modern times, by excessive confidence in its own lights, was stricken with blindness; and paganism, subsisted thenceforth, on fancies, even concerning the attributes of the human soul and the immortal destinies which constitute our glorious heritage.

The struggle against the Church thus took on a more serious character than in the past, no less because of the vehemence of the assault than because of its universality. Contemporary unbelief does not confine itself to denying or doubting articles of faith. What it combats is the whole body of principles which sacred revelation and sound philosophy maintain; those fundamental and holy principles, which teach man the supreme object of his earthly life, which keep him in the performance of his duty, which inspire his heart with courage and resignation, and which in promising him incorruptible justice and perfect happiness beyond the tomb, enable him to subject time to eternity, earth to heaven. But what takes the place of these principles, which form the incomparable strength bestowed by faith? A frightful skepticism, which chills the heart and stifles in the conscience every magnanimous aspiration.

This system of practical atheism must necessarily cause, as in point of fact it does, a profound disorder in the domain of morals for, as the greatest philosophers of antiquity have declared, religion is the chief foundation of justice and virtue. When the bonds are broken which unite man to God, who is the Sovereign Legislator and Universal Judge, a mere phantom of morality remains; a morality which is purely civic and, as it is termed independent, which, abstracting from the Eternal Mind and the laws of God, descends inevitably till it reaches the ultimate conclusion of making man a law himself. Incapable, in consequence, of rising on the wings of Christian hope to the goods of the world beyond, man will seek a material satisfaction in the comforts and enjoyments of life. There will be excited in him a thirst for pleasure, a

desire of riches and an eager quest of rapid and unlimited wealth, even at the cost of justice. There will be enkindled in him every ambition and a feverish and frenzied desire to gratify them even in defiance of law, and he will be swayed by a contempt for right and public authority, as well as by licentiousness of life which, when the condition becomes general, will mark the real decay of society.

Perhaps We may be accused of exaggerating the sad consequences of the disorders of which We speak. No; for the reality is before our eyes and warrants but too truly Our forebodings. It is manifest that if there is not some betterment soon, the bases of society will crumble and drag down with them the great and eternal principles of law and morality.

It is in consequence of this condition of things that the social body, beginning with the family, is suffering such serious evils. For the lay State, forgetting its limitations and the essential object of the authority which it wields, has laid its hands on the marriage bond to profane it and has stripped it of its religious character; it has dared as much as it could in the matter of that natural right which parents possess to educate their children, and in many countries it has destroyed the stability of marriage by giving a legal sanction to the licentious institution of divorce. All know the result of these attacks. More than words can tell they have multiplied marriages which are prompted only by shameful passions, which are speedily dissolved, and which, at times bring about bloody tragedies, at others the most shocking infidelities. We say nothing of the innocent offsprings of these unions, the children who are abandoned or whose morals are corrupted on one side by the bad example of the parents, on the other by the poison which the officially lay State constantly pours into their hearts.

Along with the family, the political and social order is also endangered by doctrines which ascribe a false origin to authority, and which have corrupted the genuine conception of government. For if sovereign authority is derived formally from the consent of the people, and not from God, who is the supreme and Eter-