

Letter to Cardinal Fornari On the Errors of Our Time

Juan Donoso Cortés

Most Eminent Sir:

Before submitting to the profound penetration of Your Eminence the brief indications which you took the occasion to ask me for in your letter of last May, it seems fitting for me to indicate here the limitations I have placed on myself in the preparation of these remarks.

Among contemporary errors there is none that does not resolve into a heresy, and among contemporary heresies there is none that does not resolve into another already condemned anciently by the Church. In condemning past errors, the Church has condemned those of the present and the future. Identical among themselves when considered from the point of view of their nature and origin, the errors offer, nevertheless, the spectacle of a portentous variety when they are considered from the point of view of their applications. My intention today is to consider them more from the aspect of their applications than their nature and origin; more for what they have of a political and social nature than of a purely religious one; more for what they have in their variety than in their identity; more for what they have of mutability than of absoluteness.

Two powerful considerations, of which one is taken from my personal circumstances and the other from the particular character of the era in which we live, have inclined me to proceed in this way. In regard to myself, I believe that my status as a layman and public official places the obligation upon me to deny that I have the proper competence to resolve fearsome questions pertaining to points of our faith and matters of dogma. In regard to the era in which we live, one needs only to look at it to recognize that what has made it sadly famous among all the centuries is not, precisely, the arrogance of proclaiming its heresies and errors theoretically, but rather instead the satanic audacity that puts into practice in present society the heresies and errors into which past centuries fell.

There was a time in which human reason, contenting itself with insane speculations, displayed satisfaction with itself when it succeeded in propounding a negation against an affirmation in intellectual spheres, an error against a truth in metaphysical ideas, a heresy against a dogma in religious spheres. Today this same reason is not content unless it descends to the political and social spheres, to disturb everything, causing to arise, as if by incantation, a conflict from every error, a revolution from every heresy, and a gigantic catastrophe from every one of its prideful negations.

The tree of error seems to have arrived today at its full providential maturity; planted by the first generation of bold heresiarchs, watered afterwards by more and more generations, it blossomed with leaves in the time of our grandfathers, with flowers in the times of our fathers, and today is, before us and within the reach of our hands, loaded with fruit. Its fruits should be condemned with a special condemnation, as were the flowers that gave it fragrance in ancient times, the leaves that covered it, the trunk which sustained it, and the men who planted it.

With that, I do not mean to say that what has been condemned before needs to be condemned anew;¹ I wish to say only that a special condemnation, analogous to the special transformation through which ancient errors have been going through, before our eyes, in the present time, seems to me altogether necessary; and that in any case, this point of view of the question is the only one where I recognize in myself a certain kind of competence.

¹ The Spanish text has a *no* in this clause, which appears to be pleonastic.

Dispensing, thus, with questions that are purely theological, I have put my attention into those others which, while being theological in their origin and essence, have come to convert themselves, nevertheless, by slow and successive transformations, into political and social ones. And even among these, I see the necessity, because of my responsibilities and lack of time, to dispense with those which seem to me of less grave importance, although I do think it my duty to touch on certain points which I have not been consulted on.

For the same reasons of being occupied and short of time, I see it impossible for me to go back and reread the books of the modern-day heresiarchs so as to point out which propositions in them should be refuted or condemned. Considering this point carefully, however, I have come to be convinced that this was more necessary in past times than in present ones, which have between them a noteworthy difference: in times past, errors were in books in such a way that, if they were not sought in books, they could not be found at all; whereas, in the times we live in, error is found inside and outside of them, because it is in them and everywhere else besides: in books, institutions, laws, periodicals, speeches, conversations, classrooms, clubs, at home, in public, in what is said, and what is not said. Pressed for time, I asked myself which is nearest to me, and the response was: the atmosphere.

Contemporary errors are infinite in number, but all of them, if one looks into it carefully, have their origin, and are going to die, in two supreme negations: one relative to God, the other relative to man. Society denies of God that He takes care of His creatures and of man that he is conceived in sin. The pride of men of these times has said two things to man, and he has believed both of them: that God has no place and is not needed, and that man is strong and beautiful; we therefore see him infatuated with his power and in love with his own beauty.

