

## 11. THE “IMPERIAL RELIGION”

In the meantime, they began to diffuse the strange concept of an “imperial religion”, which in some cases did not take into consideration the fundamental elements of Catholicism. Thus there was an “imperial Catechism”, not acceptable to the Holy See; on the cover of the Catechism was the figure of “St. Napoleon, a Roman soldier and martyr”, which was not included in the Roman Martyrology.

In France there was the festive celebration of the cult of this saint on the 15 of August, which was substituted for the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin.

On the other hand, the question of the naming of bishops created a tension, as did that of the marriage of Jerome Bonaparte; he was married to a protestant, Elisa Patterson, and the emperor asked that it be declared null, which Rome, once the case was studied, could not do.

Until March of 1808 things got worse due to the occupation of the Kingdom of Naples by the French, who entered the capitol without a battle, while the emperor declared that the Bourbon dynasty had come to its end and gave the throne to his brother Joseph, demanding that the Holy See, who had the right of recognition of the dynasties of the kingdom, accept this fact without protest.

The tentative negotiations only served to increase the tensions already existing between the two parties, to the point that the Roman Curia foresaw an invasion of Rome, or in any case, what would be worse. Napoleon always followed his usual character: sometimes he threatened with vehemence and at the same time with condescension. When an ex-Jacobine counseled: “Majesty, to cut off definitively this discussion with Rome, do the same as the head of religion.” He answered, “It would be like breaking glass”,

which signifies more or less: “you would lose everything you gained.”

Napoleon always hoped to bend the old, sick person, who was pope. His star, in these years was becoming more and more brilliant; two years later, in Tilsitt<sup>1</sup>, he reached his height, when as conqueror of all and surrounded by kings, he could proclaim himself owner of Europe.

But it was justly a man without arms, the temporal ruler most weak, that continued resisting him and had acquired a force that filled Napoleon with stupor. From the end of 1805, effectively, the voice of Pius VII had changed: the voice of one who had done everything possible to show himself favorable to the “restorer of Religion”, and who nevertheless received delusion after delusion. Among the delusions most bitter was the “Code” which Napoleon just promulgated also for Italy and which referred to divorce.

The “imperial” atmosphere was extending itself beyond France and was invading all of Europe. In Paris the “Imperial University”, founded in 1808, was to prepare men for tomorrow. The young men studied in a climate of grandeur, from which was not excluded the Catholic Religion, whose teaching was confided to persons of value, such as Emery, the Superior General of the Sculpicians, and a prominent figure for his spirituality and culture. But in practice, the studies and rights, and equally the arms, had to be “napoleonized” for the entire world.

The emperor knew that this transformation would not be possible if he did not get the Holy See, at least as a temporal State, as an ally without reserves: Rome had to enter to form part of the federated system of the empire. In reply to exaggerated pressure, Pius VII refused, on 11 October 1807, to

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<sup>1</sup> Tilsitt, or Tilsit, also known as Sovetsk, a city in USSR in W. Soviet Russia on the Nerman river.

install the bishops designated by the French Ministry of Worship for vacant sees in Italy; and furthermore, he was preparing an identical refusal for all of the bishops named for France.

Napoleon, meanwhile, had conquered Prussia. From Berlin he called Msgr. D'Arezzo in order that "in a decisive manner he tell the dotting pope that he had better enter the confederation. If the pope accepts, he would lose nothing; but if he refuses, his States would be taken away."<sup>2</sup> The reply from Rome did not change.

