



LETTERS TO HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS X.

BY A MODERNIST.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.

THE author of these letters to his Holiness Pope Pius X is not known to me personally, but I have heard enough about him to form a vivid picture of his character and attitude. My source of information is not limited to Catholics; in fact, my acquaintance with him is due to a widely known Protestant theologian, who lives in one of our Eastern metropolitan cities.

Judging from what I know, the author is a devout Christian and also a good Catholic in the broad sense of the word. He has been an active priest for many years, and is devoted to his pastoral work. But his piety has suffered severe shocks and he is fretting under the conflict between the ideal he cherishes and the realization with which, to his deep regret, he finds so much fault. The result is a state of mind which can be imagined from these letters to the highest ecclesiastical authority. They are written in the hope that His Holiness will hear the voice crying in the wilderness. If we are not mistaken in the signs of the time, this voice is not isolated. It finds a strong resonance in the minds of many pious Catholics, who realize that it would not be wise to speak out boldly because

of the subtle methods of the organized hierarchy, which have hitherto proved very efficient in meeting any attempt at reform. It is easy enough to force the discontented out of the church, but the church would scarcely be benefited thereby.

These letters are not intended to create a sensation, but to prepare for a future which, in moments of enthusiasm, seems near at hand. They have a twofold purpose. On the one hand our author wants to make the Curia feel its enormous responsibility, and on the other hand to educate both priest and layman for the work of reconstruction.

The author himself expresses the purpose which he has in mind in his recent correspondence as follows:

“Nothing can be truer than your declaration that one who would work for reform needs to examine his conscience as to his motives. I can say in very solemn truth that before setting to work on the ‘Letters’ I examined mine. Two years before I put pen to the final writing I made a beginning on them—and tore up what I had written because not yet satisfied that I ought to undertake so grave a responsibility. All the thought that I could bring to the decision, as well as all the counsel I could get, preceded the determination to go ahead with the work. So far as I can read the processes of mind and conscience that issued in the decision to write the book, these two considerations were foremost. First, to do a work of education among the priests of the church. I know that body of men well—their nobility, their vague aspirations, their concealed sufferings—and I am convinced to a degree of absolute certainty that the first step toward progress, and a primary need of truth, is to educate them—to undo, in part, anyhow, the results of a training in self-repression, which begins often when they are children of fourteen and fifteen—and leaves them for life with crippled personalities and perverted minds. Secondly, I desired to show—and make the effort, in the second part of the book—that dark and painful as the collapse of a cherished orthodoxy is—still, when criticism has done its worst, it leaves us a splendid Christ to revere, and an immortal spirit to purify and love. I hope that the book is both educational and constructive. I trust it attacks nothing that Truth itself and Progress are not attacking—and that it has something to offer for all that it takes away. At all events, every word of it is written in sincerity, and many words of it were written in feelings which, if possible, are deeper still.”

In further comment I may add a word of my own.

I know the attraction which the Catholic church has, and at the

same time I know the shortcomings of Protestantism. Many Protestants look upon art as pagan, if not as superstitious, while Catholicism has inherited, or rather gradually acquired, the beauty of old paganism. Pope Gregory X, when rebuilding St. Peter's, crowned the cross of the aisles with the Pantheon in conscious recognition of his intention to have Christians imbued with the spirit of classical antiquity. This Pope, who was incapable of understanding the zeal of Luther and who is often denounced by Protestants as an infidel and a pagan, was, in his way, a reformer of the church. His love of art, quite in contradiction to the tendencies of early Christianity, has become an inheritance of the Roman church, while Protestants, in contrast to Catholics, have retained to a great extent a hostile attitude to art. This is especially true of the Puritans.

