

**DOCUMENTARY EXPOSITION OF  
THE RUPTURE OF DIPLOMATIC  
RELATIONS BETWEEN THE HOLY  
SEE AND THE FRENCH  
GOVERNMENT**

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Documentary Exposition Of The Rupture Of Diplomatic Relations Between The Holy See And The French Government by Various

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*From the Int. Catholic Truth Society*

*Nov. 21 '04*

**Documentary Exposition**  
of the  
**Rupture of Diplomatic Relations**  
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**The Holy See**  
and the  
**French Government**



**International Catholic Truth Society**

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## Contents.

Introduction.....	Page 6
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### DOCUMENTS.

I. The Cardinal Secretary of the Holy Office to the Bishop of Laval (Rome, Jan. 26, 1900).....	14
II. The Bishop of Laval to His Holiness Leo XIII. (Laval, Feb. 2, 1900).....	14
III. The Cardinal Secretary of the Holy Office to the Bishop of Laval (Rome, May 17, 1904).....	15
IV. The Chargé d'Affaires of France to His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State (Rome, June 3, 1904).....	16
V. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Apostolic Nuncio in France (Rome, June 10, 1904).....	17
VI. The Bishop of Laval to the Holy Father (Laval, June 24, 1904).....	21
VII. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Bishop of Laval (Rome, July 2, 1904).....	22
VIII. The Bishop of Laval to His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State (Laval, July 6, 1904).....	23
IX. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Bishop of Laval (Rome, July 10, 1904).....	24
X. The Chargé d'Affaires of France to His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State (Rome, July 23, 1904).....	25
XI. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Chargé d'Affaires of France (Rome, July 26, 1904).....	27
XII. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris (Rome, March 10, 1904, 8.30 p. m.).....	31
XIII. The Apostolic Nuncio at Paris to the Bishop of Dijon (Paris, March 11, 1904).....	31
XIV. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Bishop of Dijon (Rome, April 24, 1904).....	31
XV. The Bishop of Dijon to His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State (Dijon, May 3, 1904).....	32
XVI. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Bishop of Dijon (Rome, July 9, 1904).....	33
XVII. The Chargé d'Affaires of France to His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State (Rome, July 15, 1904).....	34
XVIII. The Bishop of Dijon to His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State (Paris, July 19, 1904).....	35
XIX. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Bishop of Dijon (Rome, July 22, 1904).....	38
XX. The Chargé d'Affaires of France to His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State (Rome, July 23, 1904).....	39
XXI. The Cardinal Secretary of State to the Chargé d'Affaires of France (Rome, July 26, 1904).....	41
XXII. The Concordat of 1801 between Pius VII. and the French Government (Paris, July 5, 1801).....	45
XXIII. The Chargé d'Affaires of France to His Eminence the Cardinal Secretary of State (Rome, July 30, 1904).....	45
XXIV. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of France to the Apostolic Nuncio at Paris (Paris, July 30, 1904).....	48

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### **Note.**

**T**HE International Catholic Truth Society believes that it will confer a real service upon its members and the public generally by publishing the entire correspondence between the Vatican and the French Government in the affair of the Bishops of Laval and Dijon.

A careful perusal of these letters will convince the fair-minded reader that not only is the Holy See free from blame in the rupture of diplomatic relations with France, but all praise and admiration are due to the Vatican for its defense of Christian morals. Non-Catholic editors, who are not slow to call attention to moral delinquencies in the Catholic Church, might be supposed to applaud the Holy See for its efforts to remove all obstacles to the spiritual welfare of its children, the incumbents in the Sees of Laval and Dijon. Instead, we have witnessed a general tendency to throw odium upon the Vatican by representing its action in these cases as a sort of petty reprisal for recent acts on the part of the French Government. Let the reader judge from the text of the correspondence whether political considerations or the sacred cause of morality actuated the Holy See in asking for the resignation of the Bishops of Laval and Dijon.



