

Liberalism is a Sin

Dr. Don Felix Sarda y Salvany

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Nihil Obstat

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Preface

In 1886 there appeared in Spain a little work under the title *El Liberalismo es Pecado*, "Liberalism Is a Sin," by Don Felix Sarda y Salvany, a priest of Barcelona and editor of a journal called *La Revista Popular*. The book excited considerable commotion. It was vigorously assailed by the Liberals. A Spanish Bishop, of a Liberal turn, instigated an answer to Dr. Sarda's work by another Spanish priest. Both books were sent to Rome praying the Sacred Congregation of the Index to put Dr. Sarda's work under the ban. The following letter, under date January 10, 1887, from the Sacred Congregation itself, explains the result of its consideration of the two volumes:

*To the Most Rev. Jacobo Catala et Alboso,
Bishop of Barcelona*

Most Excellent Sir:

The Sacred Congregation of the Index has received the denunciation of the little work bearing the title "El Liberalismo es Pecado" by Don Felix Sarda y Salvany, a priest of your diocese; the denunciation was accompanied at the same time by another little work entitled "El Proceso del Integrisimo," that is "a refutation of the errors contained in the little work El Liberalismo es Pecado." The author of the second work is D. de Pazos, a canon of the diocese of Vich.

Wherefore the Sacred Congregation has carefully examined both works, and decided as follows: In the first not only is nothing found contrary to sound doctrine, but its author, D. Felix Sarda merits great praise for his exposition and defense of the sound doctrine therein set forth with solidity, order and lucidity, and without personal offense to anyone.

The same judgment, however, cannot be passed on the other work by D. de Pazos, for in matter it needs corrections. Moreover his injurious manner of speaking cannot be approved, for he inveighs rather against the person of D. Sarda, than against the latter's supposed errors.

Therefore the Sacred Congregation has commanded D. de Pazos, admonished by his own Bishop, to withdraw his book, as far as he can, from circulation, and in future, if any discussion of the subject should arise, to abstain from all expressions personally injurious, according to the precept of true Christian charity; and this all the more since Our Holy Father, Leo XIII., while he urgently recommends castigation of error, neither desires nor approves expressions personally injurious, especially when directed against those who are eminent for their doctrine and their piety.

In communicating to you this order of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, that you may be able to make it known to the illustrious priest of your diocese, D. Sarda, for his peace of mind, I pray God to grant you all happiness and prosperity and subscribe myself with great respect,

Your most obedient servant,

Fr. Jerome Secheri, O. P.

Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Index.

The following short chapters on Liberalism are mainly and substantially Dr. Sarda's book, put into English, and adapted to our American conditions. Their need and their use will be best understood and appreciated by their perusal.

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Chapter 6

**CATHOLIC LIBERALISM
OR LIBERAL CATHOLICISM**

Peace in war is an incongruity. Foes in the midst of battle cannot well be friends. Where the pressure of conflicting forces is intensest there is little opportunity of reconciliation. Yet this absurdity and contradiction we find in the odious and repulsive attempt to unite Liberalism with Catholicism. The monstrosity resulting is what is known as the Liberal Catholic or the Catholic Liberal. Strange as it may seem, Catholics with good intentions have paid tribute to this absurdity and indulged the vain hope of peace with the eternal enemy.

This fatal error has its source in the vain and exaggerated desire of reconciling and harmonizing in peace doctrines utterly incompatible and hostile by their very nature.

Liberalism is the dogmatic affirmation of the absolute independence of the individual and of the social reason. Catholicity is the dogma of the absolute subjection of the individual and of the social order to the revealed law of God. One doctrine is the exact antithesis of the other. They are opposites in direct conflict. How is it possible to reconcile them? Opposition here necessarily means conflict, and the two can no more harmonize than the square can be made one with the circle.

To the promoters of Catholic Liberalism the thing appears easy enough. "It is admirable," they say, "for the individual

reason to be subject to the law of God if it so wishes, but we must distinguish between the public and the private reason, especially in an age like ours. The modern State does not recognize God or the Church. In the conflict of different religious creeds the public reason must stand neutral and impartial. Hence the necessary independence of the public reason. The State as State can have no religion. Let the simple citizen if he wishes, submit to the revelation of Jesus Christ, but the statesman and the man in public life must comport himself as if no revelation existed." Now all this means civil or social atheism. It means that society is independent of God, its Author; that while individuals may recognize their dependence on the divine law, civil society should not; a distinction whose sophism is founded on an intolerable contradiction.

It is clear that if the individual reason is obliged to submit to the law of God, the public and the social reason cannot logically escape the same duty without falling into an extravagant dualism, by virtue of which men would be forced to submit to the law of two contrary and opposed consciences. Privately men would have to be Christian, publicly they would be free to be atheistic. Furthermore the road is open to an odious tyranny; for if the public conscience were independent of the Christian law and ignored it, there would be no public recognition of the obligation to protect the Church by the civil arm in the exercise of her rights. Nay, more; the civil power would readily become the means of persecution, and rulers hostile to the Church, contemning divine law, could actually, under cover of authority, legislate against Christianity. Nor is this a fanciful picture, for France

and Italy, legislating today on the basis of the sovereign independence of the social and public reason have enacted odious laws which hold the Church in those countries in distressful legal bondage. And the Holy Father himself is now a prisoner within the walls of the Vatican on account of the violent usurpation of his domains by an atheist government.

But the results of the fatal distinction does not stop with the functions of legislation and administration subjecting the Church to social and civil persecution; in modern times it has gone further still and extends its baneful influence to the school-room, propagating itself by placing the education of youth under its dominating influence. It forms the conscience of youth not according to the divine law which acknowledges the will of God, but upon a premeditated and careful ignorance of that law. It is as secular education that it seizes upon the future and breeds atheism in the hearts of the coming generations.

The Catholic Liberalist or the Liberal Catholic admitting this fatal distinction between the private and the public reason, thus throws open the gates to the enemies of the faith, and, posing as a man of intellect with generous and liberal views, stultifies reason by his gross offense against the principle of contradiction. He is thus both a traitor and a fool. Seeking to please the enemies of the faith he has betrayed his trust, the faith itself; imagining he is upholding the rights of reason, he surrenders it in the most abject way to the spirit of denial, the spirit of untruth. He has not the courage to withstand the derision of his cunning foe. To be called intolerant, illiberal, narrow, ultramontane, reactionist,

is gall and wormwood to his little soul. Under this epithetical fire he gives way and surrenders his birthright of faith and reason for a mess of Liberal pottage.

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