The Roman Catholic Jubilee

By Louis C. Fraina

An apostolic letter of Pope Pius decreed a universal jubilee from March 20 to December 8, of this year, in "commemoration of the religious tolerance edict issued by Emperor Constantine."

Religious hysteria rarely conduces to accuracy. The Pope's letter being conceived in the spirit of apostolic fervor, inaccuracy follows.

What the jubilee actually commemorates is not religious tolerance, but the acquisition of political power by the Church and immediate religious *intolerance.*

The circumstance that Constantine was not the one to establish "religious tolerance" indirectly attests the fact. The Emperor Galerius in 311 A. D. put the Christian upon legal equality with the Pagan creeds. A passage in his edict reads:

"After the publication, on our part, of an order commanding the Christians to return to the observances of the ancient customs, many of them, it is true, submitted in view of the danger, while many others suffered death. Nevertheless, since many of them have continued to persist in their opinions and we see that in the present situation they neither duly adore and venerate the gods nor yet worship the god of the Christians, we, with our wonted clemency, *have judged it wise to extend a pardon even to these men and permit them once more to become Christians and re-establish their places of meeting;* in such manner, however, that they shall in no way offend against good order. We propose to

notify the magistrates in another mandate in regard to the course that they should pursue."*

The German scholar Seeck** has conclusively shown that the "Edict of Milan," hailed as the proclamation of religious equality, was really a letter issued by Constantine's colleague, Licinius, to a government official in the East, demanding the thorough enforcement of Galerius' edict. And this "Edict" which was not an edict forms the basis for commemorating Constantine's establishment of "religious tolerance."

The service of Constantine to the Church was official recognition of Catholic prelates and granting them all sorts of privileges and power. In doing this the emperor paid political debts, for the Christians assisted him mightily in usurping the imperial throne. The Church historians would make Constantine a Christian prior to 313, although up to that time, says Duruy ("History of Rome," Vol. VIII) "nothing testifies to the Christian faith of the Emperor." Church historians have constructed an ideal mythical Constantine, just as they doubtlessly manufactured the "Edict of Milan," the supposed text of which has never been found. Constantine was not a religious but a political ruler. He protected Christianity for reasons of state. Each strengthened the other, and for purely temporal ends. The forms of the old Roman state religion were revived, but now, instead of merely Pagan gods, there was an amalgamation of the old and the new—old gods under new names. In its organization the Catholic Church was inspired not by Jesus' teachings, but by Roman hierarchic despotism and compromise with Paganism for political purposes.

Constantine's victory over Maxentius, accordingly, marked not the triumph of Christianity over Paganism, but the final extinction of Primitive Christianity and the rise of the Catholic Church as a political power. The early Christians were persecuted not so much for their religion as for their hostility to the government and Roman civilization. The Church, on the contrary, derived its strength from that very government and civilization. In making Christianity practically the state religion,

*Cited in "Readings in European History," by James Harvey Robinson, Vol. 1. H. Stuart Jones in "The Roman Empire" says that Galerius "had been compelled to own himself beaten in his struggle (against the Christians) and to accord to the Christians the free exercise of their religion."

** Robinson, loc. cit., cites Seeck's "Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte," Vol. XII, pp. 381 sqq.

Constantine completely destroyed its revolutionary aspirations. The Arians, Donatists, and other sects still holding partly to primitive Christianity were mercilessly rooted out. The clergy now began to acquire the power which ultimately made the Church supreme in Feudal society. Clerics were exempted from public burdens and later from public taxes. Clerics generally could be accused only before a bishop, and minor civil cases were tried by ecclesiastical tribunals.* Pagan priests at this period also possessed these privileges. Under succeeding Emperors the Church "tolerantly" monopolized this power and crushed the Pagans.

An edict, "On the Catholic Faith", issued after the Council of Nicæa, illustrates the "religious tolerance" which the Church now commemorates:

"We ordain that the name of Catholic Christians shall apply to all those who obey this present law. All others we judge to be mad and demented. We declare them guilty of the infamy of holding heretical doctrine; their assemblies shall not receive the name of churches. They shall first suffer the wrath of God, then the punishment which in accordance with divine judgment we shall inflict." (Cited by Robinson, *loc. cit.*)

Prior to this edict Constantine (315 A.D.) renewed the edict of Vespasian and Severus, punishing those embracing Judaism. (Duruy, *loc cit.*, Vol. VIII.)

A later edict decreed capital punishment upon any person concealing or possessing "harmful books written with criminal intent."

A triumphant Church construes "tolerance" as favors for itself and persecution for others. A universal peculiarity: the Puritans, Calvin and Protestants generally fought and fled from religious intolerance only to establish a religious depotism of their own.

