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3. LOUBET'S VISIT TO ROME AND THE QUESTION OF PAPAL PRESTIGE

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IN April 1904, Emile Loubet, the French president of the Republic, visited the king of Italy in Rome. His visit occasioned a strongly-worded note of protest from the Vatican to the governments of other Catholic nations, and as a result the French ambassador was recalled. Ten weeks later, following a dispute involving the bishops of Dijon and Laval, diplomatic relations between the French government and the Vatican were broken off altogether, not to be resumed for sixteen years, and in the following year, 1905, a law of 9 December abolished Napoleon's Concordat and separated Church and State in France.

Published accounts of the visit are few and brief,[1] and are concerned with it only as a link in a chain of incidents precipitating the Separation. In these accounts the basic problem appears as no more than an obstinate and unrealistic reluctance on the part of the papacy to recognize the occupation of Rome by the House of Savoy in 1870, and little conscious indication is given of what would seem to be the major cause of this reluctance—the Vatican's complete reliance on prestige once its territorial sovereignty had gone. It seems worth while recounting the episode as it appears when augmented by certain little-known facts that help to elucidate the Vatican's motives, and seeing how far they confirm the impression that the role played by the Vatican's concern for its prestige was of pre-eminent importance.

The Vatican clearly had unique reasons for attaching particular importance to prestige. The occupation of Rome in 1870 had deprived the papacy of its last vestige of temporal power. That it should feel vulnerable was not surprising. Though the Temporal Power had been no obstacle to serious military attack, as Napoleon and the Italian armies had proved, it had at least provided the pope with sufficient geographical independence to enable him to rule the Universal Church without constant accusation of being under the influence of any particular country. But with Rome in the hands of the Italian government, this geographical independence had disappeared. Henceforth, to deter the Italian government from exerting pressure on him in its own interests, he could rely only on the international respect he received as the head of what was widely considered a great moral force. Whilst this repect was worth far more, diplomatically, than the Temporal Power, and compelled the Italian government to move very warily, it was understandable that the pope should feel alarm at finding himself resident on soil officially belonging to the Italian government. If the Vatican's uneasiness was initially inspired by the fear that the Italian government might attempt to put pressure on the pope, it came almost immediately to be as much inspired by concern lest other governments accuse him of being under Italian pressure and thereby find a further pretext for limiting the distribution of his directives and for other restrictive measures. An anxiety not to appear under influence or pressure probably explains the Vatican's

[1] The most informative are contained in Antonin Debidour, *L'Eglise catholique et l'Etat en France sous la Troisième République*, II: *1889–1906* (Paris, 1909), 394–404, and in [*Le*] *Livre blanc* [*du Saint-Siège*] (Paris, 1906), 55–61, 139–43.

subsequent demonstrations of extreme intransigence towards Italy and the unusually abusive references to the Italian government that often appeared in its declarations. Inevitably this anxiety and the policy it inspired made the way to an eventual settlement of differences with Italy correspondingly more difficult. Although subsequent events were to justify in some measure the argument that the loss of the Temporal Power gave the pope an independence he had never had before, such arguments are best appreciated in retrospect, and the knowledge that territorially he now had nothing to lose was probably far from comforting. The observation that other nations could now put physical pressure on the pope only by marching through Italy was also of little consolation when Italy was the Vatican's foremost cause of worry.

Whatever the merits and shortcomings of the Italian Law of Guarantees,[2] the Vatican refused to accept it, both Pius IX and his successor, Leo XIII, remaining firm in the attitude that they were the victims of an unlawful usurpation. The Vatican further maintained that any ruler of a Catholic country who accepted the hospitality of the king of Italy at the Quirinal was *ipso facto* condoning the usurpation and gravely insulting the pope. Heads of Catholic countries could not, therefore, visit the king of Italy in Rome without offending the Vatican, and either had to avoid an invitation altogether, or arrange to be entertained by the king in a locality other than Rome. Relations between Catholic countries and Italy were considerably embarrassed by the Vatican's attitude, but its intransigence remained unshaken.

In 1902 a mutual sense of insecurity was drawing Italy and France closer together, and an exchange of State visits was rumoured. In a meeting with the French Foreign Minister on 1 July 1902, the nuncio in Paris, Mgr Lorenzelli, reminded Delcassé that a visit of the president of the Republic to Rome would have most unfortunate consequences for Franco–Papal relations.[3] Relations between France and the Vatican were already far from good. The aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair had seen the planning of a campaign of reprisals against those involved in anti-Republican propaganda, notably certain of the religious orders, and the fanatically anti-clerical Emile Combes had come to power with the intention of effecting the expulsion of a large proportion of the religious orders in France. Neither President Loubet nor Delcassé, however, was sympathetic to the anti-clerical programme, but Barrère, the French ambassador at the Quirinal, had impressed on Delcassé the desirability of an exchange of visits if the *rapprochement* with Italy was to succeed.

