

LIFE OF
REV. FATHER LACORDAIRE

Vol. 1 [Extract]

Joseph-Théophile Foisset

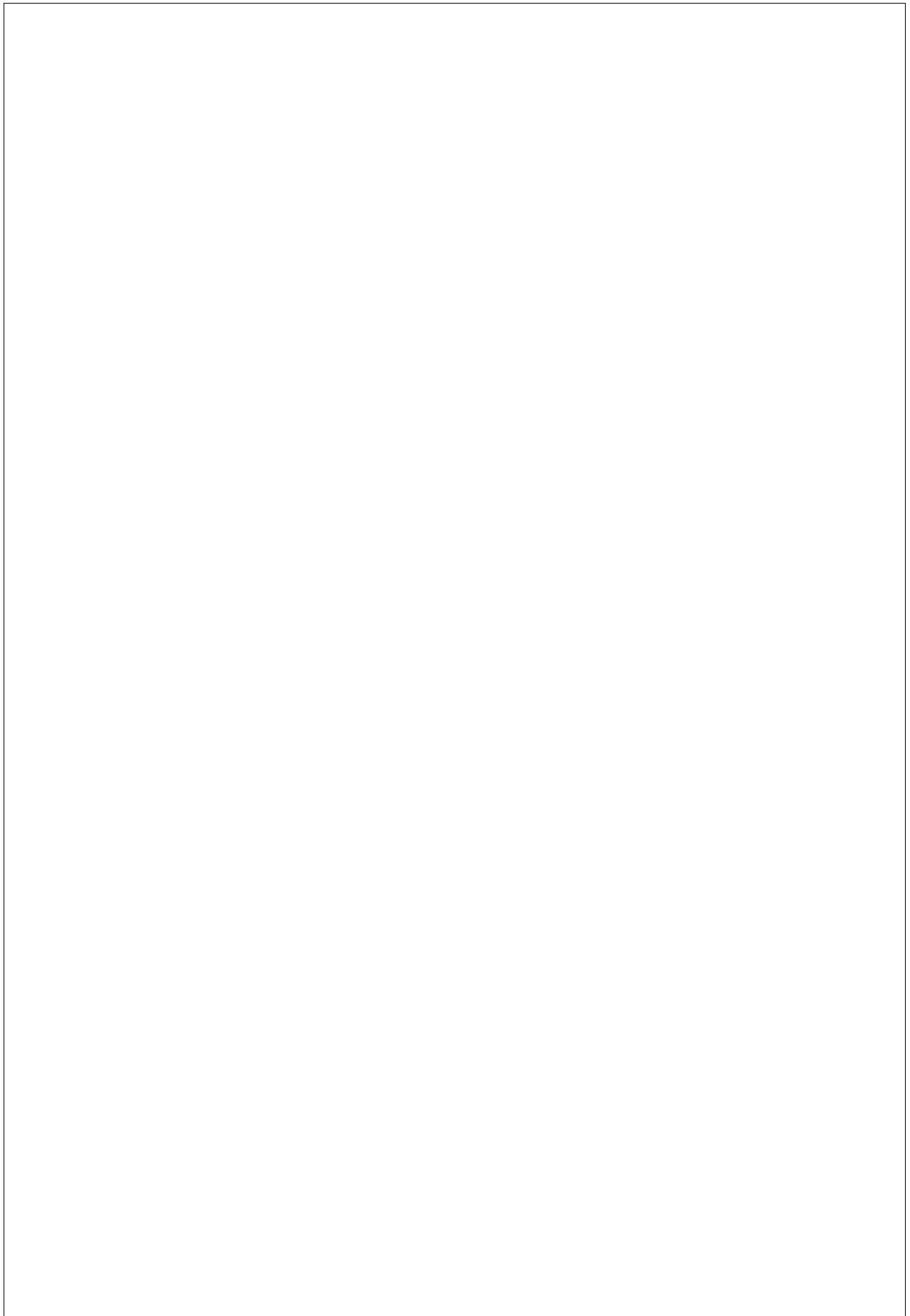
Vie du R. P. Lacordaire
Tome Premier [Extrait]
Joseph-Théophile Foisset

Paris
Librairie Jacques Lecoffre
Lecoffre Fils et C^{ie}, Successeurs
20, rue Bonaparte

1870

Translated by the Brothers CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

This work was composed from memories and from correspondence. When I knew Lacordaire, he was seventeen years old, I was nineteen. Since then, I have not lost sight of him for even one day. Moreover, I had the good fortune that my memories — very strong indeed — were continually checked by the most undeniable of testimony: by letters written at the very moment when things were happening. In referring to those letters, I am very careful; I indicate the date and I name the persons to whom they were addressed. From them, I cite their most remarkable passages in quotation marks; but I must give notice that, having to meld into my report the facts that arose from the letters, I have had very few scruples about relating these facts without quotation marks, in the very words used by the author of the letter; I believed that, on this point, it was sufficient to indicate my sources at the bottom of the page. [*Moved to Endnotes - Trans.*]

With the same discretion, I have drawn from the admirable work that Father Lacordaire dictated on his deathbed.

Of all tasks, it has always been a delicate one to write a history of one's own times. And the task becomes even more difficult if the author publishes the work in his lifetime, if he leaves this work to the impassioned judgments of his contemporaries! Most men prefer to hear the praises of that which they love. What the Hebrews demanded of the prophet, that is what men demand of the historian: Tell us things that please us.¹ But history is history; it has no value except by way of truth.

I am not a eulogist, I am a witness. I come to relate what I saw, I can only relate it the way I saw it; I may have seen it imperfectly, but I am unable to lie.

