THE SPANISH CHURCH AND POLITICS

By

John Langdon-Davies

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FOREWORD

Some months ago certain Catholic papers had to apologize to me in Court for mis-statements about my views as expressed in my book, *Behind the Spanish Barricades*, and to pay over to me a sum of money in settlement of actions for defamatory libel which I brought against them.

I propose to use some of this money to publish material which may assist the many sincere progressive Catholics in England, who have been seduced by a certain faction within their Church into taking a view of current Spanish events that is repugnant to all believers in democracy. The accompanying pamphlet is a first instalment of this material.

It is an amplification of my statement that in widely diffused catechisms the Spanish Church teaches that it is "mortal sin to vote liberal." This statement has not yet been denied by any Catholic; but if a denial were attempted it would probably take the form that by "Liberalism" Catholics did not mean political democracy, but rather the movement within their Church designated by that name. I do not think anyone would accept that defence after reading this pamphlet.

It must be perfectly clear to any English Catholic that what the Spanish Church wishes to destroy is that very form of political liberalism to which he, as a Catholic, owes his social, political, and religious freedom in England. Once he realizes this, he will lose no time in helping those of his faith in Spain who have stood up for those liberties and refused to become the tools of international Fascism.

J. L.-D.

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IN my book *Behind the Spanish Barricades* I quoted, on the authority of Ralph Bates, a question and answer from a Catholic Catechism used throughout Spain for instruction in sound doctrine :—

Q. What sin is committed by those who vote liberal?
A. Usually, mortal sin.

This quotation was received with honest incredulity by many English Catholics, who are not aware that the teachings of their Church upon political matters are in this country toned down from the crude colours which they still possess in less politically advanced countries like Spain.

I doubt if Catholic priests are in the habit of trying to prevent Englishmen from voting as they please. Indeed, I remember with gratitude that, when fourteen years ago I was a Labour candidate for Parliament, the only minister of religion who was willing to risk his character by appearing on my platform was the Catholic priest. Moreover, it is common knowledge that a certain lack of enthusiasm for the cause of the Spanish Government to be found in some Labour candidates to-day is due to a fear of losing the Catholic vote in their constituencies. Without a hope of gaining it this fear would not exist. And, further, I have been told on very good authority that the *Daily Worker* itself has to consider the feelings of its numerous Catholic subscribers in its approach to certain social questions. It seems, then, that in England Catholics do not attempt to dissuade their co-religionists with threats of spiritual sanctions from reading even a Communist paper.

Seeing that an Englishman is not prevented by the Catholic Church from making up his own political mind, it must come as a genuine surprise to many thoughtful English Catholics that in Spain their co-religionists have always been forbidden to take part in Liberal politics. My quotation has, indeed, been challenged. I therefore made a special effort during a recent visit to Barcelona to buy a copy of the Catechism

referred to by Ralph Bates. It was not an easy task. I was in Barcelona for only six days, and during that time there were eight air raids on the civilian population, carried out, as the *Universe* firmly believes, in the service of God. This made it very difficult to go about one's business methodically, and when I had finished my work of trying to help put as many children as possible beyond the danger of death from the sky I had only a limited time to look in old bookshops for discarded Catechisms.

I was not able to find the precise Catechism quoted by Ralph Bates, but I found another just as good. It is the *Brief and Simple Explanation of the Catholic Catechism*, by R. P. Angel Maria de Arcos, S.J., of which (according to the Preface in my copy, which belongs to the third edition) hundreds of thousands of copies have been sold.

It is preceded by a circular signed by the Archbishop of Granada recommending it "especially, and this is most important," for its clear instruction on "the most important questions of the day." We can take it, therefore, that what we find in this book is the teaching of the Spanish Church, and not of some exceptionally reactionary enthusiast.