By the end of May 1903, it was publicly known that the visits would take place. The disappointment of the Vatican at this news was probably not unmixed with bitterness, for the fact that France was the country involved added a certain irony to the situation. Although French governments since 1879 had pursued anti-clerical policies of varying intensity, there are clear indications that Leo XIII had entertained hopes that France might one day be persuaded to exert pressure on Italy and induce her to recognize the pope as sovereign ruler of some part of his former possessions. It seems that he had previously looked to Austria then Germany

[2] The Law of Guarantees of 13 May 1871 offered the pope sovereignty of his person but only the extra-territoriality of those of his former possessions left to him—the palaces of the Vatican and the Lateran, and the summer residence of Castel Gandolfo. Since the Law was a purely internal measure with no international or even national guarantee against repeal, it left the pope's status at the mercy of the changing majorities of the Italian parliament.

[3] *Livre blanc*, 57.

as possible saviours and, disappointed, had transferred his hopes to France.[4] Whilst a *ralliement* to the Republic was clearly the indispensable condition on which any tolerable existence for the Church in France would depend, it was perhaps also in furtherance of his hopes that Leo promoted the policy of the *Ralliement*, the appeal to French Catholics to abandon their monarchical allegiances and place themselves on constitutional ground. It does not appear to be known how far Leo's hopes exceeded territorially the limits eventually conferred by the Lateran Treaties of 1929, but much of his anxiety not to offend French governments—even at times when the persecution of the religious orders in France prompted the French hierarchy to urge him to strong protests—may be explained by his faith in French help.[5] As late as 7 March 1902, he declared to the bishops of Châlons, Grenoble, Montauban, Perpignan, and Séez: 'There are voices which tell me that it is France who will deliver me.'[6]

It was usual for eminent Catholic visitors to Rome to be received by the pope, and it was known that Loubet hoped that, despite the unprecedented insult to the pope constituted by his visit to the Quirinal as president, the pope might see his way to receiving him—unofficially, if necessary, as a private Catholic visitor. The Vatican would, therefore, soon have to decide whether it would refuse or grant an audience to Loubet, and then make public this decision. It seemed a choice between further alienating France or possibly encouraging anti-clerical action in other countries by what might seem a feeble capitulation on the Roman Question, indicative of the declining strength of the papacy. Among the French clergy, the moderates felt that precisely on account of the concession involved, the pope's receiving the president might have had a considerable effect in calming the distrust of Rome that existed in some otherwise not essentially anti-clerical circles.[7] The death of Leo XIII on 20 July 1903 and the subsequent election of Pius X offered hope of a concession on this particular issue, since the new pope was believed to favour terminating the barren hostility that divided the Vatican and the Quirinal, and to desire a fuller participation of Italian Catholics in their country's affairs.[8]

[4] The reports of the French *chargé d'affaires* at the Vatican are particularly interesting in 1887. See notably *Documents diplomatiques [français (1871–1914)]*, 1st series VI *bis* (Paris, 1938), 134–5. De Monbel to Flourens, D, no. 168, 10 Nov. 1887.

[5] The matter of the *loi d'abonnement* of 16 April 1895 is but one example. The Abbé Landrieux, who was personally acquainted with a number of the highest Vatican officials, observed that 'Vatican opinion is in favour of submission, and the matter of the religious orders...is made a secondary issue. The pope clings to his ideal of the Temporal Power. He counted on Germany. Disappointed, he has turned to France. He does not wish to lose this last support, and, whatever it may cost, he does not wish to break with the French government.' Landrieux's MS. diary. Entry of 13 Nov. 1895. Three years later, the papal secretary of State, Cardinal Rampolla, told Cardinal Langénieux: 'The pope has been very upset by the [French] trade treaty [of 21 November 1898] signed with Italy. This *rapprochement* is a disturbing set-back for the pope. The more Italy feels herself supported, the more critical is the position of the Holy See. Conversely, it is when Italy is hard-pressed that she finds it most difficult to avoid the Roman Question.' Ibid. Entry of 3 Dec. 1898. This diary has been kindly lent by the Abbé Patrick Heidsieck.

