

CHARLESTOWN ARTICLES
CONCERNING THE BUDGET¹

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We have not read these two articles; we know of them only by the analysis given recently in the *Ami de la Religion* (Friend of Religion). The author does not believe that the situation of the clergy of France is similar to that of the clergy of the United States; this is the first reason he gives to oppose the suppression of the ecclesiastical budget among us. Assuredly, he has the right to say that, the two clergies are not in the same situation: one is independent of civil power, chooses the bishops intended to govern it, assembles freely in councils, establishes schools where it will, founds monastic associations to enlighten civilization, offers the nuptial blessing to whomever it pleases, refuses Christian burial to those who die outside its bosom, does not have a minister of cults to send it circular letters, nor a council of state to examine pontifical bulls, nor prefects to make claims on the Treasury in its favor, nor mayors to supervise it. The other, as we know, enjoys a different kind of fate. But because of this difference, it is not easy to conclude that the suppression of the budget, whose absence is useful to the Church in the United States, is deadly to the Church of France. What is obvious is that the Church of the United States is free and that the Church of France is not.

Besides, both clergies reside in a country wherein freedom is available to whomever wishes to take it; a country divided by opinions, enthusiastic for worldly pleasures, equally seasoned. If the clergy of the United States is smaller in number, it also has fewer members to feed it, and its disadvantage on that score is very great because those who are not its faithful members belong to a distinct sect, whereas in France the latter are simply unbelievers and hold to the Church by their wives and their children.

Nowhere is the difficulty to support oneself more evident for the clergy than in the United States and in Ireland — in the United States for the two-fold reason of the small number of Catholics and of the sects that divide the rest of the inhabitants among themselves; in Ireland because of the poverty of the country and because of the Established Church whose hand is extended to all doors, no longer to bless in the name of Jesus Christ, but to collect in the name of the law. Nonetheless, the populations of the United States and of Ireland are Catholics who give us the example of a clergy without a budget, and thus prove to us that this is possible, not only because this is a fact, but because this fact exists despite enormous local difficulties. The faith that surmounts them there, can surmount them everywhere. If faith is lacking, we acknowledge that the clergy will not survive without a budget; then again, even with a budget it will not survive because to provide gold is not to give life.

Here, we touch on the very heart of the issue because it has to be said at least once that our adversaries know this very well. They know that a clergy can live anywhere where there are true believers; they know that the Apostles had nothing, that for three centuries the State never gave us anything, and that later the riches of the Church came from ordinary believers more than from kings; moreover, that even today laws take into consideration the effects of Catholic charity, so much do they fear its consequences. Our adversaries know that; they rise against the suppression of the budget of the clergy because of one undying thought that they dare not express openly: they believe there is no longer any faith in France. If they believed that there once was faith in France, they would their take treasury bonds and throw them into the fire with more joy than Abraham would have felt in immolating a vile animal instead of his only son. If we could prove to them that faith does exist in France, they would not ask any more of us; in the end, all our thinking fails before this idea: there is no more faith!

Ah well! How unfortunate, there is no more faith! What will you do? What they will do, they say, is that *they will not extinguish the wick that still smolders*. They will submit themselves to the most shameful servitude out of love for the remains of Christianity, not out of any hope to save it — one cannot save a religion in which its own believers no longer believe — but in the hope of slowing down its fall and to glean some souls along the centuries harvested. They will extend their hands to princes, so as to be able to continue giving alms; they will receive rituals from the ministers so as to be able to continue to pray;

they will remain silent so as to be able to continue to speak; they will adore one man so as to be able to continue adoring God; they will turn their abasement into a virtue worth respecting, if that were possible, calling pride the memory of Christian independence, and saying of Christianity what Andromachus said about his son:

May he retain a modest remembrance of his ancestors;
He is of divine blood, but he is the last of it.

When those whom we battle look into the depth of their thought, they go even further; because the answer would be too easy if they stopped there. Indeed, was there any faith in France when its early preachers came to bring it there; did they think of asking the State for bread so as not to die? Was there any faith in the world when the Apostles received orders to convert it? And yet, they were ordered: "Have no gold or silver, no money in your purse, no bag for the road, only one tunic, no shoes, not even a walking stick." Consequently, bishops and priests can survive in a country where there is no faith because wherever bishops and priests go, faith comes with them. Those who think that a budget for the clergy is needed because there is no faith in France reproach not only the faith of the people, they remove from over the sanctuary, with great anguish, the cloak fallen over it so that it might prophesy to the end. If they are priests, they call their own virtue into doubt; trembling, they consider themselves mutilated remnants of the priesthood, and tell themselves what the temple of Jerusalem told itself: the gods are leaving.