Both Confessions, Romanism and Protestantism, have pursued their ideals in their own ways. By concentrating their fervor on truth irrespective of consequences, Protestant savants have worked out philosophy, science, and Biblical criticism, and have made science the basis of a new and higher civilization. The inheritance of Catholics has been limited to art and mystical devotion, and whatever may be wrong in it, Protestantism is now ready to broaden and to accept of art what is good and noble. Superstitions, at least so far as belief in legend and liberalism is concerned, have in Protestant countries entirely lost their hold on the human mind and there is no danger of a relapse. It is time that the two hostile brothers should share their inheritance, and while Protestants would welcome art, Catholics might give the right of free inquiry and confidence in admitting to scientific truth a recognized place in their theology.

Should the Roman Catholic church not conform to the demands of the time, should the Curia continue to prevent a reformation so much needed, it is quite probable that many pious souls will break away from Rome and originate a genuine Catholic church. There are not a few who cling devoutly to the traditional form of worship, but who are dissatisfied with the narrowness of the old ecclesiastical institutions.

The present Catholic church is not Catholic but is Italian, and even Roman. Its first principle is that only an Italian can become Pope, and among the Cardinals few non-Italians are tolerated in order to keep the balance of power in Italy. Will the time ever come when the Roman Catholic church will drop the epithet "Roman" and will be simply a Catholic church in which Romans, Americans, English and Germans are on a parity?

In case Rome should be impervious to the kindly advice of

her sons, would not the natural outcome be a Catholic church independent of Rome?

The situation reminds us of Christ's lamentation over Jerusalem in Luke xix. 41-42: "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, 'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'" Let the men who have the ear of Pius X read the handwriting on the wall.

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I

The Need for These Letters

YOUR HOLINESS:

It has become unfortunately very rare, it is considered indeed to be not only improper but irreligious, for a simple Christian to offer counsel or remonstrance to his ecclesiastical superior. However tyrannical and unchristian the acts of Pope or prelate may be, however cruel the suffering he may inflict, the common faithful must raise no voice of protest. When recently the most illustrious laymen of France, among whom were such men as Brunetière, Thureau-Dangin, de Vogüé and d'Haussonville, earnestly recommended that your Holiness give a loyal trial to the Briand separation-law, and pointed out how uncalled for and disastrous would be the course which it pleased you to adopt, they were roundly scored for the impertinent presumption of giving advice to a Pope. When also the loyal Catholics of Italy, wearied unto very sickness with the Papacy's puerile attitude toward the Italian government, founded their League of National Democracy for the promoting both of patriotism to their country and devotion to their church, they were condemned and silenced, and their noble project put under ban of anathema. Even should it be that a bishop himself speak out in conscientious opposition, though in the most respectful terms, to this or that Papal policy, he is considered by the regnant autocracy at Rome as having transgressed the limits of the servitude which the Curia has imposed upon mankind. Witness the late bishop of La Rochelle, stricken in his very death-hour by Roman censure, because of his solicitude to mitigate the severity of your Holiness's condemnation of the Separation law. Witness certain of our own American bishops who informed Leo XIII ten years ago that his fancied Americanism did not exist here, and thereby came under the high displeasure of the Roman camarilla. Witness the three German bishops who only yesterday, as it were, supported the

project of erecting a monument to the pure-minded Christian scholar, Hermann Schell, and received from your Holiness summary disapproval and crushing rebuke. Schell's stainless name is hated at the Vatican; therefore no Catholic must venerate it. When the Pope speaks let every tongue be still; when the Pope acts let every head be bowed. If we feel righteous indignation at Roman folly, we must not utter it. Should even our very conscience revolt, we must repress it. Blind, stupid, slavish submission—this alone is left us.

So strongly is Roman coercion riveted upon prelates, priests and people, that the old Catholic independence is lost, the old episcopal dignity sunk to serfdom. Men of candor and strong personality, men who bend the knee to God alone and follow not the tricks of fawning—can such men obtain bishoprics to-day? No, except by accident, and a rare accident. Weakness, the inevitable consequence of subservience, is the universal result. Weak men are appointed bishops; poor, docile, unintellectual instruments who see no disgrace in being liveried lackeys of Italian congregations, deem it not dishonorable to profess in their official documents that they owe their successorship to the apostles “to the mercy of the Apostolic See”—*Sanctæ sedis misericordia*—and conceive it to be the highest purpose of episcopal statesmanship to make this year's Peter's Pence more opulent than the last.