Catholics cite the "beneficent" influence of Christianity upon Constantine. Yet soon after his rise to power the Emperor issued an edict against the slaves than which none more brutal was issued by the Pagans: "The master whose slave perishes under

*Jones, *loc. cit.*, says: "The most remarkable enactment of Constantine in favor of the Church is the first of the so-called *Constitutiones Sirmondi* (not found in the Theodosian Code, but in a small independent collection of laws) which sets up episcopal tribunals, from whose judgment there **is no appeal,** in certain civil causes. Its genuineness has very naturally been called in question, but is accepted by many scholars of high authority."

the rod is not guilty of homicide if he declares he did not intend to kill the man. The woman who had criminal intercourse with her slave was put to death and the slave burnt at the stake." (Duruy, *loc cit*, Vol. VIII).

The rather lenient policy of the later Pagan emperors was succeeded by bitter persecution under the Christian-Catholic regime.

The Church intends the jubilee to be historical as well as sacred. We suggest three statuary groups or paintings of historical interest, worthy of a place in the contemplated memorial chapel near the Milvain Bridge.

(1) Jesus and the Apostles preaching their revolutionary message to the lowly and oppressed of the Roman Empire, inscribed with the words, "The lowly shall inherit the earth. The first shall be last and the last shall be first."

(2) Constantine and Catholic prelates at a banquet unctuously discussing their political schemes; in the background hover the slaves of field and hearth, cadaverous of face, forms bleeding, and crushed with oppression and despair; while one group of slaves experiences the first fruits of Catholic triumph in the execution of the brutal edict of Constantine.

(3) A composite group of all the popes and priests and prelates of the Middle Ages blessing the arms of the murderous barons, especially when directed against rebellious serfs, casting divine sanction on Medieval exploitation, and preaching submission to the serfs on pain of hell-fire should they revolt.

The Catholic Church was not alone in crushing Labor. Pagan society did the identical thing; but upon that crushed mass the Pagans reared a brilliant intellectual monument. It is a common thing for Christianity to be extolled over Paganism. But wherein does the intellectual achievement of Catholic Christianity compare with that of the Pagans? Medieval genius as expressed in Dante and the Renaissance was in revolt against the Church as an intellectual and political institution. And as a philosophy of life Paganism needs no demonstration of its superiority over Christianity. Macchiavelli, a master-mind of the Renaissance clearly saw the inferiority of Christianity:

"Our religion has glorified men of humble and contemplative life, rather than men of action. Moreover, it has placed the *summum bonum* in humility, in lowliness, and in the contempt of earthly things; Paganism placed it in high-mindedness, in bodily strength, and in all the other things which make men strongest. And if our religion requires us to have any strength in us, it calls upon us to be strong to suffer rather than to do." (Cited in "The Cambridge Modern History," Vol. II, Chap. VI.)

The Pagan spirit is abroad in the world to-day. Its manifestations are manifold. And no amount of Roman Catholic jubilees can stem the rising tide that shall carry the race into a world where religious and political tyrants are no more, and humanity shall live for the Joy of Life.

The Apotheosis of Pragmatism

By Robert Rives La Monte

Walling has a provoking and perverse fondness for giving his books misleading titles. His "Socialism As It Is" was notable, not so much for what it told us about Socialism and the Socialist movement, as for its marvelous analysis of the present trend of capitalist society toward State Capitalism or "The Servile State" as Hilaire Belloc dubs it. In his latest book* Walling once again utterly misleads us by his title. "The Larger Aspects of Socialism" might far more fitly be called The Apotheosis of Pragmatism. It is a sort of ecstatic epic—if a volume as full of heterogeneous quotations as a badly made legal digest may be called an epic at all—in praise of Pragmatism in general and more particularly of the brand of Pragmatism formulated by Professor Dewey. If it pleases Walling to become the protagonist of Dewey's philosophy surely no one shall say him nay, but equally surely it is not mere idle cavilling to protest emphatically against labelling such a piece of special pleading "The Larger Aspects of Socialism."

The root idea of pragmatism has long been familiar in the form of popular proverbs, such as "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." Jesus' "By their fruits ye shall know them" is not far from what Walling loves to call "the pragmatic spirit." In the New Review for March 29th Paul Lafargue embodies this same spirit in a single sentence: "In the material and intellectual world the deed alone is fruitful."

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this pragmatic idea that a speculative theory that will not stand the test of prac-

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* *The Larger Aspects of Socialism*, by William English Walling. The Macmillan Co., New York. Cloth, 12mo, 403 pp. $1.50.