I have written this book, as much as it was in me, in the presence of God, in a spirit of complete submission to His Church, the Catholic, apostolic, and Roman Church. For fifty years I have been on the ramparts for the defense of my faith. I pray that God will grant me the grace of dying as I have lived. Especially do I pray that the biography of Father Lacordaire will not be a contradiction to my rather long life, during which — I dare compliment myself here — I never for a single day wavered in fidelity to the Church and to the Holy See.

Joseph-Théophile Foisset

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INTRODUCTION

The decline of spiritual authority; causes of this decline — Anti-Christian sentiment of the eighteenth century and of the French Revolution — Sterility of error — Why Bonaparte created the Concordat — Organic Articles; supremacy of the State in matters of religion — Bishops, ecclesiastical prefects; humiliation of the Church of France — Attitude of certain Catholic writers — The University of the Empire — Imprisonment and suppression of Pius VII — The question of the institution of Bishops; Council of 1811; Concordat of Fontainebleau — The Church under the Restoration — Failure of the alliance between the throne and the altar — *The Émigrés* of the Church of France: Concordat of 1817 — The advanced age of the Bishops — Contrast with the vitality of France at that time — Lacordaire's frame of mind when he entered the seminary

One can hardly understand the life of a famous man without first having gained precise knowledge of the era in which God granted him to live. This is true for whomever appears in history, but how much more for Father Lacordaire! Who, more than he, was a man of his times? Who was involved earlier than he in the very muddled conflict of the nineteenth century? And so, before relating his life, I would like, if I may, to give readers a full understanding of the first years of that century, a period that influenced the childhood and adolescence of Lacordaire, and made him who he was. Before anything else, I would like explain the state of the Church, initially under the First Empire, then under the Restoration, when Henri Lacordaire entered the seminary. Finally, I would like to present an exact idea of the state of minds regarding religion and politics in both periods. But we need to start a bit further back in time.

In the Middle Ages, the supremacy of religious authority generally prevailed in Christian Europe, although often astoundingly misunderstood. But in France, starting with Philip the Fair, a reaction of despotism mixed with violence and cunning, the jealousy and the excessive servility of legal counselors, the lack of forcefulness in the clergy, delivered the Church increasingly to him who was called the "Bishop from Without," that is to say, a master, "well armed and always present in its breast." Because of this, Catholic lifeblood was immediately and notably sapped. The Church would no longer see a St. Anselm, a St. Thomas Aquinas, a St. Bonaventure, nor a St. Bernard. The great schism of the West, the cries for reform in Constance and Basel, the rapid defection to Protestantism, not only of the three Scandinavian kingdoms but also of England, Scotland, and more than half of Germany, and finally, the eruption of Calvinism in the heart of France — all these factors shook the authority of the Holy See deeply everywhere. Later, the stubborn shrewdness of Jansenism, reinforced in the eighteenth century by parliamentary Gallicanism, had in our daily lives practically ruined among us that sublime authority.

Then, and only then (let us not forget), anti-Christian sentiments reared their head. Everything favored the ruin of souls: at court, the public scandals of the Regency and those of the overly-long life of Louis XV, the worldliness of the clergy, the almost universal dispersal of monks, the sophisticated disorders of the nobility, the Jansenistic and Gallican spite of the middle class, the eloquent sophisms of Rousseau, the literary eminence of Voltaire, and finally, the deplorable insufficiency of contemporary apologetics. Should we be surprised that from 1760 on, anti-Christian opinions burst like grape-shot in the innumerable pamphlets emanating from Ferney,² endlessly filled with verve, that animation which makes impiety so contagious and so popular? The Jesuits were swept out like dust and scattered by the wind. Voltaire was carried in triumph in Paris. Anti-Christian sentiments reigned in all the salons, throned in all the academies; henceforth, or very nearly so, it will be the only topic in all the rostrums from Mirabeau to Robespierre. It is the anti-Christian views of the Constituent Assembly alone that explain why this Assembly, by set purpose, separated itself from

the Church, whose writings were so favorable to the reform of abuses and to the development of civic freedoms. Anti-Christian feelings explain why the Church was despoiled, without taking into account the offers she had made to defray a large part of the debt of the State. It is anti-Christian views that allow us to understand why the Church was subverted from top-to-bottom when the State arrogated to itself the power to reconfigure dioceses, like the no less excessive right to abolish the Concordat of Francis I, and to transfer to non-religious electors the choice of bishops, bypassing altogether confirmation by the Pope. Incompetence was flagrant; the violation of freedom of religion, clear as day; but, at all costs, it was necessary to portray the Church as incompatible with the Revolution, and the Revolution incompatible with the Church.³

At the fall of Robespierre, it is true, the tide of anti-Christian feelings was stemmed, but it did not abandon the territory it had gained. For another eight years — and here, I let Father Lacordaire speak:

The Church presented to angels and to men only extensive ruins. The remains of its hierarchy, decimated by a revolution which spared no virtue, wandered, for the most part, in exile. Its temples were converted to secular usages; some were destroyed; others closed and emptied; still others consecrated to the schism that had been inaugurated, under Louis XIV, by the men of Port-Royal, and which grown bigger by fear at the feet of the gallows, coveted the bloody heritage of the saints. The monasteries, with which the Church had peopled cities and wilderness areas, became factories, farms, prisons, or uninhabited places. The Church retained nothing of the heritage which it had acquired through centuries of charity. Since she herself was barren, no one could foresee her bringing about near the overturned altar such men who one day would be able to help their exceptional predecessors in rebuilding her from the debris.