[6] Ibid. Entry of 7 March 1902.

[7] Examples of clerical opinion are given in [Edmond] Renard, [*Le cardinal*] *Mathieu* (Paris, 1925), 435–6.

[8] This belief had almost certainly won him the votes of those Italian cardinals anxious for a reconciliation. Landrieux, who conversed with a number of cardinals before and during the Conclave, observed: 'They want a pope who will raise the famous prohibition, *ni eletti ni elettori*....The Holy See, having no longer this bone of contention with the Quirinal,

What hopes the French ambassador at the Quirinal might have entertained, however, were quickly dispelled by a report from a French journalist who had just had an audience with the new pope. The pope had told him that, although he had received no request from the French government for an audience with Loubet, he could not have granted such a request, since the traditional papal attitude in this matter was the Vatican's last means of protest against the usurpation of Rome. The pope had then added: 'For my part I understand the reasons of policy that motivate Monsieur Loubet's forthcoming visit to Rome; in the same way it ought to be understood in France that for reasons that are equally political I have to follow the line of conduct adopted by my predecessors in comparable circumstances, without that it implies in any way a sign of annoyance or discourtesy towards the French government.'[9] This conciliatory statement does not appear to have reached a wide public in France, and it was generally assumed that the Vatican had made little or no attempt to appreciate the French dilemma. France needed the Italian alliance, and the growing demand in the Chamber for the abolition of the Concordat of 1801 and for the Separation of Church and State made the Vatican's apparent attitude seem singularly untimely. For most French Catholics, the Vatican's attitude seemed a futile endeavour to uphold an outworn concept—with possibly dangerous consequences for the Church in France. They did not appreciate that in the view of the Vatican concession on this issue could only appear as a disastrous retreat in the war for its prestige. It therefore came as no surprise that when the credits for Loubet's visit to Rome were discussed in parliament in March 1904, the vast majority of Catholic Deputies and Senators voted in their favour, and Denys Cochin, one of the principal spokesmen of Catholic interests, made a speech vigorously supporting the visit. A few days later, the new papal secretary of State, Cardinal Merry del Val, told Cochin, who was then on holiday in Rome, that he strongly disapproved of their conduct,[10] though, surprisingly, his predecessor, the retired Cardinal Rampolla, told Cochin that he had acted wisely in voting unconditionally for the credits.[11]

The French ambassador at the Quirinal, Barrère, had abandoned the hope of a papal audience for Loubet only with the greatest reluctance, but knowing Cochin's acquaintance with a number of prominent Vatican figures, Barrère asked him to arrange, if possible, at least a meeting between Merry del Val and Delcassé, when the latter accompanied Loubet to Rome. This might, if nothing more, salve some

would have less need of the support of other nations, and consequently would risk less in acting towards them in a firmer and more independent fashion.' Landrieux's MS. diary, entry of 30 July 1903. See also the extracts published by the Abbé Heidsieck in 'Le Conclave de 1903—journal d'un conclaviste', *Etudes* (Nov. 1958), 157–83.

[9] *Documents diplomatiques*, 2nd series, IV (Paris, 1932), 235. Barrère to Delcassé, D, no. 8, 10 Jan. 1904.

[10] MS. letter of Denys Cochin to a priest (possibly the R. P. de la Brière), dated 11 June but of a later year. Denys Cochin is best known as the first prominent representative of Catholic interests to be offered a place in a post-1879 French government; he was a minister of State in Briand's government of October 1915. Of mildly royalist sympathies, he was at the time of Loubet's visit to Rome a deputy for the eighth *arrondissement* of Paris and a member of the Catholic parliamentary group, *Action Libérale*. His letters—cited hereafter as 'Cochin MSS.'—have been kindly lent by his grandson, Monsieur Denys Cochin. Monsieur Marc Bonnefous, at present engaged in writing a thesis on the Cochin family, kindly helped in locating those letters of interest to me.