It was not always so. Catholicism and Romanism were not always one; and if to-day we must hold our peace whether Rome does well or ill, time was when the spirit of manhood could coexist with Holy Orders, and not even the might of the Sovereign Pontificate dared to assail it with impunity. To one of your predecessors an Irish monk, Columbanus, wrote the splendid defiance, *Si tollis libertatem, tollis et dignitatem*; “if you destroy liberty, you destroy honor”. To Pope Eugenius, St. Bernard, another monk, dared to send a sturdy warning against the corruption surrounding the Roman See. Disgusted with the profane pomp displayed by the successors of a Galilean fisherman, the austere Cistercian reminded the head of Western Christendom: “*In his successisti, non Petro sed Constantino*”: “in this you make yourself the successor not of Peter, but of Constantine”. (*De Consid.* Bk. 1V-c. 3).

The government of the Church, says Gregory 1, in words which we of this time can scarcely believe to be the words of a Pope, ought never to crush the right of honorable protest. “*Necesse est ut cura regiminis tanta moderaminis arte temperetur, quatenus subditorum mens, cum quaedam recte sentire potuerit, sic in vocis*

libertatem prodeat, ut tamen libertas in superbiam non erumpat." (*De Cura Past.* II-8.) So Hilary of Poitiers sturdily condemned Pope Liberius; so Catherine of Sienna poured an invective of fire upon the sordid souls of the Curialists of her time; so Strossmayer told the Vatican Council that the Italianizing of the world must cease if Catholicity is to prosper; so, to conclude with the first and greatest of such instances, Paul withstood Peter for betraying the spirit and the cause of Christ.

Yes, the sorrowful history of Roman tyranny has been now and then illuminated by spokesmen of freedom. Simple priests and humble monks and weak women have dared to speak their minds to the wearers of the triple crown; and at intervals the voice of candor has flung its challenge into halls that were better acquainted with the accents of subservience, falsehood and intrigue. In the spirit of these apostles of truth-telling, the writer of these letters ventures, your Holiness, to commit the impropriety of addressing you. Who I am is of the smallest consequence. Suffice it to say that I am an American, penetrated to the heart with the love and the traditions of my country; that as an American I cannot tolerate bondage, and must detest whatever man or institution endeavors to check the ever-growing, ever-rising personality of man in its aspirations for larger freedom and more perfect truth; that furthermore, I have been drilled and disciplined in the Roman system from my youth; that for years I could see no distinction between Romanism and Catholicism; but that now after long study and reflection, in the course of which I have tried to follow the highest ideals of Truth which God has permitted me to see, I have come to the conclusion that a Papal power capable in this twentieth century of such infamies as the Syllabus of Pius IX and your own campaign against modernism, is irreconcilable with civilization and is destructive of the religion of Jesus Christ.

II

The Purpose of These Letters

YOUR HOLINESS:

In writing these letters I am deluded by no false hope, no vain expectation. Had I the genius of Pascal, I should no more hope to influence the traditional spirit of the Roman See than that illustrious man in his day hoped to destroy Jesuitism. It goes without saying, that I wish some such words as these of mine might receive impartial consideration in the court over which you preside. Nothing is dearer to my heart than that the best traditions of Catholicity

