

A TOMB OF JULY

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Here is a victim of three long days that comes to claim some flowers from national piety. It is the religion of Louis XIV, and of Bossuet, killed on 28 July last, at the age of one hundred forty-eight, following a life whose misfortunes were more protracted than the years.

It was born in Paris on 19 March 1682. Bossuet carried it in its cradle to Louis XIV who found it pleasing, and shared his viewpoint with Madame de Maintenon, who agreed with him. This was being born under fortunate circumstances; the smile of the greatest king of Europe, was surely worthy of the breath of the Holy Spirit. All the world believed it except the Pope, that stubborn old man, who imagined that a religion could not be born without his knowing something about it, a claim altogether unreasonable in the age of Corneille and of Racine. The pope consulted his Bellarmine, another kind of man who wrote books which contained little else than what popes thought. As a result, the pope saw clearly that it was impossible for a religion to see the light in Paris on 19 March 1682. The pope closed the book and issued a decree in which he annulled the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet; a major quarrel ensued. But the child kept growing, protected by generous caretakers and embraced in secret by the bishops. Now and then, the Sorbonne brought her some candies, telling her: "Have confidence, Miss, you are not as young as is alleged; in a few days, you will have seventeen well-counted centuries." Only one poor archbishop, named Fénelon, a great visionary spirit, lacking very much in charm, never spoke a flattering word to her. He died, Louis XIV died, Bossuet was dead as was Mr. Colbert. The latter, Minister, Secretary of the State in the Department of Finances was, basically, the true parent of the orphan; the bishop of Meaux [Bossuet - Trans.] agreed wholeheartedly. And so, every one of them died.

Now they tolerated a heresy that grieved the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet, but since it could not thrive by itself, it had recourse to a less than honest pope who had already annulled it two or three times. The pope did as best he could. Unfortunately, the procurators-general who had set themselves up as official guardians of the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet found it irritating that the pope would interfere so strongly in the matters of their ward. They drew up warrants; the pope sent bulls; the heresy produced miracles; the daughter of Colbert signed notes of confession; the Regent exploded into laughter and all Europe after him.

Some philosophers came onto the scene, men who read history more or less well, and could not avoid noticing that for eleven hundred years the pope interfered in the quarrels of nations with their kings. The situation appeared strange to them. Perceiving that the religion of Louis XIV was united with the pope to cremate Cornelius Jansens, who had died of the plague in 1638, they composed against this religion a boundless myth of dethroned kings, of major and minor excommunications, of civil wars, and of everything that ensues from them. The fable started with Zachary I and finished with Sixtus V; one had elevated Pepin the Short as king, the other had declared Henry of Bourbon removed from the throne, apparently so that the ending might not duplicate the beginning. This was a strong blow for a church, which at its birth, was rocked on the knees of an absolute monarch. For all that, she was not troubled; she responded with modesty that she had not done this, but a certain Roman Church whose every action she did not approve of; the full story was clearly told in Fleury [Card. A.-H. Fleury, 1653-1743; minister to Louis XV. - Trans.] The philosophers mocked the rejoinders because, unfortunately, they were very quick-witted. They created such a stir with their myth that the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet, harassed by their cries, by the shadow of Jansens and by the bailiffs of parliaments, no longer knew to which saint they should dedicate themselves.

A revolution arrived just in time to remove its embarrassment by throwing it on the

scaffold. There, since she was the daughter of Bossuet, she made such an eloquent cry that the entire earth was astonished and realized that she should not expire.

Having become impoverished and unhappy, this church was met on the roads of Europe by a soldier who would be king and who believed that God could compose a genealogy for him. But he wanted to be an absolute monarch, and say, in his turn: *I am the throne*. The religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet appeared well-suited for him to arrive at his goal. He could not rest until he had surrounded himself with cardinals and bishops seated at his lecterns with eagle carvings; and more fortunate than the great king, he had the happiness of granting everyone some favors. One day, the pope displeased him, so he offered him a yearly income of six million to live on; this was his way. The pope had the impudence of refusing, preferring to live free in a prison than as a slave in an imperial palace. The religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet saw with its own eyes the chains of its pontiff and received its pay from the same hand that held him prisoner, so well was it respected by the despot!

