

# FREEDOM OF INSTRUCTION

## *Article II<sup>1</sup>*

(18 October 1830)

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We have already several times requested of the court the actualization of the Charter which established freedom of instruction as a principle of our civic rights. Freedom of instruction is no longer an opinion; it is part of the agreement which attaches the French people to the new crown; it is the condition for our oaths; it has been paid for with blood.

Quite remarkably, some two years ago this question was being debated, feebly among the liberals, with vigor by a group of Catholics, when the Revolution came to realize that the wishes of the people were among those hopes that opposed each other during sixteen years. Nothing indicated that the freedom of instruction was desired strongly enough, was popular enough, to find a place in a legislation overcome by other weapons than speech. The liberals had nothing to gain in this new emancipation of the mind. Indeed, the University<sup>2</sup> of the Restoration had left them masters of studies, of the sciences and of youth. What was to be the character of a University directed and reformed by them? No intellectual power can be imagined as more victoriously oppressive than that which they had obtained by simply holding on to a monopoly, consecrated by usage, and that the Restoration itself had obtained expressly for it [the University] the blessing of the bishops. And yet, freedom of instruction finally won out on 7 August. At that point, it became connected in minds with the principles of the former Charter and those of the new one, with freedom of creeds, freedom in the home, freedom of opinions, freedom of error and of truth. Not one voice was raised in favor of that respectable structure called the University.

There is no further need for argument: freedom of instruction is a law; it is contemporary and associated with all living power in France; it rests on the four feet of the throne. Nonetheless, it is useful to give some explanation even when one does not need to spell out the logic.

Restriction of instruction is incompatible with any and all freedom, because freedom is obtained by learning, is preserved by learning, has learning as its goal — namely, the progress of the human race in religion, in the sciences, in the arts, in industry, in body and in mind. If the centuries have painfully given birth to freedom, if it has cost men so many tears to arrive at this twilight of barbarism in which they are still living, what was the reason for that if not that they had to seize freedom of instruction with as much agony as Prometheus suffered when he seized fire from the heavens? Indeed, long before Kalif Omar,<sup>3</sup> who thought that everything was in the Koran, and all the way up to Napoleon, who thought that everything depended on the point of a sword, despots wanted to be the sole teachers of people — bolder in that than God Himself, Who did not seek to be the sole teacher of man living in the world, lest He make the latter a slave to truth. Freedom was therefore a late arrival because spreading the idea of it was for a long time very difficult, and the Catholic Church was the first spiritual society to be strong enough to bring the human race into communication with itself.

This, no one doubts; everyone knows that instruction and freedom, throughout the ages, have created two pathways, illustrious and inseparable in their destiny. How then could instruction be subordinate in this day when freedom has been victorious? See here! Just because there came from the head of a soldier, during trying times, an academy fully empowered, a kind of Minerva,<sup>4</sup> half pagan, half gothic — in better days could France not sweep away this phantom which aspires to immortality? That would be too ungrateful and inconsequential; it would constitute serious ignorance of the source from which freedom springs, and which survives in the world of kings who, at the gates of their empire, keep out the lessons of Europe as others might deny entry to pestilence.

Consider this: if freedom can dominate instruction, after having been its victim for six thousand years, absolute power had the same right and still retains it. Everything that freedom can do, absolute power can do likewise, with this difference, however, that freedom can only achieve what is holy and just. Woe to power if the oppression of instruction is one of its rights! Willful disregard of one's forebears benefits no one; humanity does not choose to suffer in order to bestow its hopes to another race, its youth to a board of ten professors. Humanity seeks progress, that is the goal of all freedom; but is progress possible under a monopoly? Progress has the right of life and death over the minds of men, during a third of their existence. As sovereign, it regulates the duration of studies, their goals, their methods; like the sun, it believes itself obliged to remain immobile. One day, Clovis<sup>5</sup> burned what he had adored; today, monopoly adores what it adored yesterday, what it will adore tomorrow. It remains kneeling before Greek and Latin, as in the times when these two languages encompassed all literature and all contemporary refinement. If it ever abandons its static and jealous nature, it will not escape that necessity, which without opposition, sees to it that invention languishes and that progress fails. Is it by following an established method that new ones are discovered? Is it by engaging in university studies that one will discover the effects of an emancipated education?

To seek social freedom and the progress of humanity without freedom of instruction is to wish for an event without a cause.

It has not been remarked upon enough that all freedom entails freedom of instruction. Freedom of the press is freedom of instruction, freedom of religion is freedom of instruction. Freedom of the podium and of the bar, freedom of industry, of the arts, of traveling, are freedoms of instruction. And the reason for that lies in the very definition of *freedom*, in that mysterious word which has always moved people, despite the terrible difficulties of its history, despite the blood and the fallacies. It is like the divine word *religion*, which hypocrisy, error, and the stake could not cripple, and on which all nations based their aspirations with an invincible patience. What, then, is freedom? It is the rule of thought over the rule of force; in the political order,

it is the victorious combat of the spirit against the flesh, to which all Christianity is reduced. Like the Catholic Church, the human race demands that the material sword be subject to the spiritual sword; it will not flag in its demand for this outcome until it has obtained it. Indeed, the human race would never be able to imagine that regiments of cavalry had a natural right to govern men, nor that the thought of a single man had the right to influence the thoughts of everyone. That being so, it is easy to see why the history of instruction — that is to say, of the propagation of thought — is the history of freedom, why almost all freedoms are freedoms to instruct and to be instructed. Finally, it is an enormous contradiction, in word and in fact, to label as free a country in which the rostrum and the pulpit are unfettered, but in which the school is shut down.

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### ***ENDNOTES***

1. Article published in *L'Avenir*, newspaper (1830), Later collected in: *Lacordaire Journaliste*, by P. Fesch. Delhomme et Briguet. Paris, 1897.  
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2. The body of teachers, chosen by the State, to administer instruction at all levels.  
- Trans.
3. Second Kalif (581-644), successor to Abu Bakr. - Trans.
4. Roman goddess of wisdom, sprung from Jove's brow; the Greek Athena.  
- Trans.
5. Founder of the Frankish monarchy (466?-511). - Trans.