

THE POSITION AND DUTIES OF LAYMEN IN THE CHURCH.

From the conversion of Constantine to the present time, Christian society has been regarded, as in truth it is, as one body, under one Head, Christ, true God, who has ruled it by His two representatives, the religious Prince and the civil Princedom, in accordance with the two fold guidance which we need here below—the one for the attainment of eternal happiness, the other for the attainment of goods which constitute our temporal happiness. Hence the necessity of harmony between these two powers, the religious and the political.

And, as the religious, which regards man's eternal salvation, is of a higher order than the civil, which immediately regards his temporal happiness, it follows that the latter should be an aid and a protection to the former.

To-day these ideas are, in one place, partly, in another, wholly changed. The state or civil Princedom, for the representation of the sovereignty of Christ, has substituted the representation of the sovereignty of man, and separating itself from the Church of Christ, no longer accords to her aid or protection. In this condition of things, nothing else but the lay element is left to the church in the civil order. What the Duties of the Catholic laymen to the church are, will form the subject of the following remarks.

I. GENERAL DUTY OF CATHOLICS TOWARDS THE CHURCH

There are laymen who seem to be persuaded that to care for the interests of the church appertains to the clergy alone. And this would not be erroneous if the clergy alone constituted the church. But the laity too, are part of the church. In fact, the faithful laity, by its amplitude and numerical influence, is a potent factor in the church, corresponding to what, in the civil order, is the multitude of the citizen.

The clergy in the church are its formal element, the governing or ruling part, but the, so to say, material element, the governed part, is the laity.

Every baptized person becomes a member of this great body of Christ's church. "We are all baptized into one body." (St. Paul 1 Cor. 12. 13.) If then, for the health and well-being of the body, be it physical or moral, all the members should co-operate, it is evident that all, clergy and laity, in proportion to the ability of each, should co-operate for the advantage and well-being of the church. The parts, in relation to the whole, are as means, and the good of the whole is likewise the good of the parts. Is not this the sufficient reason, why in the civil order we recognize the justice of the blood-tax to the enrollment of our volunteers in the hour of danger?

Moreover, inestimable are the advantages which the faithful layman received in the past, and is daily receiving from the Church. From her and through her he has received the sonship of God by adoption, from her and through her he has received the true knowledge of heavenly things, from her, the remission of sins, through her, secure guidance to eternal happiness. The church is all intent on procuring and promoting the advantages of her children. She prays for them, she suffers for them, she endures increasing fatigue, and even joyously sheds her martyr blood for them. Is it not, therefore, a debt of justice that her faithful children should, as far as possible, repay, love with love, care with care, deeds with deeds?

Every good citizen is ready to shed his blood on behalf of his country. And yet the country can do no more for those who die for it than perpetuate their memory in monuments of bronze and marble. Poor consolation this for him, who for love of country, violates the Law of God, and is irreparably lost.

But the church is not restricted, like civil society, to the present life. She passes through the gates of death, she spans the abyss beyond the tomb, and lives in the eternal ages and if she combats on earth in the guise of a militant, she reigns in Heaven in the glory of the triumph, where she crowns her valorous champions with an fading laurels. To labor for her, therefore, is to gain for one's self happiness and greatness.

But above and beyond every other reason for aiding the Church, is the love which we owe to Christ. The Church is a body, the head of this body is Christ. The Church is a kingdom, the King of this kingdom is Christ. The Church is that mystic bride affianced to "Him who with loud cries espoused her in His holy blood." (Dant. Par. xi.) As Eve, from the side of Adam while he slept in Eden, so the Church came out from the side of Christ whilst He slept on the cross. Christ loved her with infinite love and gave Himself for her. (Ephs. v. 25.)

Here we may ask, is a Christian obliged to love Christ? Is he bound to be zealous for His cause? Is he bound to fight under His standard? You will answer, most certainly. Now, I ask again, is it possible to love Christ and not love His spouse, the Church? Is it possible to love Christ and be indifferent to her for whom He shed His blood? Love for Christ is identified with love for His Church, so that it is as impossible to love the Church too much, as it is to love Christ too much. How, therefore, reconcile love for Christ with indifference to His Church and her interests?

The cause of Christ is identical with the cause of His church, "Saul," he said, "why persecutest thou me?" (Acts, 4.) This was the reproach of Christ to Saul, who persecuted the faithful—the church. And, in truth, what else is the church but Christ Himself, diffused, in a manner, and mystically personified in the aggregate of those who believe in and obey Him? Therefore to promote the interests of this aggregate, is to promote the interests of Christ, as to fail in the former is to fail in the latter. Every faithful Christian is a soldier of Christ, and the church is His Kingdom. How does this soldier show his fidelity to his King, if he is indifferent whether His Kingdom flourishes or falls to pieces?

This proves that the faithful layman, in every hypothesis, under all circumstances, even under governments friendly to the church, should exert himself to promote her well-being.

But in States, which have failed in allegiance to the church, and under governments which are unfriendly to her, the aforesaid duty of the Catholic layman is increased and intensified. For, from being a private, it becomes a public duty, from being an individual, it becomes a social obligation.

[The second and third divisions of the Bishop of Endocia's article, have been held over, and will appear in our next issue.]

SECTARIAN.

"Hello, John! What a jolly dish! Potatoes, Greens, Carrots, Beans! Who's it for?"

"Mr. Binks, Sir."

"Is Mr. Binks a vegetarian?"

"Oh no, Sir! I believe he's Church of England!"—
Punch.