On page 404 we read as follows :—

Q. How should we Catholics conduct ourselves beneath a Government hostile to the Church ?
A. If it is in peaceful possession, to suffer it with patience, to pray and work all together, under the direction of the Bishops, for the triumph of truth, justice, and the Church.
Q. Is every Liberal Government hostile to the Church ?
A. Evidently, since whoever is not with Christ is against him.
Q. How do those sin who, with their vote or influence, help the triumph of a candidate hostile to the Church ?
A. Usually mortally ; and are accomplices in the wicked laws contrary to the Church, voted by their candidate.
Q. Can the Church take part in politics ?
A. The Church can and must take part in politics when it is a matter of faith, morals, customs, justice, and the salvation of souls.

Since every Catholic is bound to oppose a liberal in politics, and since also he is guilty of mortal sin if he votes for a liberal

candidate, it is very important for us to know exactly what is meant by "liberal." On page 400 we are given full information:—

Q. What are liberal principles?
A. Those of 1789: so-called national sovereignty, freedom of religious cults, freedom of the Press, freedom of instruction, universal morality, and other such.
Q. What consequences result from these?
A. Secular schools, impious and immodest periodicals, civil marriage, heretical Churches in Catholic countries, abolition of ecclesiastical immunities.....etc.
Q. What does the Church teach about these?
A. That they are most disastrous and anti-Christian:
Q. What more?
A. That they never can be accepted as good, and may be tolerated only for as long as and in so far as they cannot be opposed without creating a worse evil.

Thus, by its own teaching, the Church in Spain shows itself in permanent opposition, not merely to the Popular Front Government elected in February, 1936, but also to the Constitution of the Spanish Republic. More than this, it teaches that obedience to such a Government is to be continued only as a matter of expediency, or as the author of this Catechism says, expanding the words "*if it is in peaceful possession*," "because then the fact of its having enjoyed power for some years peacefully, whether or not its method of obtaining power was just, shows that this Government, though bad, possesses strength, and that it would be useless or very rash, and in every way disastrous, to appeal to violence to get rid of it" (p. 405).

In short, the Church confesses itself to be in implacable opposition to any Spanish Government which legalizes non-Catholic education, freedom of the Press, civil marriage, and "national sovereignty"; and the only limit it sets to violent opposition to such a Government is expediency.

This makes short work of the pretence that the Spanish Church rebelled with Franco only so as to save Spain from "Communism." By its own confession the Spanish Church was bound to work together under its bishops to overthrow the Spanish Government and to use violence if violence seemed practicable, *not* because of burned churches, sacrilege, disorder, Anarchism, Communism, *but* because the Spanish Republic was instituting those civil liberties which we in England regard as the basis of our public life.

Above all, English Catholics should realize that the Catholic Church in Spain is implacably opposed to the very political principles to which they, as Catholics in England, owe their emancipation.

But, lest anyone should think that the definition of Liberalism as "the principles of 1789" means that the Catholic Church in Spain opposes only advanced and revolutionary Liberalism, let us consider what Father Arcos has to say on "national sovereignty," an idea which, as we have seen, all good Spanish Catholics must oppose :--

> National sovereignty means that power or authority originates in the nation, or in the totality of its citizens ;..... that what the majority votes is law ; ..... that permanent and public opposition to authority is to be recognized as legal ; and also the right of rebellion and of the *fait accompli*, erroneous ideas held by many liberals, which condone and authorize crime.

In short, the whole idea of representative Government is an evil to be tolerated only as long as it is dangerous to try to destroy it by force. In passing, we may note that the refusal of the Basque Catholics to support Franco was partly due to their denying that any Catholic had the right to rebel against his lawful Government, a point of view which, although inculcated in their Catechism, does not seem to have appealed strongly in July, 1936, to certain Spanish Catholics.

Father Arcos further explains that a secular school is not one where laymen teach, but rather one "*where the Catechism approved by the Bishop*" is not taught. In other words, the Spanish Church is opposed to any school in Spain that does not teach its children, among other things, that it is mortal sin to vote Liberal, and that representative Government is an evil. English Catholics should recognize that their Church in Spain teaches that anyone desiring the sort of Government that Catholics enjoy here is in danger of eternal punishment.