And yet, the Church of France, now impoverished and destitute, having scarcely a chalice from which to drink the blood of its Master — the Church of France had conquered its enemies. From that very powerful Revolution, which the human spirit had prepared by three centuries of labor and which had given birth to so many men and to so many extraordinary events, no belief was able to emerge. The Revolution had destroyed a monarchy, won battles, terrified Europe; it did everything except what could change the world. The limit had been crossed at which error had enough consistency to remain the common faith and bond between people; indeed the point had been reached at which error could no longer join two men together, and where it remained *as if overwhelmed by its triumph* [emphasis in original]. Although the Church in France had been disturbed by a stubborn schism [Jansenism] — which tore at it from within for one hundred fifty years — it was impossible for the Revolution to introduce a national religion. What saves and perpetuates error is that portion of truth mixed in it, and the authority thereby conferred on it. The more error increases, the more of truth it loses, and all the more does its authority diminish, because it disturbs ever increasingly the fundamental principles which it had retained in its understanding. Minds become amazed and follow error to the precipice where it is carried; but, as soon as they attempt to understand it, it fades away, it escapes their grasp very quickly even, like a phantom whose reality disappears before those who attempt to touch it from close up. And then, all of a sudden, man finds himself alone, naked, without beliefs, gasping for breath in the face of truth.

This is where France stood the day after its first Revolution. The sterility of error, unable in the midst of that universal upheaval to establish a belief and a church, revealed that its final hour had arrived. Napoleon understood it in the same way that, fifteen centuries earlier, Constantine had understood the fall of idolatry. When a sect of Deists approached him to ask him to recognize their religion as that of the State, he responded with the answer he already had in his thoughts for everyone who hoped to take advantage of the heritage of the Roman Church: “There are only four hundred of you!” The Concordat of 1801, between the Holy See and the French Republic, was the outcome of the power that

truth had gained in a struggle in which it seemed to have lost everything. A great captain, by the battles he had won, was elevated to be the head of the State; he tried to learn what kind of support he had in the human spirit, but found he had none, other than a ruined Church which, for a century, had become the folk tale of skeptics.⁴

Nonetheless, we should not exaggerate this victory.

True, in spite of the Revolution, Catholicism remained the religion of the vast majority of Frenchmen who had one. On those grounds, it remained a force, the liveliest and most potent of social forces. It is the eternal honor of the genius of Napoleon's government that, surrounded by Deists and atheists, it alone had a clear intuition of that significant fact, and took it seriously into account. From that came the Concordat of 1801, whose greatness should in no way be minimized nor its importance underestimated.

But the Catholic faith was not the rule of life for the First Consul; he was not a St. Louis,⁵ he was a politician. He was less resolved to serve Religion (this is a critical point) than to have Religion serve him.

No one could be mistaken, when on promulgating the Concordat, he seemed to have watered down this very solemn treaty by a long series of legislative directives, of which he was the sole author, and to which he gave the name, unknown until then, *Organic Articles*.⁶

These marked the supremacy of the State in matters of religion. In proposing to the legislative body that it establish as law those Leonine provisions, the most religious and the most moderate of Napoleon's councillors, Portalis the elder, expressed this principle: "Public power is nothing unless it is *everything*; the Ministers of Religion should not claim the ability to limit it."⁷ These words need no comment.

The head of the Catholic Church was declared to be in a state of permanent suspicion; every act emanating from him was treated as void as regards France, unless it had been approved by the government.⁸ The day was to come when, under threat of exile, all religious correspondence with him would be forbidden.⁹ General Councils — those which represented the Church as a whole — were designated as *foreign* synods.¹⁰ It was forbidden to publish their decisions in France without the express authorization of the political party in power. Interior synods, even purely diocesan ones, simple gatherings of priests with the bishop presiding, were proscribed. The guardianship of the canons of the Church was entrusted to a council of laymen, named by the Prince and removable *ad nutum* [at will - Trans.], almost all of them chosen from among the sons of Voltaire. This council served as supreme judge in cases of abuse of power committed by clerics. Abuse was defined as "any procedure which, in the exercise of Catholic worship, could compromise the honor of citizens, trouble their conscience, degenerate into oppression against them, in injury or in public scandal."¹¹ That is to say, as Bentham¹² wrote concerning the word *libel*: "whatever can displease whomever for any reason whatsoever."

All of Napoleon's correspondence shows that, in his eyes, the bishops (*his* bishops, he used to call them) were simply ecclesiastical monitors, charged with *managing* the clergy under the direction of the Minister of Worship,¹³ a title equally new and insignificant, used to designate the government's commissioner appointed to *supervise religions*.¹⁴ Besides, even if there were still bishops, there was no episcopal body left. Indeed, the Minister of Worship had as his mission not only to see that the bishops refrained from any oral conference between each other, but also that they not consult each other in written letters (that would have been *to hold a council by correspondence*). Not only bishops, but all the pastors in primary centers headed by justices of the peace were to be named and approved by the Prince; moreover, they were to bind themselves by oath to report any incident that could endanger the State.¹⁵ The easy removal of priests under the hand of the bishop, himself subject to even greater pressure, rounded out the system.¹⁶

Even that was not enough. Every ecclesiastical establishment, other than the seminaries, was suppressed.¹⁷ No group or association of men or of women was allowed *under pretext of religion* without express authorization from the government.¹⁸ The rules governing the organization of seminaries were to be

submitted for the Prince's approval. Concerning the theological limits of the spiritual power, the professors were held to teach the doctrines recommended by the secular power. Would you believe it? Every year, bishops were ordered to send to the Minister of Religions the names of the students in seminaries and to perform no ordinations until such time as the government had approved the number of candidates.