Given the negation of sin, the following, among many other things, are denied: that the temporal life is a life of expiation and that the world in which this life is passed must² be a vale of tears; that the light of reason is weak and vacillating; that the will of man is weak; that pleasure has been given to us in the condition of a temptation, to liberate us from its attraction; that pain, accepted for a supernatural reason, with a voluntary acceptance, is good; that time has been given to us for our sanctification; that man needs to be sanctified.

Given these negations, the following, among many other things, are affirmed: that the temporal life has been given for us to elevate ourselves by our own efforts, by means of a limitless progress, to the highest perfections; that the place in which this life is passed can and should be radically transformed by man; that, since the reason of man is sound, there is not any truth to which it cannot attain; and that what his reason does not reach is not true; that there is no other evil than that which reason understands to be such, nor any other sin than that which reason says is sin; that is, there is no other evil and no other sin than philosophical evil and sin; that, since the will of man is right on its own, it does not need to be rectified; that we should flee pain and seek pleasure; that time has been given to us for the enjoyment of our time, and that man is good and sound in himself.

These negations and these affirmations with respect to man lead to other, analogous negations and affirmations with respect to God. The supposition that man has not fallen leads one to deny, and some do deny, that man has been restored. The supposition that man has not been restored leads one to deny, and some do deny, the mysteries of the Redemption and of the Incarnation, the dogma of the exterior personhood of the Word and the Word Himself. The supposition of the natural integrity of the human will, on one hand, and not recognizing, on the other, the existence of any other evil or sin than philosophical evil and sin, leads one to deny, and some do deny, the

² *debe*, "should, must."

sanctifying action of God upon man, and with it the dogma of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. From all these negations results the negation of the supreme doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity, the cornerstone of our Faith and foundation of all Catholic dogmas.

From here is born and here has its origin a vast system of naturalism, which is the radical, universal, and absolute contradiction of all our beliefs. We Catholics believe and profess that man is a sinner perpetually in need of help and that God perpetually grants this help by means of supernatural assistance, a marvelous work of His infinite love and of His infinite mercy. For us, the supernatural is the atmosphere of the natural; that is, that which, without making itself felt, simultaneously surrounds and sustains a man.

Between God and man there was a fathomless abyss; the Son of God became man; and with both natures joined in Him, the abyss was filled. Between the Divine Word, both God and man at the same time, and sinful man, there was yet an immense distance; to shorten this immense distance, God put between His Son and His creature the Mother of His Son, the Most Blessed Virgin, the woman without sin. Between the woman without sin and sinful man, the distance was still great, and God, in His infinite mercy, put between the Most Blessed Virgin and sinful man saints who were sinners.

Who would not admire such a grand, supreme, marvelous, and perfect design! The greatest sinner needs no more than to extend his sinful hand to find someone to help him climb up, rung by rung, to the heights of heaven, from the abyss of his sin.

And all this is nothing other than the visible and exterior form, and as such, imperfect to a point, of the marvelous effects of that supernatural help with which God comes to man's aid, so that he may tread the harsh road of life with a firm foot. To form an idea of this marvelous supernaturalism it is necessary to penetrate with the eyes of faith into higher and more hidden regions; it is necessary to put one's eyes upon the Church, moved perpetually by the most secret action of the Holy Spirit; it is necessary to penetrate into the most secret sanctuary of souls and see there how the grace of God solicits and seeks them, and how the soul of man closes or opens its ear to that divine call, and in what manner a quiet conversation strikes up and develops continually between a creature and his Creator; it is necessary to see, on the other hand, what the spirit of darkness does there, says there, and seeks there; and how the soul of man comes and goes, and is troubled and bothered between two eternities, to plunge itself, in the end, depending on which spirit it follows, into the regions of light or the regions of darkness.

It is necessary to look and see our guardian angel at our side, and how he keeps watch and with a subtle breath keeps us from being troubled by importune thoughts, and how he puts his hands beneath our feet so that we do not stumble. It is necessary to put our eyes on History and see the astounding way in which God arranges human events, for His own glory and for the good of His elect: He is the master of all that happens, yet man does not cease to be so of his own actions. It is necessary to see how He raises up conquerors and conquests at the right moment, captains and wars, and how He restores and brings peace again in an instant, bringing down the warriors, and subduing the pride of the conquerors; how He permits tyrants to rise up against a sinful people, and how He allows rebellious peoples to be, sometimes, the scourge of tyrants; how He unites tribes and separates castes, or disperses the nations; how He gives and takes away at His pleasure the empires of the earth; how He brings them down to the earth and how He raises them up to the skies. It is necessary to see, finally, how men go lost and blind through this labyrinth of History, yet building the generations of men without knowing what its structure is, where its entrance is, or its exit.