To emphasize still further that it is not only extreme radicalism that is opposed by the Spanish Church, we have the following dialogue :—

> Q. Is there no grade of Liberalism which may be Catholic ?
> A. That is what its partisans claim : but the Church teaches that what is called Catholic Liberalism is not Catholic.

Q. Then there is no grade of Liberalism that can be good?
A. None: because Liberalism is mortal sin and anti-Christian in essence. (P. 390.)
Q. Then whoever is liberal in politics sins?
A. Certainly: because in liberal politics there exists that Liberalism which the Church condemns.
Q. And if by "liberal" is understood something not condemned by the Pope?
A. Then he sins in calling himself liberal, knowing that the Pope condemns Liberalism.....
Q. Then a Catholic must be anti-liberal?
A. Without a doubt; exactly as he must be anti-Protestant or anti-Freemason; in short, against all the contraries to Christ and his Church. (Pp. 408-9.)

"Catholics," Father Arcos explains (p. 411), "may be liberals in the old sense of the word—that is, generous in giving of their own to the Church and to the poor." Any other kind of Liberalism infringes the fourth commandment, since it "preaches the right of rebellion; by words, by continual opposition to the Government, and by deeds in accepting what they call *faits accomplis*" (p. 412).

Q. What of Communism, Socialism, Modern Democracy, Anarchism, and the like sects?
A. They are contrary to Catholic faith, to justice, and to all virtue, and as such condemned by the Church.
Q. Do not they say that they want to root out from the world the abuses of the rich and to regenerate Society?
A. They say so; but their doctrines and works prove the contrary.
Q. To what do they pertain?
A. To Luther and other arch-heretics who, with the pretence of reforming the Church, teach and practise all kinds of vices. (P. 419.)

It seems from this that the Spanish Church teaches that "Modern Democracy" is as bad as Communism and Anarchy, and that all three descend from Martin Luther. It is not surprising, therefore, that Father Arcos goes on (p. 421) to tell us that "the Liberal system is the weapon with which the accursed Jewish race makes war on our Lord Jesus Christ, on his Church, and on Christian peoples."

After thus analysing Liberalism and condemning it, Father Arcos describes to his readers the infallible weapon against it which has been supplied by the Church. It is the cult of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Later events have shown that this cult has been supplemented with other and more immediately efficacious weapons of Italian and German manufacture; but it is worthy of note that the foreign guns supplied to Franco have in many cases been sanctified by, and decorated with, the emblem of the Sacred Heart.

Although this is the official teaching of the Spanish Church, there were a few Catholics who risked the spiritual dangers of being known as Catholic liberals. Among these one may mention the Archbishop of Tarragona, and Prebendary Carles Cardo, Canon of Barcelona. These two men, although their dioceses were among those which suffered worst from the anarchy of the first days after the military rebellion, have never deserted their flocks even in exile, and to this day have refused to go to Burgos to collaborate with Franco.

Canon Cardo, in March, 1936, wrote an article in the Catalan Catholic review, *La Paraula Christiana*, in which he explained from the Catholic point of view the reason why the Catholic party had been so completely defeated at the February elections. He gives example after example of the appalling social injustice of the Gil Robles-Lerroux Government during its two years of rule, and puts the dilemma of any true Spanish Catholic who has a feeling for social justice thus:—

> Christ, in our country, is cut in two: the Right Parties have His Truth; the Left Parties have His Justice. Truth without Justice is tyranny; Justice without Truth is anarchy.

Whatever we may think as to the Right Parties having Christ's truth, we can at least see that a Church teaching such a catechism as that from which we have quoted must abandon Social Justice to its opponents, the parties of the Left. And when we say "parties of the Left" English readers should remember that, to the Spanish Church, our present Government, our Conservative party, the Primrose League, and Sir Henry Page Croft would all be tainted with "leftism," for the Liberalism to which that Church is opposed is not a matter of party politics, but the very political atmosphere which an Englishman breathes unconsciously by virtue of his country's history.