With that, the Church of France — I saw this with my own eyes — fell to an even lower condition than one could fully describe.¹⁹ Emigrant priests were returning, no doubt under amnesty, but still suspect. Nonetheless, the clergy took up its ministry with no less zeal, and with an impartiality worthy of the Church's finest hours. Never were the episcopacy and the priesthood more exemplary in their morals, more irreproachably committed even to the most insignificant labors of their sacred ministry. But, at the same time, the clergy applied itself fully to obtain forgiveness for its resurrection. If, in the Church, the priestly virtues were not rare — this needs to be said: outstanding personalities were lacking. The monarchy of Louis XV had not formed any, and the long years of exile had not exhausted in the clergy the courage to suffer, but, rather, the courage to fight. Not one of those confessors of the faith yielded on the *Credo*, as did the clergy under Henry VIII and Gustaf Wasa.²⁰ Nonetheless, without sensing the accompanying humiliation, they were subjected to the law of the victor. Many of the *organic* charges had been in force under the *ancien régime*, such that they were not as outraged by them as we are today. They gave no thought to the fact that the *ancien régime* had been shattered and dishonored as despotic by the Revolution to such a degree that the heirs of the Revolution were not in a position, it seems, to restore the regime's tyranny and make it worse.

I say: *to make it worse*. Indeed, what had never been seen before, the pastoral letters of the bishops could no longer be published without the express permission of the prefect, who was sometimes Protestant, more often than not a non-believer. And this lasted until the censure of episcopal writings was concentrated in a special bureau in Paris, under the watchful eye of the First Consul, (and, later,) the Emperor.²¹ Even more, the word of God was placed under police surveillance. Denis Frayssinous was summoned²² by Fouché²³ to include in some fashion, in the conferences which he gave on the existence of God in the Church of St. Sulpice, some praise of military conscription. The first time, a special report from Portalis to the Emperor was needed to quiet the storm.²⁴ The extremely careful moderation of the preacher's language was unsuccessful in having his conferences tolerated until the end of the series.

And yet, even in the neutralized position given it, the new episcopacy could still have maintained some of its dignified attitude, which, during the persecution, had gained the respect of Europe. It is painful for me to say this: the episcopacy did not know how to do so. It lavished too much incense on the new Cyrus.²⁵ To be sure, legitimate recognition was due to Napoleon for having desired the Concordat of 1801. But in 1802, when the first provisions appeared, how can we not judge the author of the Concordat for the legislative dispositions he added to this great act, in glaring contempt of the Holy See? Obviously, praise was to be kept within certain limits. History would not be able to remain silent concerning the fact that the Holy See was not protected by many bishops. In this matter, some of them were short-sighted to the very end, even during the captivity of Pius VII.²⁶

At the same time, the writers who professed Catholicism had adopted, in the *Mercure de France* and the *Journal des Débats* (shortly *Journal de l'Empire*), a tactic which they felt was appropriate, as if something that was not respectable could nonetheless be resourceful for Catholics: they lauded Napoleon excessively so that he would allow them to scold the Revolution and Voltaire. The Master accepted their flatteries; but as for the rest, he rudely imposed silence on them.²⁷ Unfortunately, it so happened that many of them disgraced themselves to no purpose, not without compromising, to a certain degree, the cause they had intended to serve.

Fortunately, other Catholic writers were, in this respect, blameless. Everyone knows that the author of *Génie du Christianisme*²⁸ publicly and immediately broke away from the murderer of the Duke of Enghien.²⁹ A man filled with faith, the poet Ducis,³⁰ refused the functions of senator. Both of them fittingly represented Christian honor during those difficult days; I praise them for having stood tall in the presence of

that giant of a man before whom all Europe knelt down.

Should I speak of the colleges of the First Empire? Here I touch the most painful wound of all. Those colleges are certainly far from us; but the institution to which they belonged survives. In what I have to say about the past, many will see an indirect attack against the present, an issue with which I need not concern myself. On this matter, it is painful for me to trouble many men whom I honor and cherish. But History is History: its first law is to say nothing false; the second is not to keep silent about what is true.³¹ Now, as to the truth, here it is.

While claiming for the State the duty of offering to everyone the benefit of public instruction, the Revolution, at least under the Consulate, respected the rights of families. The State opened schools, it did not impose them. Everywhere, it accepted the autonomous harmony of municipal teaching and of ecclesiastical teaching. As Emperor, Napoleon saw things differently. He abolished the freedom of instruction; the right of running schools became the exclusive monopoly of the State. The University of the Empire was created. It left Christian families with only one choice: either serfdom or *dechristianization* of their children. In effect, how to protect these children from the contagion of anti-Christianity, after they had been plucked from their families by a kind of annual pruning, to have them live for eight years, at the beat of the drum, in barracks that foreshadowed the military, helter-skelter with those in whom faith was completely dead? This was the conscription of souls, an unlimited and universal conscription, one that did not admit quality members. This is the nature of the institution, abstraction made of the men charged with following through. I am not judging; I am simply reporting.

To be sure, the choice of the Grand Master, Mr. de Fontanes,³² was pleasing to everyone; he knew how to find associates worthy of himself: Joubert, Gueneau de Mussy, Ambroise Rendu, and others, including many retired revolutionaries and scoundrels. It is only right to praise the considerable services of the righteous men whom I have just named. But could they see to it that France would no longer be what the eighteenth century and the Revolution had made of her? Could they turn away from the State schools the sons of Voltaire-tinged families? Could they require of teachers that they give their pupils open example of a serious practice of the Catholic religion? No, they could not! No one in the world could have. Public behavior completely repudiated this. Such was the misfortune of the time, and that was not the fault of Mr. de Fontanes nor of his friends. Well, then, under these conditions, how to infuse public schools with the atmosphere of faith in which were born and reared the generations of previous centuries? That was a thousand times impossible; the consequences of this impossibility are evident: in all the colleges, without exception, an original clique of young people, with no Christian tradition and without innocence, tyrannically setting the law for their fellow students; mutual instruction in vice, with a precocious egoism and the hardness of heart which follows it; a spirit of permanent revolt against God and against teachers. The one who writes this history has seen these things happen; not one of his contemporaries will gainsay his testimony.