—its splendid sanctity, its divine fecundity of heroism, its priceless mysticism, should gain access to the souls of modern men, and sanctify and save them. Yes, Holy Father, I devoutly wish, that you might bear with me even when, overcome by feeling, I speak perhaps too harshly of the history of your exalted office. Would that laying every prejudice aside you might say: "Why is the modern world so hostile to Catholicism? Why have the most enlightened nations of history rejected it and set themselves against it? What is the reason? Has it any justification? Can I do anything to correct mistakes and remove antipathies which are ruinous to the cause of Christ? I will listen to what sincere men would say to me. Their speech may be at times intemperate, but it is easy to overlook that if their intention be upright and their remonstrance true. These modernist reformers, so hateful to the Curia, are very often of high intelligence and unquestioned probity, and of a truth their number is astonishingly increasing. They are neither fools nor criminals; they have a message; they wish to serve religion. Let me see—me who am beholden to Jesus Christ, how I discharge my shepherdship if there be not in these loud cries some appeal to my conscience, some summons to a duty not yet fulfilled. May I not have to incur in my judgment-hour the reproach uttered by holy Bernard to one who wore my tiara: *Quousque murmur universæ terræ, aut dissimulas aut non avertis!* 'How long have you been deaf to the outcry of the whole world!'"

Alas! there is no ground to hope that either Pope or bishop will thus heed the reformer's cry. Every earnest spirit that in our time has attacked consecrated iniquity or ecclesiastical folly has been bludgeoned. Look at the men who have spoken for pure religion and truth against Roman oppression: Graty, Montefeltro, Gioberti, Montalembert, Lamennais, Döllinger, Schell, Murri, Tyrrell—why extend the list?—noble names, high-minded men of God, yet every one of them saw his dream dissolve, and dièd, or will die, forlorn, defeated, hopeless.

No, I have no expectation of succeeding where these great souls have failed. The walls of Jericho collapse no longer at the trumpet call of consecrated men. Save that the Papacy has been deprived of the power to shed blood, its grip upon its remaining adherents was hardly ever more suffocating than in this present day. Its autocracy has still a long history before it, and hundreds yet unborn are destined to be added to the lengthy list of its victims. But I do hope in these letters to your Holiness, to help the formation, especially among American Catholics, of a public opinion, which will

send across the Atlantic some ringing word, some typically American defiance, against the non-representative cabal whose only courtesy to us has been the taking of our lavish largesses of money. I do hope to open the eyes of some of our fair-minded priests to the appalling falsifications of their poor, pitiable seminary education, and to the mental and spiritual bondage in which, to the grievous injury of character and manhood, they are enslaved. I do hope to express in the name of America, which has thus far been silent, a protest against your frenzied crusade upon the rights of human intelligence. I do hope to tell you frankly why the Church is losing ground every day among civilized and enlightened peoples, and to put it before your conscience whether you, who alone can do it, will relieve the momentous situation, will turn your back upon traditions whose history reeks with blood and is foul with corruption, and take as your simple standard: Not the Curia, but Christ!

III

The Purpose of These Letters (continued)

YOUR HOLINESS:

It is my purpose to tell you why the modern world rejects and distrusts Roman Catholicism. Until we know the answer to that question Catholics are in a fool's paradise, their apologetics are inept, their dreams of conversions only hallucinations, their wider religious activities almost ridiculous. I am aware that in the marvelous mentality of the strict Roman theologian, the question is summarily answered. The most highly enlightened nations of the world have cast off Roman Catholicism because they are under the power of Satan, and of his chief instruments, the Free-Masons. *Voilà!* the problem is solved. This solution I have no intention of refuting. It would degrade the intellect of a grown man to discuss it. Merely let me say, Your Holiness, that the educated minds of Germany, France, England, and the United States, have not set the Father of Falsehood upon the altar of the God of Truth; and that whenever the Catholic religion shall appear before them as a purely spiritual society, existing for no other purpose whatsoever than to reproduce the Christ-life upon earth, they will turn to her with overflowing hearts, will merge all their differences in a world-wide spiritual brotherhood, and will recognize with new ardor the supreme leadership of Jesus Christ.

But now, and for imperative reasons, as I soon shall point out, they do not regard Roman Catholicism as a purely religious society.

They consider it, on its official, on its Roman side, a mischievous political institution that has done its best to wreck civilization in the past, and is still a deadly menace to the civilization of to-day and of the future. They can see nothing resembling Christ in the Roman Curia, and in the Papacy as it functions now. They dread it; they abhor it. Until it radically changes, until it candidly gives the lie to its past history, they will have no dealings and no patience with it. And the solemn responsibility that rests upon you, and upon those who will come after you, is whether you will save the souls of the modern world, or prefer to save the worthless forms of a dead and rotting theocracy.