All this vast and splendid system of supernaturalism, the skeleton key and universal explana-

tion of human things, is denied implicitly or explicitly by those who affirm the immaculate conception of man, and those who affirm this today are not only certain philosophers, they are the governors of peoples, the influential classes of society, and even society itself, poisoned with the venom of this disturbing heresy.

Here is the explanation of all that we see and all that we touch upon, to which state we have come to rest by this string of arguments. If the light of our reason has not been obscured, it is light enough, without the help of faith, to discover truth. If faith is not necessary, reason is sovereign and independent. The advances of truth depend on the advances of reason; the advances of reason depend on its exercise; its exercise consists in discussion; therefore, discussion is the true fundamental law of modern societies and the only crucible where truths and errors, after being confused, are separated out. In this principle have their origin the liberty of the press, the inviolability of the tribunals,³ and the regal sovereignty of deliberative assemblies. If the will of man is not weak, the attractiveness of the good suffices for him in order to follow the good without the supernatural help of grace; if man does not need this help, neither does he need the sacraments that give it to him, nor the prayers that obtain it; if prayer is not necessary, it is idle; if it is idle, then the contemplative life is likewise idle and useless; if the contemplative life is idle and useless, then most religious communities are so as well. This serves to explain why, in whatever part these ideas have penetrated, those communities have been extinguished. If man does not need the sacraments, he does not need anyone to administer them to him, either; and if he does not need God, neither does he need mediators. Hence the contempt or proscription of the priesthood, in whatever place these ideas have taken root. The contempt of the priesthood everywhere resolves into contempt of the Church, and the contempt of the Church is everywhere equal to the contempt of God.

With the action of God upon men denied and the unfathomable abyss opened once again (to the extent that this could be done) between God and His creation, society thereupon instinctively separates itself from the Church by the same distance; thus, wherever God has been relegated to heaven, the Church has been relegated to the sanctuary; and conversely, wherever man lives subject to the dominion of God, he is subject also, naturally and instinctively, to the dominion of His Church. All centuries attest to this truth, to which the present century gives the same testimony as past ones.

With everything supernatural thus discarded and the religion converted into a vague Deism, man who has no need of the Church, hidden in its sanctuary, nor of God, bound to His heaven like Enceladus to his rock, turns his eyes to the earth and consecrates himself exclusively to the cult of material interests. This is the epoch of utilitarian systems, of grand expansions of commerce, of feverish industry, of the insolences of the rich and the impatience of the poor. This state of material wealth and religious poverty is always followed by one of those gigantic catastrophes that tradition and History perpetually engrave into the memory of men. To conjure them, the council of the prudent and the capable is summoned; the hurricane which comes roaring puts the council into sudden dispersion and carries them away along with its conjurers.

This is because it is completely impossible to impede the invasion of revolutions and the arrival of tyrants, whose arrival and whose invasion are one and the same thing; for both resolve into the domination of force, when the Church is relegated to the sanctuary and God to heaven. The attempt to fill the great void that is left in society with instead a certain manner of artificial distribution and equilibrium of public powers is an insane presumption and vain attempt, like that which, in the absence of vital powers would seek to reproduce the phenomena of life by

³ *tribunos*.

force of industry, and by purely mechanical means. Just as neither the Church nor God is a single form, there is no single form that can occupy the great void that they leave when they are withdrawn from human societies. Conversely, there is no way of governance at all that is dangerous in its very essence when God and His Church move freely, if, that is, morals and the times are favorable to it.