[11] Cochin MSS. Undated letter of Denys Cochin to his wife, written in April 1904; letter to a priest cited in note 10, above.

of the bitterness on both sides that Loubet's visit would entail. Merry del Val was in fact persuaded to agree to the suggested interview with Delcassé, but lest this concession be interpreted as a tacit acquiescence by the Vatican in Loubet's visit to the Quirinal, he insisted that the interview would have to take place at the French embassy to the Holy See, and not in the secretary of State's appartments. The French ambassador to the Holy See, Nisard, approved the arrangement, and Cochin was commissioned to put the matter to Delcassé when he returned to Paris.[12] The scheme, whilst it did not resolve the basic problem, had the potential merit of preventing the quarrel going further. An interview between Delcassé and Merry del Val would render unlikely any public papal protest following Loubet's visit, and might even lead to a temporary easing of tension between the Vatican and Paris. As long as Combes remained prime minister, however, there was no hope of compromise on the principal matters of difference, and there was good reason to suppose that he would not allow the projected interview with Merry del Val to take place. It was just conceivable that Delcassé, if he approved of the interview, could persuade Combes to agree to it, provided that Delcassé guaranteed that the interview would not be made the occasion of French concessions on any of the various Concordatory matters in dispute, notably the matter of episcopal appointments. There were already five sees vacant as a result of Combes's refusal to present suitable candidates, two of which had been vacant since June 1902. Combes's basic policy consisted in tightening the interpretation of the Concordat's various provisions until they held the Church in France in a stranglehold, and nothing inconsistent with this policy could expect to meet with his approval.

Whatever the chances of the endeavour, they were ruined by Gaston Calmette, editor of the *Figaro*. In a recent lawsuit, Delcassé had given evidence against the *Figaro*, and Calmette was determined on revenge. Rumours had evidently reached him concerning the scheme, and they seemed to provide an excellent opportunity for imperilling Delcassé's position in Combes's cabinet—or at least of causing Delcassé acute embarrassment. On 7 April 1904, when Cochin was travelling back to Paris, Calmette published a report which either through misinformation or design gave a considerably distorted picture of the situation, to the effect that 'Monsieur Delcassé..., putting the interests of the country above ministerial solidarity, is rightly striving before his departure for Italy to obtain an audience with the Sovereign Pontiff' and 'that an influential Deputy of the Right...has just made overtures to the Pope in order to obtain the audience desired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs'.[13] Delcassé was understandably furious, and issued a circular to the press denying the initiative it was alleged that he had taken, and declaring that his activities in Rome would be confined merely to accompanying Loubet. Combes also issued a statement declaring the *Figaro*'s allegations completely false.[14] Arriving in Paris on 9 April, Cochin sent a letter to the *Figaro* denying—quite

[12] The details of Denys Cochin's visit to Rome and his subsequent mission are taken, unless otherwise stated, from the letter to a priest cited in note 10, above. Renard is the only writer who speaks of this episode, apart from L. V. Méjan who takes her information from Renard (*Mathieu*, p. 437; Méjan, *La Séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat. L'oeuvre de Louis Méjan* (Paris, 1959), 41–2). Renard's account, which contains some slight inaccuracies, is presumably based on the papers of Cardinal Mathieu, Cochin's intermediary with Merry del Val. The Holy See clearly had reasons for saying nothing of the mission in the *Livre blanc*.

[13] 'X', 'M. Delcassé au Vatican', *Le Figaro*, 7 April 1904.

[14] Both reproduced in 'X', ibid. 8 April 1904.

truthfully—that he had received any request from Delcassé,[15] but if he managed to conceal the actual nature and direction of his mission, this was little consolation. On going to the Quai d'Orsay shortly after his arrival in Paris and asking to see Delcassé, he was refused an interview. Cochin and Delcassé were on terms of close friendship, and when Cochin later reproached Delcassé for refusing to receive him, he would say no more than that the affair had been 'a trap'.

Loubet arrived in Rome on 24 April. His visit was completed without any contact, official or unofficial, being made with the Vatican, and his presence in Rome was made the occasion of various violent anti-papal demonstrations. Under the circumstances, it might have seemed wisest for the Vatican to keep silent or limit its action to reminding the ambassadors of the various Catholic states, in as discreet a fashion as possible, that Loubet's visit had taken place against the Vatican's wishes and that any future visit to the Quirinal by the head of a Catholic country would be viewed with equal disfavour. The pope's remarks to the French journalist at the beginning of the year, already quoted, suggest that had it not been for the matter of the Delcassé interview and the anti-papal demonstrations, the Vatican's course of action would have contained little that could give offence. The *Figaro*'s disclosure, however, and the consequent humiliating rejection of his willingness to meet Delcassé had scarcely disposed Merry del Val to moderate action. His agreement to the Delcassé interview had been a considerable concession on the Vatican's part, in view of the loss of papal prestige which Loubet's visit to the Quirinal would entail. That this concession should finally have resulted in a curt denial by the government of any possibility of such an interview—with a consequent further loss of prestige for the Vatican—was especially provoking. The fact that this was due to the malice of the *Figaro* probably weighed little with him—if he knew the details. The incident, together with the anti-papal demonstrations that accompanied Loubet's visit, demanded, in his view, strong action, if the Vatican's humiliation was not to be left absolute. On 28 April, he sent a stiff note of protest to the French ambassador.[16]