IV

What Is Religion?

YOUR HOLINESS:

Before coming to the reasons on which the modern world bases its rejection of Roman Catholicism, let us go back to certain primary principles of religious life and thought. Bear with me while I touch upon a definition or two which a penny catechism furnishes indeed, but in hardly adequate terms. What, after all, is the Christian religion? What is the Church of Christ? Religion is the name for our God-obeying, Godward-growing life. Religion means union with Deity, character-culture in the pursuit of infinite Truth, Justice and Love. The Christian religion signifies the type and method of these spiritual relationships as shown forth and taught by Christ. Christianity is God-worship in the Christ-manner; soul-cultivation after the Christ-model. In a word, the aim of Christianity is to reproduce and perpetuate the Christ-life. A Christian Church is a brotherhood of Christian disciples; and that Church will be the best and truest church which teaches in the most pure and perfect way the Christ-life, the Christ-character. It seems too obvious to need remarking, but there is, as we shall see, abundant reason to remark, that Christianity, or the Christ-ideal, can never stand in opposition to morality, to the ideas of goodness, charity, mercy and truth which our Creator has placed within our spirit. Christianity is rather to purify and exalt these ideals. If they are attacked, it cannot be Christ that attacks them; and if it be that someone does attack them in Christ's name, we may straightway know that such a one is consciously or unconsciously misrepresenting the Lord in whom all our ideals shine forth divinely, and is an apostate from the perfect standard which he has left us.

Furthermore, religion is not the sole activity of man. In all

other departments of the higher life, too, we must grow; we must be forever dropping the less to reach forth for the greater. Growth in Truth and in Liberty is the law of the beneficent Providence which has made us men. And just as only a falsification and travesty of Christianity can contradict morality, so only a falsification and travesty of Christianity can contradict these other species of human progress. A true Christian Church therefore must perpetuate the Christ-ideal while never obstructing the higher evolution of mankind, which is as much a part of God's Providence as Christianity itself. Accordingly, the Church must be one, inasmuch as the ideal life which it is its *raison d'être* to inculcate, is one; it must be holy, because its purpose is the sacredest possible to man; and it must be Catholic; that is to say, it must further all forms of human development by sanctifying the root and origin of all. If any Church—let us say it once more—does not fulfill this mission, if it officially degrades morality, and obstructs the pathway of the higher human evolution, to that extent it is faithless to the Christ-type, it is renegade to the Christ-teacher, it is a falsehood and an imposition; and instead of forming men to the Gospel standard, it will turn many of them away in disgust from any religion whatsoever. Can anything be plainer?

I have been using the terms Christ-spirit, Christ-life, Christ-ideal. I trust there is no need for detailed definitions here. Surely we know who and what was Jesus. He is the crown and glory of human character. Love of truth, that made Him defy a corrupt hierarchy; consecration to duty, that led Him to the cross; gentleness, that crowns him with winning loveliness beyond any other of the sons of men; mercy, that has let us see that no penitent or prodigal need despair; in these, how divinely great and glorious He is! How He rises above His nation by conceiving the Kingdom as not for the Jews alone, but for the world! How He scorns the caste-pride of the Pharisees by sitting down to eat with sinners! How He shatters the antipathies of narrow orthodoxy by putting forth as models the heretic leper who returned to give thanks, and the heretic philanthropist on the road to Jericho, who understood God better than the Levite or priest! It were sacrilege to think of Him as brutal; as striking with cruel fist any face upturned to God; as grinding any of the little ones He loved beneath the iron heel of tyranny. O Sovereign Pontiff, the standard of men and institutions is not Canon Law, but He, the Master; not ancient tradition, but the everlasting God as shining out upon us in the perfect Christ.