The remedy would have been free competition. This was forbidden. From 1 June 1809 on, every educational establishment, however little known, was to accept the official link to the Grand Master, or cease to exist. We can read in the correspondence of Father Jean de la Mennais with what merciless eagerness were pursued those humble priests who attempted to teach a little Latin to young Breton lads, whom they were preparing for the major seminary.³³ The boarding schools that clerical charity had established for that purpose were placed under the control of the University; either it chose their teachers or it approved of them. The children received in those houses, reduced to being simple boarding schools, had to attend college or *lycée* classes. Nay more, faculties of theology of purely civil creation were invented. Appointed by the Grand Master, these professors of theology swore obedience to him. This was an attempt to transfer higher instruction in theology from the Church to the University of the Empire, by conferring grades that were purported to be absolute requirements for ecclesiastical advancement. "A priest," the Emperor wrote, "who had depended on no other authority than his ecclesiastical superiors, will be unable to occupy high posts unless THE UNIVERSITY CONFERS THEM ON HIM! — which it could refuse to do if the priest were known to harbor ultramontane ideas or others dangerous to authority."³⁴ Is that not clear? Napoleon wanted to be the sole teacher: and how could one escape the imperial grasp when all careers were blocked to anyone

who had not crossed the University's Thermopylae?³⁵ Here was something without precedent in Europe, without precedent in ancient as well as in modern times. France was pushed to accept this by being persuaded that, without it, the Revolution and national unity were endangered.

I could not stress enough this package of imperial autocracy. It was a complete system, powerfully conceived, skillfully coordinated, the system of the Pharaohs, summarized by Moses in these terms: "Oppress with skill."³⁶ This oppression, I admit, weighed not only on the Catholic Church of France, but also on the Protestants and the Jews. The aim was to even out the creeds, to abase one by the other, by scrambling them.³⁷ Nonetheless, the Protestant or Hebrew consistories did not embarrass Caesar; they never offered him any resistance. Now the Catholic Church had a head who was not subject to Napoleon: as long as the Pope was not pliable like a glove in the hand of the dominator of the world, nothing could be done; the almighty power of Caesar had its limits. On the other hand, if and when the Sovereign Pontiff became a simple tool of government, manipulated at will by the successor of Charlemagne, immediately the will of Napoleon would become the voice of God, the living rule of the human conscience. God did not allow this to happen, but we will see that it would not have taken much for this monstrous dream to be fulfilled.

Before we return to the long duel of the greatest power there ever was and the conscience of an elderly captive, I pray allow me to note two facts. Many persons willingly persuade themselves that, if the Pope fell under the subjection of a government, in the present state of public opinion and behavior, that government would never think of attacking Catholic beliefs or morals. And yet, that is exactly what Napoleon Ist did on two occasions, which it is important to highlight.

Everyone knows the dogma: "Outside the Church there is no salvation." Well, Napoleon tried to suppress it by having it disappear from the catechism which he imposed on all the dioceses of France. The intervention of Cardinal Fesch³⁸ was needed to have those words reinserted in the imperial catechism. — From another angle, the Emperor ordered the insertion there of a long chapter on *love* for Napoleon (yes, *love*), commanded on pain of ETERNAL DAMNATION.³⁹ — At the same time, he kept in the civil code the right to divorce. Portalis [*see Note 7*] forbade priests from refusing to grant the nuptial blessing to those who remarried during the lifetime of their wife, after having divorced her.⁴⁰ With such recent examples at hand, how can it be claimed that Catholic dogma and morality have nothing to fear from subjection of the Pope to secular domination?

It is this subjection, not partial but total, that was to be the supreme goal of Napoleon's politics. As early as 1806, the Pope was nothing but *Bishop of Rome*;⁴¹ *Caesar is its Emperor*.⁴² Notes were exchanged; Pius VII recalls his ministers as often as Napoleon demands; but the Pope nonetheless retains his free choice. Then, events keep happening. Captured in Rome, Pius VII is thrown into prison; his States are confiscated, and all exercise of his spiritual power is SUPPRESSED IN FACT, up to the fall of the Empire. This is not ancient history; what I have said, I have seen happen.

Only one issue embarrassed the Emperor. With the person of Pius VII placed under interdict, Napoleon counted on substituting the action of the bishops to that of the Pope. But death was decimating the episcopate, and how to create Catholic bishops while bypassing the Pope? In order to help him resolve the question, the Emperor assembled in Paris his subjects, the *monsignori* of France and of Italy. In his omnipotence, he decorated this assembly with the title of *national council*, and proposed that — since, in the past six months, the Pope had not consecrated the men chosen by the Emperor — the assembly should decree to have the metropolitan make them bishops. How more openly could the Church be placed into the hands of Caesar?

A commission of the bishops, charged with writing a report on the imperial proposition, struggled to gain some time; in a timid conclusion, it sought to confer with the Pope on the project of the decree.⁴³ Would you believe that on this simple motion of delay by the Commission, without even giving the assembled prelates time to discuss the issue, Napoleon declared the council dissolved. Three members of the Commission, seized during the night, were held at Vincennes until they handed in their resignations from their

respective sees. Terrified by these measures, the other bishops were summoned one by one by the Minister General of the Police; in the latter's hands, each one in turn bound himself to turn over the hierarchy to the imperial omnipotence. Once more assembled, even when the Emperor did not bother to revoke the decree of dissolution of the council, they confirmed the will of the Master. In truth, they were told that the Pope had given his consent; after this, in order to discourage Pius VII's resistance, he himself was led to believe that the bishops had abandoned him.

