

THE PORTUGUESE SEPARATION DECREE

A JOINT PROTEST BY THE BISHOPS

(Concluded from last week.)

And what does the State give in return for all these riches (the still valuable remnants of a past wealth in which the many thousands of the needy had their share)? What does it give to the clergy? What does it give to parochial clergy, who were only very lately deprived of a considerable part of their income by the enforcement of the Civil Registration Law? What does it give? Nothing! It promises, or rather allows, to a few of the ministers of religion certain life-pensions still to be defined, without a fixed minimum and at the good pleasure of certain Committees, on which, as a great concession, one ecclesiastic may be elected or appointed. These Committees have to take into consideration many various conditions, amidst which even the private and personal means of the priest are to be reckoned, as well as the rental value of the dwellings, the grant of which is otherwise declared to be a free gift. Pensions which, subject to many charges, and on pretext of being an experiment available for only one year, are no better than a few begged crumbs! And those very crumbs can be withdrawn on the slightest and almost unavoidable infractions of the enactments contained in this or any other future decree. . . . Thus the menacing sword remains always suspended over the head of the priest!

For our own part we here now declare most deliberately that we renounce such pensions, which mere decorum forbids us to accept.

In any case those pensions do not pass to the successors of the present ministry of the Church. Yet real property of the Church remains; it does not end, and its income ceases not.

Once more we ask by what right does the State take to itself all this property, mostly due to the generous piety of the faithful, to the legacies and donations of private individuals?

Such is not the procedure of other Republics. In America examples are not wanting of definite protection to the Catholic Church and sometimes even of an exclusive protection! The Central Government of the United States of North America does not indeed subsidise any religion, but it respects all legacies made in favor of the Catholic Communion. The members of the Catholic clergy are by reason of their ministry exempted from military service. The bishop's juridical position is acknowledged, and the judicial and coercive power of the Church in spiritual matters is protected by the Courts of Law. The strict observance of the Sunday's rest is well known. In each year one day is set aside for the whole nation officially to render thanks to God for all blessings received.

'Mockery.'

Derogatory to the clergy is every Law that humbles and discredits it, as this Decree aims at doing, by lowering the priest to the condition of a paid cleric at the order of the *Cultural Associations*: by altogether setting aside the ecclesiastical hierarchy; and by forcing upon the prelates the necessity of a *Placet*, which is in all cases injudicial, but quite absurd and absolutely unwarranted under a *régime* of pretended Separation and liberty of worship.

Derogatory to the clergy surely is a law that not only aims at corrupting the priest with uncertain pensions, offered on the most dishonoring conditions, but also flings in his face the supreme insult of inviting him to disobedience and immorality by assuring the payment of those pensions to suspended priests, and providing that maintenance (a unique instance!) shall be transmissible to the widows and to the sons, *legitimate* or *illegitimate*, of those priests who may wish to avail themselves of the permission to marry granted by the Civil Law.

The Portuguese clergy must have fallen low indeed in the appreciation of the legislator, who dared to draft this!

This Article 150 sufficiently shows what this law is, and reveals its purpose. There may, unfortunately, exist weaknesses, and even miseries! There may be priests who, by using their ministry, not as a priesthood, but as a paying profession, may repeat the words '*Quid vultis mihi dare*'! There may be the degenerate, and the deserter! But the national clergy in its vast majority will repel this affront, for it fully understands the high motives both moral and social of the ecclesiastical law of conscience. It well knows that celibacy is, if not the chief, one of the principal factors in the superiority of the Catholic clergy, compared with the ministers of other persuasions or so-called Christian sects.

A profound thinker of our days has very well said: '*L'anathème est inévitable. Tout prêtre marié tombera toujours audessous de son caractère. La Supériorité incontestable du Clergé Catholique tient à la loi du célibat*' (J. de Maistre).

More, very much more, could still be said of the unjust, oppressive, predatory, and insulting provisions in this Decree of the 20th of April. Enough, however, has been briefly pointed out that not only we prelates and the clergy and sincere Catholics who are faithful to their Creed, but that all men of a right mind and dispassionate judgment, and every soul capable of knowing the significance and of appreciating the value of the words *liberty, coherence, justice, respect for other people's rights and social interest* properly so-called, may acknowledge with us, that it is only our conscience, our divine mission, and sense of our office, impels us to raise this solemn protest against this Decree!

With the Holy See now lies the final and definite pronouncement. But it is not possible even for a moment, or as a mere hypothesis, to suppose that pronouncement can be any other than the Apostolic *Non possumus*.

Though the Church does not, and cannot, approve in theory or in principle of the doctrine which regards Separation as a better *régime* and more in accordance with progress, it may, for all that, under special circumstances, hypothetically accept Separation as tolerable and as a lesser evil. But for this it is essential that it shall leave the Church freedom to exercise her sacred mission and the possession and ownership of her own property.

If the formula 'a free Church in a free State' does not represent the ideal, it may be tolerable, and is at least always preferable to the other, 'a Slave-Church under a tyrant-State': but it is exactly this last formula that is embodied in the recent document of the provisions of which we have just given a brief summary.

There can be no doubt that the so-called Separation effected by this Decree is set forth in such legislative terms that all illusion is rendered impossible. It is downright hostility; it is imminent persecution. At any rate, no one can deny this document, which is already a matter of history, the merit of outspokenness. Its express purpose is to give the *coup de grâce* to Catholicism in Portugal. If the Church built on the immovable rock has received the promise of indefectibility in the world, such is not the case in respect to nations. Some there have been which have abandoned or lost the true and pure faith, and so have lost themselves. 'What has become,' asks Fénelon, 'of those famous Churches of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, under which innumerable others existed? What remains on the shores of Africa, where the assemblies of bishops were as numerous as General Councils, and where the aid of God awaited its commentaries from the lips of Augustine? There I see no more than the smoke, telling witness of the fire from heaven which consumed the land' (Sermon pour L'Epiphanie).

Is the same to happen in Portugal? Will the Portuguese people abandon their glorious past and turn their backs on the Church, in whose maternal bosom this admirable nation grew and spread and became so prosperous and noble? Will they drive God out from their conscience and from their homes, as He has already been driven from their law-courts and schools? Will they live without God in days of happiness and even in