CHAPTER X

RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN

The question of the official relations between the Netherlands and the Vatican long vexed Dutch politics. The peculiar nature of the controversies over relations with the papacy are chiefly the result of three factors: (1) the strongly Protestant traditions of the country, (2) the presence of a large body of Catholics whose proportion of the total church affiliated population has been steadily increasing, and (3) the peculiar division of Dutch political party life along both socio-economic and religious lines. Although in a minority, the Catholics have controlled enough seats in parliament to hold the balance of power. During the last few decades before World War II, the Catholic Party was the largest party in the States-General, commanding about a third of its membership.

Before 1814 Catholics played a very small part in the public life of the Netherlands. This was largely due to the fact that the great majority of the Catholics live in the two provinces of Brabant and Limburg, which under the Republic were not members of the United Provinces. This area was known as the Generality Lands and was governed by the central government very much like territories in the United States. In 1814 these provinces became an integral part of the state with the same constitutional position as the other provinces.

With the constitutional revision of 1848 the principle of the separation of Church and State was finally written into the Constitution and all religious bodies were placed on a basis of equality. In the years immediately following this constitutional reform the Catholics supported the Liberals, to whom they felt obligated for the removal of religious discrimination. Taking

1 In 1930, 36.4 percent of the population were members of the Roman Catholic Church; 43.9 percent were affiliated with various branches of the Reformed Church and 14.4 percent had no church affiliations. In 1947 the percentages were respectively 38.5, 41 and 17.
advantage of the freedom granted to all religious bodies under the Constitution, the Vatican proceeded to reestablish the episcopal hierarchy in Holland. When in March, 1853, the Pope issued the "allocution" announcing the reorganization of the Church in Holland he deeply offended Protestant susceptibilities by making Utrecht, the most Protestant city in all Holland, the seat of the episcopate and by stressing the importance of counteracting in Holland the heresies of Calvin. The outraged Protestants addressed mass petitions of protest to the King. The "April Movement," as it was called, stopped short of violence, but was strong enough to upset the Liberal Thorbecke Ministry.

The annexation by Italy of the Papal State in 1870 caused great indignation among Dutch Catholics. Addresses were sent to the King expressing the wish that the Government would not recognize the annexation and urging it to take steps, either alone or in cooperation with other states, to restore the sovereignty of the Papacy. An interpellation to this end was made in the Second Chamber, but the Government refused to adopt the policy pressed upon it, holding that it was incompatible with the Netherlands policy of neutrality. A resolution by Fransen van de Putte declaring that it was not the function of the Government to take the steps urged upon it by the Catholics was defeated, but a resolution merely expressing the approval of the Government’s position was accepted.¹

The question of the relation of the Netherlands to the Papacy arose in another form in the debate on the budget for the Department of Foreign Affairs for 1872. A Liberal member of the Second Chamber proposed an amendment to the budget bill to reduce the appropriation for the Department by the amount of the item for the maintenance of the diplomatic post at the Vatican. Previous to the third Thorbecke Ministry, which came to power in January, 1871, every ministry contained a Department of Reformed Worship and a Department of Roman Catholic Worship.² It was now contended that the discontinuance of the diplomatic post logically followed the loss by the Vatican of its temporal power and the incorporation in the Netherlands

² The Ministry of Fransen van de Putte, February 10, 1866 to June 1, 1866, seems to have been an exception to this rule.