

THE BUDGET FOR WORSHIP UNDER THE REPUBLIC

Article II

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Our first task is to answer the objections which we brought up in the preceding article.

It is seen as illogical for citizens to be constrained by taxes to support at the same time a multitude of contradictory religions: Jewish, Lutheran, Calvinist, Catholic, and all others whom the Republic would choose to recognize and compensate. The tax, they say, must provide for the general needs of society and not for particular needs. Just as each individual bears the expense for postal service by meeting the cost of letters which he receives¹, each one has to pay the minister of worship in whom he has confidence, and who offers in return, at the pleasure of his heart, the anticipated consolations of a better life.

The difference is great; it holds precisely that religion is a general need, a need of all families, and of society itself. The majority of citizens live without ever writing, and without ever receiving letters, but no one lives without fulfilling some religious acts, whether directly in person, or indirectly in the person of his wife, his children, or his servants. He who is totally unbelieving was not always that way; he will perhaps not be so at the end. The religion of his early years will probably complete his last days. There is no public service which enters more deeply into the life of everybody than religious service or ministry.

True, not everyone understands or accepts this in the same way. And the result? It

follows that ministers must have different personalities to respond to the differences of faith, but not that their ministry should cease to be a public and social need. If there is such a thing as a public and social need, then the State must supply for it, just as it supplies for all other general needs of the nation. It is not the Catholic who supports the Protestant minister, nor the Protestant who supports the Catholic priest — it is the State which supports both in the name of society, for their role as servants of society.

I say ‘servants’ and not functionaries. The functionary obtains his authority from civil society; the servant, even the most devoted one, can hold them from another source. It is not necessary to originate from someone to serve him.

The objection of one religion supporting another by means of a budget presupposes a degree of intolerance such has never arisen even in the most fanatic or the most scrupulous mind. We do not pay taxes as believers, but as citizens; in our minds, we do not apply them to this or that service. Even if that were ever the case, no sincerely religious man could really be disappointed because, in reality, his faith is amply rewarded for what he does for the faith of another. In this matter, reciprocity, which is the law of all relationships, is all the more natural in that each religion, even the most imperfect or the most corrupt, nonetheless contains a notion of God, and of interaction with Him; this establishes between everyone a link which, while it does not reach brotherhood, allows everyone to draw without guilt from the heart of one and the same nation his material subsistence.

Moreover, it is not the religious confessions who rail against civil inequalities between them by reason of taxes; no, the difficulty arises from the unbeliever, the man who rejects all religions and who considers himself wronged in seeing religion given equal rank with necessities paid for by the State. Concerning the budget for worship, the unbeliever is moved by an idea rather than by a fact. In his eyes, faith is a foul remnant of the past, a kind of tenacious affliction, very difficult to understand, for which a kind of sanitarium should be built somewhere out of the way, until that day when the light of reason will have dissipated the forlorn remnants of the ages of superstition. The unbeliever does not wish to persecute faith; rather, he perhaps wishes to let it remain free; but to support it in the name of the State, as an important and serious interest of a nation, this is what he cannot accept. The budget for worship is the last trace of the political alliance of societies with

God: it must be eradicated. That the priest agrees to pay the rabbi, and the rabbi to pay the priest, at an appropriate time, this is a touching and defensible accord. But if the philosopher lends a hand to such a treaty, if he draws from his purse some shiny coins to place them in the bottomless pit of the vestry, could the Republic ever be able to condemn him to the same fate?

We believe that the Republic could in fact do this, and for a reason which the philosopher himself can understand. In fact, all of us, believing men, who value our faith more than our life, are we not all, as regards the budget, humble debtors of the philosopher, as long as philosophers occupy a university chair? Is there not a budget for philosophy as there is for worship? Come now! The priest agrees to pay the sage but the sage hesitates to pay the priest?

This is clearly not a simple matter of reciprocity between religions, but a reciprocity between all forms of human thought and conscience. Religion and philosophy, revealed tradition and theoretical speculation, faith and reason: these are the highest essentials in the lives of peoples. They circulate, pure or tainted, in the veins of humans, and they need to have, in the heart of every civilized nation, some representatives whom the State endows, in the name of everyone, with honorable and assured means of living. To leave this care to individual efforts, under the pretext that philosophy does not like religion and that religion does not like philosophy, or that religions are divided among themselves, and that each one need pay only for himself and for his own — this is to invest the most revered activities with an intolerant egoism, and to dignify that egoism by abandoning to it, without help, the entire destiny of the human spirit.

No, that is not what the Republic should be doing. Freedom to think, to believe, to worship, in no way diminishes the duties of society towards religion. Religion stands as the foundation of all human institutions, of all rights, and of all duties: it remains a profound and universal need of man. It remains a fundamental social reality which society has to support in the same way that it supports all important public services. The single difference between the former state of religion and its current one lies in this point: that consciences are free to choose the religious form which suits them, or even to reject all forms. Indeed, the budget of worship changes nothing about that freedom. Am I less free to be Catholic because the French State supports Protestant ministers?

Is the rationalist less free to reject faith in Jesus Christ because the State repairs the walls of Notre-Dame cathedral and gives sixteen canons of Paris something to live on?

Indeed there would be a contradiction between the budget of worship and the freedom of worship only if a single religion received the consideration of the State. In that case, all other religions would have the right to complain about the inferior and precarious situation in which they were placed. Since all of them are remunerated according to the number of their faithful and of their ministers, clearly they enjoy equal influence, the same degree of public honor and of unfettered action. The difference that remains between them does not arise from the budget; it comes from a superior cause, which is the very diversity of their intrinsic strength. That cause, neither freedom nor persecution can destroy because nothing can destroy the nature of beings.

We will shortly examine the second objection dealing with how the budget makes dependent both the priest and religion.

Endnote [Trans.]

1. At the time, the postage fee was paid by the recipient.

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