Is that all? Absolutely not! Surrounded by traitors from the early days, weakened by a habitual if not constant secrecy, during four years, one moment fascinated by a skillfully prepared meeting with Napoleon's upward rise — more so by his sweet talk than by his threats — Pius VII signed the suicide of the papacy, at Fontainebleau, on 25 January 1813. It was a repetition of the downfall of Pascal II.⁴⁴ An unforgettable example of the danger which the religious independence of the Holy See risks when it is no longer protected by a temporal barrier. No doubt Pius VII hastened to retract an action so forced or unexpected. As anticipated, this retraction was ignored; Napoleon considered it as absolutely not having been received. As a general answer, he had included in the *Bulletin des lois de l'Empire* [Bulletin of the Laws of the Empire] what he called the concordat of Fontainebleau.⁴⁵ Supported by the signature of the Pope, what resistance could he have met in the Church of France if God had not intervened at Leipzig?⁴⁶ Who does not know that the students at the Seminary of Ghent, numbering 236 — among whom were 40 deacons or subdeacons — having refused to attend the Mass of an intruder whom the Emperor had named bishop of that diocese, were abducted and incorporated into a regular army regiment, in which they served until the fall of Napoleon?⁴⁷

These things have been forgotten to a great degree, and too few persons today realize how little it would have taken for the Russian Church to serve as the type of Church which, from the straits of Messina up to the Elbe, would have continued to call itself Roman Catholic. Moreover, who does not sense that, if once this crime had been committed, it would have marked the end of the conscience of the human race? How long would it have held off the bondage and the perversion of the Catholic priesthood? "The princes who lust for spiritual authority," said Lacordaire, "never dared to take it onto the altar of their hands. They realize all too well that in this lies a greater stupidity even than sacrilege. Incapable as they are of being *directly* recognized as the source and the regulators of Religion, they seek to become its masters through the intermediary of some clerical body, fashioned to their wills. Once there, these high priests without a mission, usurpers of truth itself, dole out to the people only that amount of truth which they judge sufficient to curb revolt. They make of the blood of Jesus Christ an instrument of moral servitude and of political calculation, up to the day when they are warned by terrible catastrophes that the greatest crime of sovereignty against itself and against society is the impious touch on Religion."⁴⁸

It is understandable that the Church welcomed the Restoration as a deliverance. Not only did this place her outside of imperial clutches, but also for the first time since the Revolution, it was treated with respect by the public power; on every step of the throne, the Church saw princes who believed what she believed, and by whom she was loved. As a gift for this joyous event, Louis XVIII, in his constitutional charter, proclaimed the Catholic religion the religion of the State. The violation of Sunday rest was prohibited by a law. Divorce disappeared from the civil code. Bishops obtained the freedom to manage their minor seminaries. Even more, the administration of primary instruction was placed in their hands. The Ministry of Religion was abolished. A bishop was at the same time Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs and of Public Instruction. Legislation encouraged religious congregations of women. Residences of men were looked upon favorably by the government. A law was even passed for the punishment of sacrilege. The King, Charles X, his son, the Dauphin, the Prime Minister Mr. de Villèle, most of the latter's colleagues, all the Directors General, all the heads of services, all prefects, all the higher level magistrates — all of them were sincerely Catholic. All the other functionaries leaned in that direction. Intense works of evangelization were undertaken by the missionaries of France and by the Jesuits in all quarters of the kingdom.

It has to be said, because it is true: the lack of success of all that was enormous. The only result was to make Religion detestable and powerless to an almost unbelievable degree.

The law about Sunday observance, while openly observed in cities by the closing of stores, met in France, as the Revolution had, a determined opposition that could not be overcome. Voltaire and Rousseau had not been reprimanded even once under the Empire; from 1817 to 1824, twelve editions of the first, and thirteen of the second were published. Helvetius, Diderot, d'Holbach, Dupuis, Volney, came out of their tombs. A long procession of the dead (the expression is from Lacordaire) was evoked with fanaticism against the Church, and, taking into account the passions of the day, all these departed men appeared to be alive. The scurrilous platitudes of Pigault-Lebrun⁴⁹ were spread in 32,000 copies; the songs of Béranger⁵⁰ gained influence. Everywhere the Church found adversaries without number against her: not only the fanatics of the secret societies, and behind them, the avowed followers of Voltaire, but also the volatile mass, frightened by the phantom of the *ancien régime*. Raised to the religion of the State, Catholicism was one of the facets of that regime and the most detested one of all.

Indeed, the eighteenth century was still alive. In 1802, Jesus Christ returned to His temples: but He did not enter the souls which anti-Christian feelings had taken away from Him. At the time, in practically all of France, most of those who exercised a liberal profession were without religion; not only did they abstain from all worship, but on every occasion in their daily conversations, anti-Christian hostility overflowed. Article 6 of the Charter of Louis XVIII seemed to be a declaration of war against the unbelief practiced by the French bourgeoisie. But what becomes influential is whatever is practiced in morals and not what is written in laws. France being what it was in 1814, Article 6 of the Charter could only be the legal constitution of a kind of official hypocrisy, something deeply repugnant to the character of the nation, and rightly so. Indeed, and above all, it is of the essence of religion to be sincere; to practice, one must believe. And so, when in the hearts of people, contrary religious beliefs meet, like two enemy armies on the same battlefield, when in public morals this antagonism has roots that are three-fold secular and recognized as complex, and to go further, when I do not say the Catholic faith but the *Christian* faith is in the numerical minority of the classes who dominate and teach others — all that is indeed a great catastrophe. For the nation, it is a significant moral diminution; and yet, any pressure, even indirect, exercised by secular authority to arrange religious demonstrations where faith is absent would only make the evil more intense and more profound.

