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The Esperantist magazine *Herezulo* has published a “letter from Russia” dated 20-5-1935, from which I reveal the following extract: “Perhaps you might be interested to know that our newspaper Il Senza-dio has stopped coming out. Why? It is difficult to answer. Some say that there is no paper; others say that Stalin wants to prepare the ground for a rapprochement with the Pope and the other leaders of the Church. The fact is that during the last Easter holidays the churches were completely full, and the young communists and atheists did nothing to disturb the religious ceremonies; this was in contrast to the previous years when demonstrations were organised.”

The fact that the famous newspaper *Il Senza-dio* has been discontinued does not move me at all, and if the rapprochement between Bolshevik Tsarism and the Vatican disgusts me as do all government commitments, the policy of tolerance towards the Greek Orthodox cult and other cults seems to me to be an indication of a healthy rethinking. The fact that churches are packed with worshippers after eighteen years of atheistic propaganda is a phenomenon that should give pause to young

atheists and Stalinists who are saddened by the fact that they cannot disrupt religious ceremonies.

Stalin's current attitude to freedom of religion is strictly in accordance with the legislation of the USSR. Once again, there is no strict application of laws and decrees that were not regularly respected by local authorities until 1935.

The right to the "free exercise of freedom of conscience and religious worship" and to protection "against any harm or persecution inflicted on believers on account of their faith or religious worship" is guaranteed by Article 3 of the Decree of 23 January 1918 and by Article 2 of the Decree of 23 January 1918.

The right to peacefully celebrate religious services and rites is guaranteed by Article 5 of the Decree of 23 January 1918, which entrusts local authorities with the task of ensuring such tranquillity, and Article 127 of the Penal Code provides that "any interference in the exercise of religious worship, provided it does not compromise public order or violate the rights of third parties, is punishable by forced labour for a period not exceeding six months."

The right to rent, build or maintain buildings for worship, to form religious associations and to collect money for worship and the maintenance of its ministers are guaranteed by Article 10, Articles 15 and 45 of the Decree of April 8, 1929, and by Article 54 of the Decree of April 18, 1922.

It seems to me that one can conclude that the legislation of the USSR affirms and protects freedom of worship. I declare that, even though I do not practice any religion or profess any religion, I will, during the Italian revolution, stand by the Catholics, the Protestants, the Jews and the Greek Orthodox whenever they demand religious freedom for all religions. Since I have had the opportunity to see that this attitude of mine and this purpose of mine do not have the general consensus of my fellow believers and comrades in the struggle, I believe it useful - and I believe it so because, in addition to the sanctity of the principle, I take into account revolutionary

errors which, in my opinion, are fraught with serious harm and grave dangers - to express my thoughts on the question.

Every intellectual should - said Salvemini in his beautiful speech at the World Congress of Intellectuals - take as a motto the words of Voltaire: "Mr. Abbot, I am convinced that your book is full of beastliness, but I would give the last drop of my blood to guarantee you the right to publish your beastliness."

Every intellectual - I say - cannot reject this principle without ceasing to be an anarchist.

When, during the last world congress of the IWA, I told the Spanish delegates to consider the anticlericalism advocated by the CNT and by many elements of the FAI as non-anarchist, narrow and crazy, and that one of the factors of success of the Spanish fascist currents was their anticlericalism, I had before my eyes a deliberation carried out by Spanish anarchists in which the right of the cults to demonstrate was denied. Even tolerating intimate feelings, as these feelings were not entirely free under the heel of Mussolini, as well as under Hitler and Stalin. Anticlericalism too often takes on the character of a rationalist Inquisition. An illiberal anticlericalism, whatever the vanguard position, is fascist.

In addition to being fascist, illiberal anticlericalism is unintelligent. Malatesta has always opposed the fanatics of… free thought. Reproducing this news from an anarchist newspaper: "A bomb exploded in a procession in Barcelona, leaving 40 dead and we do not know how many wounded. The police have arrested more than 90 anarchists in the hope of getting their hands on the heroic author of the attack," he commented on it in the following way in the only issue of L'Anarchia of August 1896: "No reason to fight, no excuse, nothing: is it heroic to have killed women, children, defenseless men because they were Catholic? This is already worse than revenge: it is the morbid fury of bloodthirsty mystics, it is the bloody holocaust on the altar of God or of the idea, which is the same thing. Oh, Torquemada! Oh, Robespierre!"

Leandro Arpinati, when he was an anarchist, he had the speciality of promoting the dispersal of processions in Santa Sofia in Forlì; and he ended up dispersing the red processions in Bologna and elsewhere.

Mussolini went from being a priest-eater to becoming a "man of Providence". Podrecca, the asinine director of *L'Asino* has ended up as a fascist and a kiss-ass. The crude anticlericalism that was in full swing in Italy until 1914 had given the most spectacular examples of turning the tables; and it could not be otherwise, since sectarian virulence was joined by intellectual superficiality and cultural trash-talking.

Anticlericalism in Italy was fascist when it prohibited the ringing of bells, when it prevented or disturbed processions, when it falsified history, when it supported the false testimonies of mythomaniac children or greedy relatives to tell of yet another "dirty priest", when it denied freedom of education, when it dreamed of denying believers any freedom of ritual and worship.

The results were what they were. The communists who today flirt with the Christian revolutionaries of France and the Christian communists of Yugoslavia and use Miglioli as a mirror for Christian democratic larks of all countries, in 1919 and 1920 contributed, with the socialists… extremists, to push the Popular Party towards an alliance with fascism. The republicans, forgetting Mazzini, where they were overbearing, also fell into crude and overbearing anticlericalism.