### **Introduction.**

SEVERAL times, particularly during the past months, some members of the present French cabinet manifested a determination to gradually bring about a rupture of relations with the Holy See. A decisive step in this direction was the leave or the recall of the Ambassador from Rome. Finally, then, taking as a pretext certain letters which, by order of the Holy Father in the fulfillment of the duties incumbent upon his apostolic ministry, were directed to the Bishops of Laval and Dijon, the French Government, in spite of the satisfactory explanations and benevolent dispositions of the Holy See, judged opportune the moment to break off diplomatic relations with the same. On which side is the right in the development of events which lead to this result will appear evident from a true and documentary exposition of facts. The responsibility for such exposition and publication of the various documents which the Holy See out of delicacy would willingly have preferred to keep entirely secret were it not necessary to put things in their true light, rests upon those who have rendered the same inevitable.

From the very beginning of his episcopate grave charges of a nature purely ecclesiastical and altogether foreign to the political and religious questions agitated in France, were made at Rome against Monsignor Geay, Bishop of Laval. After an investigation these charges appeared such that the Holy Father desired the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office (Docum. I) to counsel the above bishop to voluntarily resign his diocese, as it was no longer possible for him to govern the same with sufficient authority or efficiency. By so doing he would have saved

both himself and the Holy See the pain of a trial with accompanying scandals, and, on the other hand, he would have been in a position to easily save his own reputation by covering up his resignation with some plausible excuse.

Monsignor the Bishop accepted at first the counsel given him (Docum. II) ; but immediately afterwards appended to his resignation the condition that he be transferred to another diocese, no matter if it be, as he said, the last in France.

The charges, however, which were made against Monsignor Geay did not arise from local or external difficulties, but were of an entirely personal nature, and hence rendered impossible the acceptance of such a condition.

With that patience which is characteristic of the Church and also in the hope that the future would make the past forgotten, the Holy See delayed for four years, but this patience and this hope were in vain ; the charges became such as to permit no further delay, nor was the situation changed by a brief visit to Rome of Monsignor Geay in 1900, which did not permit the Holy See to proceed to a formal trial. Hence the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, by order of the Holy Father, wrote again, and in the same tenor, the 17th of May, of the present year (Docum. III), repeating the counsel given, and adding that, if in the space of a month he did not resign his diocese, the Sacred Congregation would be under the necessity of proceeding further, according to the prescripts of the sacred canons.

The bishop took the liberty to communicate this letter, of its nature secret, to the French Government, which, in a note of June 3 (Docum. IV), demanded its withdrawal, supposing that the Sacred Congregation intended to proceed to the deposition of the bishop, provided the resignation did not take place within the space of a month.

### 8 The Holy See and the French Government.

The Holy See in a dispatch sent to the Papal Nuncio, 10th of June (Docum. V), a copy of which was given and left with Signor Delcassé, hastened to give the most ample explanations, declaring that the words *progredi ad ulteriora*, which were read in the cited letter of May 17 as well as in the preceding letter of January 26, 1900, according to the phraseology peculiar to the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, did not signify any intention to depose the accused from his office or to inflict upon him any other disciplinary penalty, but only to submit him to a regular process according to the sacred canons. Hence, in other words, the Sacred Congregation in the cited letter merely said to the bishop that, if, within the space of a month, he had not followed the counsel given him to resign of his own free will, he would have been called to Rome and invited to defend and justify himself from all the charges made against him. If the bishop succeeded in refuting them, the Holy Father would have been most happy to proclaim his innocence; in the hypothesis then of a deposition or of a voluntary resignation the concordat would have been scrupulously observed on the part of the Holy See.

These explanations seemed to satisfy the Minister; at all events they had no reply and hence the Holy See, with reason, considered them accepted. For the rest, the Papal Nuncio had on various occasions informd the French Government, both during the present and the preceding ministry, of the painful situation in the diocese of Laval, insisting upon the necessity of applying some remedy.

In the meantime Monsignor Geay directed a letter to the Holy Father under date of June 24 (Docum. VI), in which, without making any reference to that of May 17 and of the communication given to the government, announced that he was to come in the month of October,