There is no accusation more curious or strange than that which consists in affirming, on one hand, along with certain schools, that Catholicism is favorable to government by the masses, and, on the other hand, with other sectarians, that it impedes the advent of liberty, that it favors the expansion of grand tyrannies. Where is there a greater absurdity than to make the first charge against Catholicism, always occupied in condemning rebellions and in sanctifying obedience as an obligation common to all men? Where is there a greater absurdity than to make the second charge against the only religion on earth that has taught peoples that no man has rights over another man, because all authority comes from God; that no one who is not small in his own eyes will be great; that powers are instituted for the sake of good; that to order is to serve and that the principate is a ministry, and, therefore, a sacrifice? These principles, revealed by God and maintained in all their integrity by His most holy Church, constitute the Public Law of all Christian nations. This Public Law is the perpetual affirmation of true liberty, because it is the perpetual negation, the perpetual condemnation, on the one hand, of the right of peoples give up obedience by rebellion, and, on the other hand, of princes to convert their power into tyranny. Liberty consists precisely in the negation of these rights, and in such a way in this negation that with it, liberty is inevitable, and without it, impossible. The affirmation of liberty and the negation of these rights are, if examined carefully, one single thing, expressed in different terms and different ways. Whence it follows not only that Catholicism is no friend to tyrannies, nor to revolutions, but rather that only Catholicism has denied them; not only that it is not an enemy of liberty, but rather that only Catholicism has discovered in the very same negation the proper nature of true liberty.

Nor is it less absurd to suppose, as some do, that the holy religion which we profess and the Church which contains it and preaches it either detain or look with dismay on the free expansion of public wealth, good solutions to economic questions, and the increase of material interests, because, while it is certain that the religion does not propose to make peoples powerful, but blessed, nor to make men rich, but holy, it is no less than one of its noble and great teachings which consists in having revealed to man his providential charge to transform all of Nature and to put it at his service by means of his work. What the Church seeks is a certain equilibrium between material, moral, and religious interests; what it seeks in this equilibrium is that every thing be in its place and that there be a place for all things; what it seeks, finally, is that the first place be occupied by moral and religious interests and that material ones come after. And this not only because the most fundamental notions of order require it to be so, but also because reason tells us, and History teaches us, that that this preponderance, the necessary condition for that equilibrium, is the only one that can exorcise, and does so with certainty, the grand catastrophes that are always ready to arise where the preponderance or growth exclusively of material interests causes great concupiscences to ferment.

There are others, however, persuaded on the one hand of the necessity of our holy religion and our holy Church, given the state the world is in, that it may not perish, who yet, on the other, are sluggish to submit to its yoke, which, if it is easy for humility, is onerous for human pride, who seek a way out by negotiation, accepting certain things from the religion and the Church and putting aside others they deem excessive. Such people are all the more dangerous the more they

bear the semblance of proper impartiality, in order to fool and seduce peoples; in this way they make themselves the judge of the battlefield and oblige a comparison of error and truth face to face, and with false moderation they seek between the two some kind of unthinkable middle ground. Truth, certainly, is often situated, and found, in the midst of errors; but between truth and error there is no middle ground whatsoever; between these two contrary poles there is nothing but an immense void; and one who puts himself in this void puts himself as far from the truth as one who puts himself in error; with truth there is nothing else one can do but embrace it.

These are the principle errors of men and of the classes to which has fallen in these times the sad privilege of the governance of nations. Turning our eyes elsewhere and placing them on those who advance by protesting the grand inheritance of governance, reason is disturbed and the imagination is confused upon finding itself in the presence of errors that are even more pernicious and abominable. It is a thing worth noting, however, that these errors, as pernicious and abominable as they are, are nothing more than logical consequences – and as such, inevitable – of the errors already mentioned.

If the immaculate conception of man is supposed, and with it the integral beauty of human nature, some have asked themselves: If our reason is enlightened and our will is right and excellent, why would our passions not also be most excellent, since they are in us just as our will and intellect? Others ask themselves: Why, if discussion is good as a means to arrive at the truth, should anything be exempt from its sovereign jurisdiction? Others do not hit upon the reason why, in the previous suppositions, the liberty of thought, of willing, or of action cannot be absolute. Those who are given to religious controversies propose the question which consists in finding out why, if God is not good in society, He is obeyed in heaven, and why, if the Church is good for nothing, it must be acquiesced to in the sanctuary. Others ask themselves why, since progress towards the good is boundless, the enterprise of bringing pleasures up to the level of desires should not be undertaken, and of trading in this valley of tears for a garden of delights. Philanthropists are scandalized at finding a poor man in the streets; they cannot understand how a poor man, being so ugly, can yet be a man, nor how a man, being so beautiful, can yet be poor. What they all agree on, without any disagreement, is the imperious necessity to subvert society, suppress governments, turn wealth upside down, and finish off in a single stroke all human and divine institutions.