The "hour of Tilsitt"<sup>3</sup> arrived, with the brilliant noon-day sun shining on Europe. Napoleon called Eugene of Beauharnais and ordered him to be the mediator of the last discussion with the "Roman clergy"; the moment was dramatic. The Holy See sent to Paris a plenipotentiary; Napoleon rejected Msgr. Litta and Msgr. Pecca and proposed Caprara; but he finally accepted Bayanne. But the imperial criteria was making itself more and more oppressive: "Pius VII is the only man on the continent that keeps resisting; is it not the duty of the leader of the empire to return to unite immediately to his empire that part which tries to make itself politically autonomous, and tries to nullify the donation of Charlemagne, while he puts up arms against his successor?"<sup>4</sup>

The last French proposition squeezed as the first condition the following: The Holy See will endeavor to have a common cause with His Majesty and unite his forces of land and sea to those of His Majesty in all of the

wars that he would have to engage in against infidels and the English."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Here is the complete text of the sketch presented by Mr. De Champigny to Cardinal De Bayanne (Pacca, vol. I, pp. 100 ff)

"The Holy See is obliged to make common cause with His Majesty and unite his forces of land and sea to those of His Majesty in all of the wars that he must endure against the infidels and the English. His Majesty obliges himself to defend the States of the Holy See in all of the wars against infidels and promises to demand respect from the barbarians for the flag of His Holiness and to guarantee his States against invasion by them for three months after the reestablishment of maritime peace.

"In all of the wars against England the Holy See is obliged to close its ports to the ships and commerce of this power, and is not to permit any Englishman to reside in the State, and is to turn over to His Majesty the care of the ports of Ancona, Ostia and Civitavecchia.

"The Holy See is obliged to receive in Ancona two thousand French troops and maintain them. All of the troops of His Majesty stationed there will receive the maintenance of His Majesty.

"His Holiness recognizes the legates to the king of Naples Joseph Napoleon, to the king of Holland Louis Napoleon and the king of Westphalia Jerome Napoleon; he recognizes the legate, the grand duke De Berg, and the legates to the princes of Lucca and Piombino; and he recognizes all of the agreements made by His Majesty in Germany and in Italy. His Holiness renounces all his pretensions and also all of his protests against the rights of His Majesty king of Naples and to full and integral sovereignty of his crown. The same rejection extends to the principalities and sovereignties of Benevento and Pontecorvo, erected as grand feudals of the Empire.

"The number of cardinals of the French empire will be raised to a third of the number of the members of the Sacred College. They will be considered French cardinals those born in the states of Piedmont, Parma and Genoa. The French cardinals in no case can be deprived of the right to assist at the Consistory. There will be no distinction between them and the Italian cardinals.

"The concordat established for the kingdom of Italy will be put into execution in the ancient State of Venice, in all of the enjoining countries and in all of the States of the legates of the princes of Lucca and Piombino. No bishop of the kingdom of Italy will be obliged to go to Rome to be consecrated.

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<sup>2</sup> *Relazione del mio abboccamento coll'Imperatore Napoleone*, of Msgr. D'Arezzo, cited by D'Haussonville, *L'Inglese Romaine et le Premier Empire*, 5 vols., Paris, 1869, II, 334-341.

<sup>3</sup> For the Convention of Tilsitt, the sovereigns of Europe found themselves behind Napoleon, and almost at his mercy.

<sup>4</sup> Ccf. Leflon, *Op. cit.*, p. 426.

Pius VII responded with a categorical “No”. And on 21 January 1808 the emperor ordered General Miollis to invade the States of the Holy See and occupy Rome. On 2 February the troops entered the City with the official pretext of quartering there on its way to Naples, but they placed their cannons on the hill of the Quirinal and aimed them at the apartments of the pontiff.

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“A concordat will be negotiated and agreed upon in Paris between His Majesty and the Holy See for all of the states of Germany included in the Confederation of the kingdom.”

Beside this sketch of Mr. De Champigny, the minister of external affairs, it is understood that Cardinal De Bayanne wished to add other demands, which included the following: 1. The Holy See is obliged not to form any protest against the liberty of the French church, nor to prejudge it, nor realize any public or private act to the contrary. 2. The Holy See is obliged not to do or permit any act which contains any clauses, positive or reserved, that would disturb consciences or sow any kind of division in the States of His Majesty.”