Subversiveness and democratic-masonic rationalism were in Italy clerically anti-clerical. Urbain Gohier wrote in one of his sharp articles (*Leur République*, Paris 1906):

> Clericalism is not a fanatical attachment to a certain dogma or to certain practices; it is a particular form of thought that manifests itself, above all, in intolerance. The majority of those who claim to be "anti-clerical" today are Protestant clerics or

Until this is a victory over things, silent and disguised under the inquisitorial gaze of the Jacobins, apparently defeated and dispersed, but more alive than ever under the ashes, the church will rise again sooner or later, perhaps strengthened.

Anarchist anticlericalism cannot be illiberal or simplistic.

> Jewish clerics who fight the Catholic religion for the benefit of their religion; or sectarian Masons replete with just as many prejudices, ceremonies just as vain and tinsel even more ridiculous than that of the clergy. Their main leaders are ex-priests or ex-friars who cannot get rid of their mental habits or their former discipline, who reestablish in "free thought" pagan Christmases, socialist Holy Weeks, civic baptisms, communions and above all excommunications, banquets instead of fasts, Gospels, Creeds of catechisms and confessional entries.

This category of "free-thinking priests" has prevailed in Italy, as well as in France and Spain. In Italy, no "rationalist" journal has had the cultural importance of the Jesuits' La Civiltà Cattolica, the Catholics' Rivista Neotomistica, the Protestant Bylichnis, and the spiritualist Coenobium. The most serious historians of religion in Italy have been Catholic or Protestant priests, and there has not been a single "rationalist" who had the cultural training, in religious matters, of a Turchi, a Fracassini, a Buonaiuti, etc. In Italy, as late as 1919 and 1920, there was the scandal of journals like Satana of Rome, directed by presumptuous asses who criticized religions with ridiculous arguments, who published articles with a pitiful poverty of ideas and documentation.

To the ignorance and stupidity of this anticlericalism was added the intolerance which, in France under Masonic hegemony, led to the exclusion of priests of great worth from universities simply because they were priests. Thus, Father Scheil, one of the greatest authorities on Assyriology, was denied a chair. Of him, in his treatise The First Civilisations, Morgan says: "There are hardly four or five such Assyriological scientists in Europe today whose opinion has authority, and among them is V. Scheil, whom I have had the good fortune and the

honour of having as a collaborator in my work in Persia. His name will always remain linked to his masterful translation of the laws of Hammurabi and to the deciphering of the Elamite texts, a tour de force accomplished without the help of a bilingual." The anticlericals were not at all moved by the fact that a truly worthy scientist was denied the chair of Assyriology at the College de France, because, according to them, a priest would not have had the necessary impartiality to deal with matters related to biblical studies. I had as a professor of the history of religions at the University of Florence, Professor Fracassini, who was a priest, and at the Circle of Philosophical Studies in this city I had the opportunity to attend some lectures by Professor Buonaiuti, also a priest. Well, I do not hesitate to declare that I have never heard religious subjects treated with greater lack of philosophical prejudice, with greater scientific rigor, with greater honesty. If almost all anticlericals do not believe that there can be intelligent, cultured, and honestly and seriously Catholic or Protestant or Jewish priests, it means that almost all anticlericals are clerical in their own way.

Anticlericalism, besides being philosophically poor and scientifically approximate and superficial, has been in Italy, and still is in France and Spain, narrow from the point of view of understanding the social problem.

The "clerical danger" has served in Italy as a diversion for the liberal bourgeoisie and radicalism. In France, from 1871 onwards, the struggle against the Church has allowed the republican bourgeoisie to avoid social reforms. In Spain, republicanism à la Lerroux has also played the card of anticlericalism, which, carried out by the left, has developed the Catholic-fascist coalition.

This speculation must be put aside. The proletariat does not feed on priests. And the socialist revolutionaries know that the hierarchy and privileges of the Church are one thing, while religious sentiment and worship are another. The right to baptism cannot be put on the same level as papal guarantees. The Franciscan convent cannot be considered in the same way as the Catholic bank. The fascist prelate cannot be considered as the priest who never bowed down to fascism or as the poor Don Abundio of the village. The Catholic trade union organisations have shown themselves capable, as in Lomellina, of striking, sabotaging and occupying lands, and tomorrow, in the Italian revolution, it would be stupid to set themselves against vast masses of the rural proletariat who are capable of entering into the game of the revolutionary and socialist forces because of an anti-clerical Jacobinism. The anarchists must have faith in freedom. When education is open to all, when the misery of the proletariat has disappeared, when the middle classes have been modernised, the clergy will no longer be able, once the caste situation has ceased, to fill its ranks completely. Already in the post-war period, the seminaries had become depopulated and there were frequent cases of young priests who, after gaining a professional title, threw their robes to the nettles.

When in every village the cultural circle, the recreational circle, the sports club, the theatre, the cinema, the radio, etc., will distract the youth from the Church and from Catholic scholars; when married life will become more harmonious, so that women will no longer feel the fascination of confession and the need for religious comfort; when the pulpit is the chair of the teacher and the priest will no longer be called to pontificate in a realm without contrasts, but must engage in a battle of ideas in public debates; when, in short, the strong breath of revolution will have swept away almost all the conditions that strengthen and corrupt the clergy, that subject ignorant children, horizonless youth, and afflicted femininity in need of hope and eager for moral support to its rule, what will become of the "clerical danger"? The churches, monuments of a defeated power, like the imperial arch and the feudal castle, will see their bells fall silent, their naves silent without liturgical songs, their altars stripped of gold and candles, when the revolution triumphs in the spirits.