There is yet, although the thing seems impossible, an error that, not seeming all that detestable considered in itself, is nevertheless still more overarching by its consequences than all these: the error of those who believe that these errors do not arise necessarily and inevitably from the former ones. If society does not soon rise out of this error, and in so doing it does not condemn the latter ones as being the consequence and the former ones as being the premises, with an utter and sovereign condemnation, society, humanly speaking, is lost.

One who reads this very imperfect catalog which I have just made of these atrocious errors will observe that some of them will result in absolute confusion and absolute anarchy, while others need for their realization a despotism of gigantic, unheard-of proportions; to the first category belong those which refer to the exaltation of individual liberty and to the most violent destruction of all institutions; to the second, those others which suppose an organized agenda. In the parlance of the academy, the sectarians and proponents of the first sort of errors are called by the general term of socialists, whereas those who promote those of the second category are generically called communists; what the former seek, above all, is the indeterminate expansion of individual liberty, at the expense of having all public authority suppressed; and, in contrast, what the latter are directed to is the complete suppression of human liberty and the gigantic expansion of

the authority of the State. The most complete formulation of the first of these doctrines is found in the writings of Girardin and in the last book by Proudhon. The first of these two has discovered the centrifugal force, the second one the centripetal force, of future society, governed by socialist ideals, which will obey these two contrary motions: one of repulsion, produced by absolute liberty, the other of attraction, produced by a vortex of contracts. The essence of communism consists in the confiscation of all liberties and all things for the benefit of the State.

The shocking and monstrous nature of all these social errors comes from the shocking nature of the religious errors in which they have their explanation and origin. Socialists are not content with relegating God to heaven, but going a step further, they make a public profession of atheism and deny Him completely. Given the denial of God, the fount and origin of all authority, logic requires the negation of authority itself with an absolute denial; the negation of the universal paternity of God brings with it the negation of domestic paternity; the negation of religious authority brings with it the negation of public authority. When man is left without God, subjects are thereupon left without kings, and sons without fathers.

In regard to communism, its provenance seems evident to me to be from pantheist heresies and all the others derived from them. When all is God and God is everything, God is, above all, democracy and the multitude; individuals, divine atoms and nothing more, arise from the All and perpetually engender it, only to return to it, which perpetually absorbs them. In this system, what is not the All is not God, though it participates in the divinity; and what is not God, is nothing, because there is nothing outside of God, Who is all. Hence that proud disdain of the communists for man and that insolent negation of human freedom. Hence those immense aspirations of a universal domination by means of the demagogy of the future, which must extend itself through all the continents and must reach to the ultimate ends of the earth. Hence that brutal fury with which it is proposed to mix and crush all families, classes, peoples, and ethnicities in the grand mortar of its triturations. From that darkest and bloodiest chaos is to arise, one day, the one God, conqueror over all that is varied; the universal God, conqueror over all that is particular; the eternal God, without beginning or end, conqueror over all that is born and passes away; that God is the demagogy, announced by the last prophets, the only sun in the firmament of the future, which must come brought by the storm, crowned with rays and served by hurricanes. That is the true All, true God, armed with one attribute only, omnipotence, and conqueror of the three great weaknesses of the Catholic God: goodness, love, and mercy. Who does not recognize that this God is Lucifer, the god of pride?

When these abominable doctrines are considered carefully it is impossible not to notice in them the sign, mysterious yet visible, of the errors which must come about in apocalyptic times. If a religious fear did not keep me from placing my eyes on those frightening times, it would not be difficult for me to propose the opinion, based on powerful reasons of analogy, that the great empire of the Antichrist will be a colossal, demagogic empire, ruled by a populace of satanic grandeur, which will be the man of sin.

After considering in general the principle errors of these times, and showing completely that all of them have their origin in some religious error, it seems not only fitting, but indeed necessary, for me to descend to certain applications which will make still more clear the dependence all political and social errors have on religious ones. Thus, for example, it seems to be a matter beyond all doubt that what affects the government of God over man affects in the same degree and in the same way the Governments instituted in civil societies. The first religious error, in these current times, was the principle of the independence and the sovereignty of human reason; to this error in the religious order corresponds that in the political order which consists in affirm-

ing the sovereignty of the intellect; for this reason, the sovereignty of the intellect has been the universal foundation of public law in the societies attacked by the first revolutions. In this error parliamentary monarchies have their origin, with their electoral votes, separation of powers, free press, and inviolable tribune.