V

The Attitude of the Modern World Toward Official Catholicism
YOUR HOLINESS:

In due time I shall bring the subject-matter of the preceding letter to bear upon Papal history. Just now let me recall to you in detail some of the chief reasons for the modern world's refusal to embrace Roman Catholicism. You do not know them, I dare say; few in the Church over which you hold sovereign dominion appreciate them in any intelligent degree. What with all this fury over modernism, what with the puerile orthodox shuddering at Satan and Free-Masonry as the cause of the Church's troubles, the real reasons are persistently and foolishly ignored. Now then, in a candid and downright fashion, let us see what they are.

The enlightened nations of to-day, Holy Father, are decisively in opposition to Roman Catholicism, largely, yes, primarily, because as has been said, they look upon it as the irreconcilable enemy of progress and civilization. The sanctity which appears so often and so brilliantly in the Church, they acknowledge and revere. The intelligent American non-Catholic speaks as affectionately as would one of the Catholic household, of the Sisters who sacrifice their lives for the orphans, the aged, and the sick. He bows his head in veneration at heroic names like that of Damien. His Catholic neighbors he esteems according to their worth. Catholic charities he is liberal in helping to support. But over and beyond the diviner side of Catholicism he sees the sinister forms, he reads the foul history of Papacy and Curia. These he abhors. With these as they have been and still are, he cannot, while the world lasts, be reconciled. He regards the political Papacy and the autocracy of the Curia as a menace to human liberty, as destructive of enlightenment and subversive of pure religion. It is as impossible to convert Germany, England and America to the Papacy, as to Mohammedanism. The triumph of Islam itself in their judgment would be no more disastrous to mankind than the re-establishment of the sovereign of medieval Rome.

I am speaking plainly, but with literal truthfulness. The Papacy and the Curia were the chief reasons for the revolt of the sixteenth century; the Papacy and the Curia are the chief reasons why that revolt is not abated in the twentieth. Now, then, why is there such an attitude toward Papal Rome? Is it not wholly unjust? Do not our pious histories inform us that the Papacy has been the savior of civilization? that the sovereign See of Catholic Christendom is a "Holy" See? that there the world's zeal and learning are

gloriously concentrated? Is it not pure bigotry, this hostility to the Roman Pontificate?

No, it is not pure bigotry. Neither is it in modernism, nor in the classic sources, Satan and Masonry, that we must find the cause of the ineradicable aversion of the modern world for the See of Rome. That cause lies in the notorious history of that See itself. It has been judged by its fruits, and by its fruits forever and irrevocably condemned. Let us see.

Nations, like individuals, cherish as most precious the possessions that have cost them most. To-day, at the basis of every free state are certain principles of liberty which have been gained only after centuries of heroic struggle and a dreadful expenditure of heroic blood. These principles of liberty are dearer to every free-man than his life. Sooner will a free country consent to give up the last of its sons to the sword and the last of its homes to the torch, than surrender the emancipating ideas which the slow Providence that overrules history has bestowed upon us. Backward the march of man can never go. Faithless to the heritage of freedom mankind can never be unless mankind goes mad. Barbarism shall never overreach civilization; Death shall never usurp the seat of Life.

The greatest of these principles of liberty is freedom of conscience. The relations of each man's soul with his Creator are a matter solely for each man's conscience, subject to nothing else than the fundamental morality and the social peace which must govern all human activities. Freedom of conscience is the highest of all freedom; it is the life-principle of every people that deserves to be called civilized. Precious as it is, fundamental as it is, it has been most painfully won. Through blood, and flames, and exile, and all terror, the right to worship Deity as conscience dictates has fought its way. To-day we blush for shame that it should ever have been violated. To-day we look back as to the highest type of heroism upon the exile banned by tyranny, because he would not lie; to the martyr dying at the stake, because he would not bend the knee to what he believed to be falsehood and superstition.

Sovereign Pontiff, do you ask why the Papacy is despised and rejected? It is, first of all, because this priceless right of conscience is denied as impious falsehood by your Roman See; it is because the Papacy's history with regard to it is perhaps the foulest infamy recorded in the annals of the world.

(To be continued.)