We can see this in 1830 and 1831. The passions stored up deep in souls by the open alliance of the throne and the altar, exploded with rage. The crosses of mission, planted with such brilliance under the Restoration, were everywhere overthrown. Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois Church was vandalized; the archbishop's residence in Paris was destroyed by savages, under the indifferent eyes of the armed National Guard. Would those excesses have been possible in 1814, at the downfall of the oppressor of Pius VII? Did they come to anyone's mind in 1848, with the disappearance of a government notoriously unfavorable to the Church? After 1830, it took three years before clerical dress could reappear in the streets of Paris, while in 1848, it did not hide itself even for one day. These are not theories, they are facts, and they are as bright as the sun; they are unassailably true.

Under the Restoration, many Catholics were already aware of the delusion of most bishops of France concerning the importance given to religion from the King's "protection," in the word of the time. But those Catholics were ignored, and that is understandable; experience had not yet spoken out. Unfortunately, the Church of France also had its emigrants.

These were the bishops named by Louis XVI, who had not reentered France until with Louis XVIII. By a two-fold sensibility (monarchical and Gallican), these bishops had refused the Pope's request for them to give up their sees and had protested against the Concordat of 1801, which took account of them as having resigned. Their notable fidelity to the House of Bourbon made of them, in matters of religion, the natural councillors of the restored monarchy.

First of all, the bishops led the monarchy in a dangerous direction, in difficult and complicated negotiations with the Holy See, to obtain the annulment of the great act of 1801. In their thinking, nothing that had been done in France during the absence of the legitimate king was to survive after his return. Pius VII resisted for a long time; we can understand that he found it repugnant that he himself repeal the act which had

crowned his pontificate. Nonetheless, in 1817 he ended up signing the reestablishment of the concordat between Leo X and Francis I. This was to turn back three centuries earlier and it was enough to bring together against the treaty all of the new France. Dioceses were increased from fifty to ninety-two; this meant that forty-two new sees had to be financed. The support of the Chambers was necessary; it was quickly evident that no such help would be forthcoming. The situation was thus found to be singularly unreal: the King had given his solemn word to the Holy See, yet he could not keep it. A compromise was finally reached: the Concordat of 1817 was not abrogated, it was side-stepped. In a Consistory, the Pope declared that the new agreement with France could not be executed; nonetheless, he accepted it as the base for a general rearrangement of the boundaries of the dioceses of France, whose number was raised to eighty.

As a result, there was in the kingdom a surplus of thirty bishops. Because of them, the church of France could be renewed, but only on one condition: that the bishops would take their times into account and be both men of government and men of the apostolate. No such idea had entered anyone's mind. The point was simply to *clean up* the episcopate, that is to say, to set up as bishops those gentlemen or those promoted to nobility who still remained in the ranks of the priesthood.⁵¹ Most of those chosen were elderly; their advanced age was compensated for by no other recommendation than that of their birth. Consequently, a senile and impotent breath spread over the Church. Everywhere, the most sterile remembrances of the past; understanding of the present, nowhere to be found. A pious and enlightened bishop, somewhat overpraised by the public, but too undervalued since by those who did not know him, Father Frayssinous⁵² had the notion of restoring the ancient Sorbonne University, "the permanent council of the Gauls." In the eighteenth century, especially in the second half, the Sorbonne had really lost its reputation; it was fading away like all the *ancien régime*. At length, it was able to raise itself up and resume growth. There was room for all kinds of improvements. It was an endeavor similar to founding in Paris, in our day, a center of ecclesiastical studies superior to those commonly found in seminaries. Nonetheless, the idea of Father Frayssinous, perhaps a bit limited, amounted to nothing. Father de la Mennais found him dangerous, as if stained with Gallican afterthoughts. Moreover, feebly received by the bishops, this idea definitely disappeared before the pretensions of the archbishopric of Paris.

Now at the time of which I speak, in contrast to that senility, to that insufficiency on which I painfully had to insist, an energy of unexpected exuberance was circulating in minds. Under the two-fold excitement of peace and political freedom, the youth in the schools unfurled their sails; with unlimited ardor, they aspired to new shores, to new horizons. The old leaven of revolution fermented in some, enthusiasm for the unknown in others. But everyone felt that the future did not belong to the elders, and that, while remaining faithful to the Church, which belongs to all times, she had to be seen as separate from the men of the *ancien régime*, who were mortal. Truth persists while men pass on, and with them the garb of the day with which they had clothed the truth.

Such was Henri Lacordaire's state of mind when he entered the seminary. No doubt the situation had its dangers, but it also had its limits. Whatever enthusiasm and boldness of intellect the young lawyer who was becoming a seminarian could have had, we will see that docility of heart and filial piety toward the Church had always been stronger. Nonetheless, when we consider his thinking about the conduct of Napoleon I, especially with regard to the Church, we have no problem explaining the persistent horror Lacordaire had for despotism.

When we realize the ravages of religion in France brought about by the so-called protection of King Charles X, we are less astounded at the attitude taken in 1830 by the man who was called by God to establish, five years later, the work of the Conferences of Notre-Dame in Paris and to re-inaugurate, on this side of the Alps, the Order of St. Dominic.