But they do not stop even there. To explain their destruction, they believe in the destruction of the world. Because the Savior asked *if, at His coming, the Son of man would find faith on earth*, they regard the weakening of theirs as a sign. In former times, the saints strove to prolong the centuries by their virtues, to delay the fall of the Roman Empire to which they believed was attached the fate of the universe; in fact, so great is the power of saints that their prayers count as years. This is not what the men of our time do; they allow themselves to fall into decadence, and they console themselves with their friends, thinking that the world will not move far away. I do not know what to make of it, but it matters little to me. Tomorrow or in a thousand years, it will always be the eve of eternity. As St. Augustine used to say: If you are not predestined, predestine yourself. Every Christian has to say: If there is only one minute left, let us make it into a century. It is a great pity that,

in order to safeguard a budget, one must believe that the end of the world is near; look here, I am merely revealing the genuine thought of Christians who support the budget. They are brought to that view logically, and hold to it. Meanwhile, the unbeliever is amazed to see Christianity still alive after its having been pounded by the press, and that in all of Europe something warned superior minds that the Gospel is the last word of humanity. Meanwhile, a religious reaction announced itself from the four winds of the sky; and when de Maistre,² *dying along with Europe*, from his bed looked on this healing future, one could see in the dust of the throne some Christians picking up a few coins so that there be at least one candle on the altar when the trumpet of judgment sounds.

We are far from agreeing with each other. Indeed, we do not even agree whether there is any more faith left in France. If that calamity had in fact arrived we would recognize only one remedy: the refusal of the budget. Faith is not a matter of money; when it is driven out of the house of the poor, it is not preserved in palaces. One does not embalm faith with aromatic herbs to give it time to wait for better days. One does not ordain priests by depriving the army of a few privileged conscripts. Not at all. Faith is born without so much display; it is born alone, like something divine that has no need of man's help, and, after it has died, it can be reborn only in the swaddling clothes of its crib. If you wish to make men believe, start by believing yourself. If you yourself wish to believe, separate yourself from what is human and entrust yourself to God. Never will the world recognize as divine he who looks forward to a bit of gold fashioned in the image of Caesar. Never will man convert the world unless he first proves that he has no need of it. No doubt, there are times when religion can have, in addition, some gold, some marble, some shiny stones, some altars and tombs filled with the ostentation of something undying that is the heir of all generations. That is all well and good when the earth believes; it has no need of proof, it believes now because it believed in the past. But let unbelief slowly come out of hell, and we see the lips of the impious imprinted on the shiny edges of the chalice, then is time to call for help from poverty, and to give to the world a second example of faith.

And so, our adversaries should not be surprised as to how little they understand us. They believe that gold preserves, and we, in turn, believe that only dirt has that power because only God, by breathing on it, can make of dirt an immortal soul.

After that, the *Ami de la Religion* and the *Catholic Miscellany* ask us how the bishops will pay for their commitments, how one will build, if necessary, churches, seminaries, episcopal residences, rectories, what will become of parish boards of directors, that is to say, in a word: how will we have money when there is no more money to be had? This question depends on another one: how does one give faith to those who longer have faith? See here: we have already answered the question; we are sure that we cannot give faith to those who no longer have it by affirming that if seminarians were not exempt from conscription, that would *suffice to extinguish the priesthood, and consequently to destroy religion*. Fortunately, history protects Catholics against dreadful prophecies. Seminarians have long been called to military service indifferently; many holy priests, born under the tent, offered to God the bloodless sacrifice.

Enough of this; let us leave those men who, in the name of faith, sometimes require of us less severe words; we know who they are. Never a courageous or fraternal word escaped their lips; never, sitting together in exile, on the same stone, did we find any sign that they had ever spoken the language of our country.

ENDNOTES [Trans.]

1. *De deux articles du Catholic Miscellany de Charlestown, sur la suppression du budget du clergé de France* [Concerning two articles of the *Catholic Miscellany* of Charlestown, on the suppression of the budget for the clergy of France] - Charlestown, Massachusetts. USA
2. Joseph-Marie, Count de Maistre (1751-1821); French writer and philosopher.

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