The government contented itself with a curt rejection of the letter,[17] but unfortunately Merry del Val sent at the same time a very slightly modified version of the letter to the governments of the other Catholic countries. To reprove the French government privately for its conduct was one thing—to denounce its behaviour to the other Catholic powers was another, and one which would have provoked retaliation from far more moderate men than Combes. Furthermore, this version of the letter contained an addition to its third paragraph: 'and if, in spite of that the Papal Nuncio has still remained in Paris, this is due entirely to very serious reasons of an altogether special order and nature.' At a time when the breaking-off of diplomatic relations with France would have been particularly unfortunate for this Church, this statement was especially foolhardy in its implication that the Vatican had ample grounds for withdrawing its representative from Paris and would have done so had not particular circumstances rendered it inexpedient. It is doubtful whether Merry del Val seriously contemplated withdrawing Lorenzelli from Paris, for the disadvantages for the Church would heavily outweigh those for France. It seems likely that in drafting the letter he was acutely conscious of the absence of any real deterrent at the Vatican's disposal, and felt the inadequacy of threatening a potential transgressor merely with the Vatican's

[15] Reproduced in 'M. Denys Cochin au Vatican', ibid. 10 April 1904.
[16] Reproduced in *Livre blanc*, 141–2.
[17] Ibid. 143. Nisard to Merry del Val, 6 May 1904.

displeasure. Nations with a large proportion of practising Catholics in their electorate could not lightly regard an official rupture of diplomatic relations with the pope, and in their case the withdrawal of the nuncio was the Vatican's most effective threat. There was the obvious risk, however, that the force of such a threat would have been nullified by the Vatican's failure to withdraw Lorenzelli from Paris, and the offending formula was thus both a threat and an attempt to strengthen this threat with an explanation of why it had not been carried out in the case of France. Whatever the expediency of the letter in the case of the nations to which it was addressed, it was obvious that if brought to the notice of France it might provide Combes with just the pretext he needed for a further intensification of his war against the Church. Admittedly, Merry del Val probably assumed that the letter would not go beyond the circles for which it was intended, but a diplomat of his experience could scarcely have excluded at least the possibility of its finding its way to the press—which is what in fact happened.

Most historians who refer to the episode express understandable amazement at the imprudence of the letter, and ask how even a man of the limited perspectives of Merry del Val could risk so much in defence of the outworn theory of the Temporal Power. His action in fact becomes intelligible only when the question of prestige and the projected Delcassé interview are taken into account. He then appears not as the defender of a theory which he as well as anyone knew had no hope of realization, but as one attempting to repair the damage he believed done to papal prestige by the double blow of Loubet's visit and the refusal of the Delcassé interview.

The price the Vatican had to pay for defending its prestige in this instance lies outside the scope of this communication. The final rupture of diplomatic relations with France was a result of the Dijon and Laval disputes, involving the question of whether the pope had the right or not to suspend bishops independently of the government, and had no direct connexion with the Vatican's letter to Catholic nations on Loubet's visit. The actual abolition of the Concordat and the Separation of Church and State in the following year were the result of a combination of factors, none of which could have brought it about singly. Pressure came from many sides—from the Socialists for whom Separation was the threshold to social reform, from anti-clericals who wanted it for its own sake, and from Combes's enemies among the *Gauche Radicale* and the *Union Démocratique* who thought it would prove Combes's undoing. Both Combes and Rouvier were personally opposed to Separation, but Combes's attempts to intimidate the Vatican into accepting his hostile interpretation of the Concordat played a considerable part in bringing it about. Merry del Val's letter to Catholic nations on Loubet's visit, when revealed by Jaurès in *L'Humanité*,[18] provided the occasion for Combes to commit the government in principle to a parliamentary debate on Separation as part of his attempt to bluff the Vatican into submission—and thus in some measure the letter helped to hasten the Separation. Fundamentally, however, it was not so much the letter itself but Combes's immoderate exploitation of it that gave it the significance it has in this connexion.

[18] It is generally supposed that the text was given to Jaurès by the Prince of Monaco. Denys Cochin, who strongly disliked the Prince of Monaco, nevertheless doubted whether he was responsible—but does not disclose the name of the person he suspected. Cochin MSS. Letter to the Comtesse Greffuhle, 19 Jan. 1906.