The second error is relative to the will and consists, as far as the religious order is concerned, in affirming that the will, right in itself, needs neither nor the call nor the impulse of grace in order to incline itself to the good; to this error in the religious order corresponds the political one that consists in affirming that, as there is no will that is not right, there should not be anyone that is either under control or in control. In this principle is found universal suffrage, and in it the republican system has its origin.

The third error refers to the appetites, and consists in affirming, as far as the religious order is concerned, that, given the immaculate conception of man, his appetites are quite right; to this error in the religious order corresponds the political one that consists in affirming that all Governments should be ordered to one single end: the satisfaction of all desires; in this principle are founded all the socialist and demagogic systems, which fight today for domination and which, if things continue naturally along the course they are headed, they would attain further on.

In this way, the disturbing heresy, which consists, on the one hand, in denying original sin, and on the other, in denying that man is in need of divine direction, leads first to the affirmation of the sovereignty of the intellect and then to the affirmation of the sovereignty of the will, and, ultimately, to the affirmation of the sovereignty of the passions; that is, to three disturbing heresies.

One needs only to know what is affirmed or denied of God in religious matters in order to know what is affirmed or denied of the Government in the political matters; when there prevails a vague Deism in the first, it is affirmed that God reigns over all creation, but denied that He governs it. In these cases, the parliamentary maxim holds in the political sphere that the king rules but does not govern.

When the existence of God is denied, then all Government is denied, even its existence. In these cursed epochs, the anarchic ideas of the socialist schools arise and propagate with an astounding rapidity.

Finally, when the ideas of divinity and of creation are conflated to the point of affirming that all created things are God, and that God is the totality of created things, then communism prevails in political spheres, as does pantheism in the religious; and God, tired of suffering, hands man over to the mercy of abject and abominable tyrants.

Turning our eyes again to the Church, it would be easy for me to demonstrate that it has been the object of the same errors, which always preserve their indestructible identity, whether they be applied to God, or shake the Church, or convulse civil societies.

The Church can be considered in two different ways: in itself, as an independent and perfect society, which has within itself all that it needs to work unencumbered and move freely, and in its relation with civil societies and the Governments of the earth.

Considered from the point of view of her interior organism, the Church has seemed to be in need of resisting the grand arrival of the most pernicious errors, it being worth noting that among them the most pernicious of all are those which are directed against what is most marvelous and perfect in her unity; that is to say, against the Pontificate, the foundation stone of the prodigious edifice. Among the number of these errors is that in virtue of which it is denied that the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth has a unique and indivisible succession of the apostolic power, specifically in its universality, supposing instead that the bishops have been his coinheritors. This error, if it

could prevail, would introduce confusion and disarray in the Church of the Lord, changing it, by the multiplication of the Pontificate, which is the essential authority, indivisible, incommunicable, into a most turbulent aristocracy. Being left with the honor of an empty presidency and deprived of his royal jurisdiction and effective governing power, the Supreme Pontiff, under the empire of this error, would remain futilely relegated to the Vatican, just as God, under the empire of the Deist error, remains futilely relegated to heaven, and the king, under the empire of the parliamentary error, remains futilely relegated to his throne.

Those who do not sit well with the empire of reason, which is intrinsically aristocratic, prefer that of the will, which is intrinsically democratic, and proceed to fall into presbyterianism, which is the Republic in the Church, just as they favor universal suffrage, which is the Republic in civil societies.

Those who are enamored of individual liberty exaggerate it to the point of proclaiming its sovereignty without any exceptions and the destruction of all impeding institutions, and proceed to fall, in regard to the civil order, into the contractual society of Proudhon, and in regard to the religious order, into individual inspiration, proclaimed as a dogma by certain fanatic sectarians in the religious wars in England and Germany.

Finally, those who are seduced by pantheist errors end up espousing, in the ecclesiastical order, the indivisible sovereignty of the mass of the faithful, as in the divine order they espouse the deification of all things, and in the civil order the constitution of the universal and absorbing sovereignty of the Phalanges.