The religion endured its fate by occasionally caressing the eagles, when one came to tell it that its ancient masters had returned; it cried for joy, entered into a pact with them, and received them at *Notre-Dame* as if receiving God Himself. Prayers, *Te Deum*, mandates, spiritual hymns: it hardly knew how to show its enthusiasm. It would become so free, so free! And it happened quickly. First of all, the gentlemen ministers of the king ordered it to teach *its own proper beliefs*; what is more delightful than to be ordered to teach one's own beliefs! It had the right to a certain allowance that was unjustly converted into a daily salary. It always remained a salary, but was increased by a few million, in the name of the throne and of the altar. It could no longer teach Greek or Latin to a single French student; it could not do so except in minor seminaries, so as not to frighten. When these seminaries became major, the obligation arose of reducing to twenty thousand the number of those in attendance, by ordering them to wear the cassock. When attacked, it did

not have a Minister Secretary of State. One was appointed. It was such an admirable institution that the minister charged with its guardianship could, one of these days, be a good and saintly Muslim, a man who, before sitting at table, would cry aloud solemnly: God is God!

Mixed in with this power and glory were many hardships. The monarchy was not like that of the days at Versailles. Some men moved about, repeating throughout the world that the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet was the apostle of subjection, the accomplice of kings against the people, the pedestal of worm-eaten thrones. The poor female child opened her ears wide on hearing all of this, because it was precisely the reverse of the myth that the XVIIIth century had composed to accuse her of a treachery of eleven hundred years. But what astonished her even more was that the same men who blamed her for so great a servitude praised her teachings to excess and did not want any syllable of them to be changed. And yet, the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet said to itself: if my teachings are so laudable, my conduct must be servile; and if my conduct should not be servile, then my teachings will not be proper. As she reasoned in this way, a man came along and told her: Your teachings are not good, nor is your conduct; both are servile and both are wrong. The man who spoke these words did so with such authority that the Minister Secretary of State, charged with defending the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet, rose from his chair, totally frightened. Three times he invoked the shadow of Bossuet; since he was kept waiting, he called for the king's agent, who arrived immediately. The agent took the orders of His Excellency and proved to the newcomer, by a judgment of the Court of Petty Sessions, that he was clearly in error.

What do destinies depend on? From that day on, the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet went from fall to fall and from minister to minister onto a straw-bed. It was in agony on 28 July, elbow resting on the pillow, head immobilized in the palm of its hand. A talk by Fleury was on the table, half closed; it did not read, did not speak, did not pray;

it was astonished at dying. Standing around it were five figures, staring at it; one carried three crowns on its head and two keys in its hand; the next rested on his sword on which the name *Washington* was inscribed; the third held a petition to the Parliament of England; the other two shook hands, exchanging with a smile the broken symbols of the two royal houses. At the first shot of cannon, the religion of Louis XIV and of Bossuet moved its lips to whisper: “Only a miracle can. . .” and died. The five figures bowed with unbelievable majesty, and the echoes of one thousand worlds repeated: God and freedom!

Now, have some pity for the deceased; she was not evil. Her first mistake was to believe that she knew more than the Roman Church. One should hope that she repented at the hour of death; leave her in peace now that she is that something which is *nameless in any language*, as Bossuet indicated. There is a proposal to erect a monument to her, bearing this inscription: “Without freedom, power and genius were not able to make me immortal.”

The monument is to be placed in the great hall of the Minister of Public Instruction and of Cults, unless the preference falls on the chamber wherein the Council of State discusses the bulls from Rome and supports with heroic vigor *the usages and freedoms* of the Gallican Church.

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