ENDNOTES

1. *Quis nescit primam esse Historiae legem ne quid falsi dicere audeat; deinde, ne quid veri non audeat?* (Cicero: *de Oratore*, II, 15).
2. A chateau on Lake Lemman where Voltaire lived for awhile. - Trans.
3. The same Machiavellianism is exercised in Italy in our day. The clergy of the Piedmont was generally favorable to the Statute of Charles Albert; it was cast, willy nilly, into the opposition by gladly breaking ties with the Pope.
4. *Considérations sur le système philosophique de M. de la Mennais* (préface).
5. Louis IX, King of France (1226-1270) - Trans.
6. As everybody knows, Pius VII protested strongly against these articles in the Consistory of 24 May 1802. (Author)
7. Rapport de Portalis sur les *Articles organiques* (Disc., rapp. et trav. inédits sur le Concordat de 1801, p. 87. — Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis: French lawmaker (1746-1807), compiler of the Civil Code - Trans.
8. Loi du germinal, an X, art. 1^{er}.
9. Code pénal, art. 208.
10. Loi du 18 germinal, art. 6.
11. Loi du germinal, art. 6.
12. Jeremy Bentham, English philosopher (1748-1832); honorary French citizen. - Trans.
13. V. aux *Pièces justificatives* (N^o 1) la lettre de Napoléon à Portalis du 21 mai 1804.
14. These are the words of the Penal Code, art. 207.
15. Art. 6 & 7 du Concordat. - V. aux *Pièces justificatives* (N^o 2) — Read what Bonaparte understood by this oath.
16. Loi du 18 germinal, art. 31.
17. Loi du 18 germinal, art.11.
18. Decret du 3 messidor an XII.
19. Loi du 18 germinal, art. 23, 24, 25, et 26.
20. V. les *Pièces justificatives*, N^o 3.

21. Proclaimed King of Sweden (1496-1560). - Trans.

22. *L'Église Romaine et le Premier Empire*, par M. d'Haussonville (I, p. 272-276).

— I take this occasion to explain myself, without straying from the book. The author is favorable to the separation of Church and State; I condemn this separation as leading to the total de-christianization of society. But the work of M. d'Haussonville, insofar as it deals with the actions of Napoleon against Pius VII and against the Church, is no less damning, and in its totality, very conclusive.

23. Count and bishop, Grand Master of the University (1765-1841); Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs. - Trans.

24. Joseph Fouché (1759-1820); Minister of Police. - Trans.

25. *Pièces justificatives*, N° 4.

26. King of Persia (?-BC 529). — Persia is today Iran. - Trans.

27. This excess of praise on the part of the bishops shocked even Napoleon. (Testimony of M. de Broglie, Bishop of Ghent, in a conversation with the Prefect of Police, Réal.) It increased his contempt for men. After his downfall, it was a simple pleasure to insert in the *Biography of Contemporaries* the names of the bishops, along with fragments of their mandates in honor of the Emperor. The Voltaire disciple Beuchot (biographer and editor of Voltaire (1773-1851) - Trans.) published a funeral oration of Napoleon composed solely of snips from those mandates. The effect of that work was not favorable to the episcopate.

28. V. *Pièces justificatives*, N° 5.

29. Vicomte François-René Chateaubriand (1768-1848), French writer. - Trans.

30. Prince of the House of Bourbon (1772-1804). - Trans.

31. Jean-François Ducis (1733-1816), poet of tragedy. - Trans.

32. *Quis nescit primam esse Historiae legem ne quid falsi dicere audeat; deinde, ne quid veri non audeat?* (Cic. *De Oratione*, 11, 15).

33. Jean-Pierre Louis de Fontanes (1752-1821), French poet and writer. - Trans.

34. Lettres de MM. de la Mennais à M. Bruté, mort évêque de Vincennes (aux États-Unis [Indiana - Trans.]). Paris, Bray 1865.

35. Notes pour le Ministre des Cultes (Saint-Cloud, 30 juil. 1806. *Corresp. de Napoléon 1^{er}*, t. XIII, p. 15).

36. Famous battle between Greeks and Persians, 480 BC. - Trans.

37. See *Exodus* 1:10. "Come, let us deal shrewdly with them." (New American Bible).

38. De Maistre, *Corresp. diplomatique*, II, 182.

39. Cardinal Joseph Fesch (1763-1839), Napoléon's uncle.

40. V. *Pièces justificatives*, N° 6.
41. Circulaire du 19 prairial an X.
42. Lettre de Napoléon au Cardinal Fesch, 7 janv. 1806; *Corresp. de Napoléon*, t. XI, p. 528.
43. Lettre de Napoléon à Pie VII, 22 février 1805; *Corresp. de Napoléon*, t. XII, p. 38.
44. It is said to realize that, in the early deliberations, all the members of the Commission conceded, except for Rev. d'Aviau, archbishop of Bordeaux, and Rev. de Broglie, bishop of Ghent. Yet on the following day, the majority was unanimous. Among the feeble ones of the first day, it was not surprising to find Cardinals Spina and Caselli, both negotiators of the Concordat.
45. Pope (1099-1118) in constant struggle against Henry V. - Trans.
46. V. *Pièces justificatives*, N° 7.
47. Site of the "Battle of the Nations" and Napoleon's defeat (1813). - Trans.
48. V. *Pièces justificatives*, N° 8.
49. *Lettre sur le Saint-Siège*.
50. French novelist and playwright (1753-1835). - Trans.
51. French songwriter (1780-1835). - Trans.
52. Letter of Father F. de la Mennais to Father Bruté (Paris, 6 August 1817). The charming testimony of Picot cannot prevail over this letter, decidedly confidential, coming from a man this well informed and *therefore* a capable judge. — This deals only with the choices of 1817. (Author)