All these errors relative to the hierarchical order established by God Himself in His Church, as crucially important as they are in the area of speculation, greatly lose their importance in the dominion of facts, since it is utterly impossible that they would come to prevail in a society which divine promises protect from such ravages. The opposite happens with those other errors which concern the relations between the Church and civil society, between the priesthood and the Empire, errors which in other centuries were quite capable of disturbing the peace of peoples, and still are able even today, if not to stop the irresistible expansion of the Church throughout the world, at least to put obstacles and traps before it and to slow the day in which its confines will be only the confines of the earth itself.

These errors are of various species, depending on whether it is affirmed that the Church is equal to the State, or inferior to the State, or has nothing to do with the State, or that the Church serves no purpose whatsoever. The first is the characteristic affirmation of the most temperate royalists; the second, of the more ardent royalists; the third, of revolutionaries, who propose as a first premise of their arguments the last consequence of royalism; the final one, of the socialists and communists, that is, of all the radical schools, which take as a premise for their argument the last consequence admitted by the revolutionary school.

The theory of the equality between the Church and the State gives occasion to the more moderate royalists to proclaim something to be of secular nature what is really of mixed nature, and something of mixed nature to be of ecclesiastical nature, since it is necessary for them to resort to such usurpations in order to make up the dowry or patrimony the State brings with it into this egalitarian society. In this system, almost all points are controvertible and everything that is controvertible is resolved by compromises and concords; it is here a matter of Public Law to allow apostolic bulls and briefs, as well as to have monitoring, inspection, and censure exercised over the Church in the name of the State.

The theory of the inferiority of the Church with respect to the State gives occasion to ardent royalists to proclaim the principle of national churches, the right of the civil power to revoke

concordats made with Supreme Pontiff, to appropriate the goods of the Church for itself and, finally, to govern the Church by decrees or by laws made in deliberative assemblies.

The theory that consists in affirming that the Church has nothing to do with the State gives occasion to the revolutionary school to proclaim the absolute separation of Church and State, and, as a necessary consequence of this separation, the principle that the maintenance of the clergy and the preservation of worship should fall exclusively upon the faithful.

The error that consists in affirming that the Church serves no purpose whatsoever, being the denial of the Church itself, gives as a result the violent suppression of the priestly order by decree, which finds its sanction, naturally, for religious persecution.

By what has been said, it is seen that these errors are nothing but the reproduction of those we saw already in other spheres; in whatever way the coexistence of the Church and the State occasions the same affirmations and erroneous negations, so do the coexistence of individual liberty and public authority in the political order, the coexistence of free will and grace in the moral order, the coexistence of faith and reason in the intellectual order, the coexistence of divine Providence and human liberty in the historical order, and, at the highest level of speculation, the coexistence of two worlds in the order of the coexistence of the natural and supernatural orders.

All these errors, identical in their nature, though various in their applications, produce woefully the same results in all their applications. When they are applied to the coexistence of individual liberty and public authority they produce war, anarchy, and revolutions in the State; when they have as their object free will and grace, they first produce internal division and war, and afterwards the anarchic exaltation of free will, followed by the tyranny of desires in the breast of man. When they are applied to reason and faith, they first produce war between the two, then disorder, anarchy, and vertigo in areas of human intellect. When they are applied to the intellect of man and the Providence of God, they produce all the catastrophes with which the fields of History are sown. When they are applied, finally, to the coexistence of the natural and supernatural orders, anarchy, confusion, and war spread through all areas and into all regions.

By what has been said, it is seen that in the last analysis and in the end result all these errors, in their infinite variety, resolve into a single one, which consists in having pretended not to know or falsified the hierarchical order, intrinsically immutable, that God has put into things. This order consists in the hierarchical superiority of all that is supernatural over all that is natural, and, consequently, in the hierarchical superiority of faith over reason, of grace over free will, of Divine Providence over human freedom, and the Church over the State; and, to put everything together in one single phrase, the superiority of God over man.

The right claimed by faith to illuminate reason and guide it is not a usurpation, it is a prerogative in conformity with its surpassing nature; and on the contrary, the prerogative proclaimed by reason to indicate to faith its limits and dominions is not a right, but rather an ambitious pretension, which is not in keeping with its lower and subordinate nature. Submission to the secret inspirations of grace is in conformity with universal order, because it is nothing other than the submission to divine solicitations and callings; and on the contrary, the disregard or negation of it, or resistance to it, put free will into an interior state of poverty and an exterior state of rebellion against the Holy Spirit. The absolute lordship of God over the great happenings of history which He works and which He permits is His incommunicable prerogative, so that History is as if the mirror in which God sees His plans; and on the contrary, the pretension of man when he affirms that he is the one making the events and the one weaving the marvelous texture of History is an untenable pretension, as he does nothing on his own other than weave those of his actions which are contrary to the divine commandments, and to help weave the texture of the others which con-

form to the divine will. The superiority of the Church over civil societies is a matter conforming to right reason, which teaches us that the supernatural is *above the natural* and the divine is over the human; and on the contrary, any aspiration on the part of the State to absorb the Church, or separate itself from the Church, or prevail over the Church, or equate itself with the Church, is an anarchic aspiration, pregnant with catastrophes and provocative of conflicts.

The salvation of human societies depends, exclusively, on the restoration of these eternal principles of the religious, political, and social order. These principles, however, cannot be restored except by one who knows them, and no one knows them except the Catholic Church; her right to teach all nations, which comes to her from her founder and master, is not based only in this divine origin but also is justified by that principle of right reason which states that it is the place for the ignorant to learn, and for the one who knows more to teach.

In such a way that, in fact, if the Church had not received this sovereign teaching office from the Lord, it would still be authorized to exercise it for the simple fact of being the depository of the only principles that have the secret and marvelous virtue of maintaining all things in order and harmony, and of putting order and harmony into all things. When it is affirmed that the Church has the right to teach, this affirmation is legitimate and reasonable, but it is not entirely complete in itself if it does not at the same time affirm that the world has the right to be taught by the Church. No doubt, civil societies are in possession of that tremendous power which consists in not presuming to scale the highest mountains of eternal truths, making a slight mistep, and falling into the abyss along the steep slopes of error; the question consists in determining whether he exercises a right who, bereft of reason, commits an act of insanity; or to say it but once and in a word, whether he exercises a right who renounces all his rights by committing suicide.

The question of education, agitated in recent times between the universities and French Catholics, has not been posed by the latter in its correct terms, and the universal Church cannot accept it in the terms it keeps being put. Given, on the one hand, the freedom of religion, and, on the other hand, the very particular circumstances of the French nation, it is clear to all sides that French Catholics are in no position to claim anything for the Church beyond the liberty that is of common right here, and as such could serve as a support and refuge for Catholic truth. The principle, however, of academic freedom, considered in itself, and abstracting from the special circumstances in which it has been proclaimed, is a false principle and impossible for the Catholic Church to accept. Academic freedom cannot be accepted by her without putting herself in open contradiction with all of her own teachings. In fact, to proclaim that teaching should be free comes to be nothing other than to proclaim that there is no one truth already known that should be taught, and that truth is something that has not been found and that it is sought by means of ample discussion of all opinions; to proclaim that teaching should be free is to proclaim that truth and error have equal rights. Now then: the Church teaches, on one hand, the principle that the truth exists without needing to be sought out, and, on the other, the principle that error is born without rights, lives without rights, and dies without rights, and that truth is in possession of absolute right. The Church, then, without ceasing to accept liberty, where anything else is altogether impossible, cannot take it as a terminus of her desires, nor greet it as the unique goal of her aspirations.

These are the indications that I believe it my duty to make on the most pernicious errors among the modern ones; from their impartial examination, to my understanding, two things stand demonstrated: the first, that all the errors have one and the same origin and center; the second, that considered in their center and origin, they are all religious. It is so certain that the negation

of but a single one of the divine attributes brings disorder to all spheres and puts human societies at the point of death.

If I have had the fortune that these indications not appear entirely idle to Your Eminence, I would dare to ask you that you place them at the feet of His Holiness, together with all the homage due of profound veneration and highest respect which I profess as a Catholic for his sacred person, his infallible judgments, and his unappealable decisions.

May God grant Your Eminence many years.

Paris, the 19th of July, 1852. – Most eminent sir. Your most attentive, most certain servant kisses the hand of Your Eminence.

El Marqués de Valdegamas.