

# **THE L'AVENIR LAWSUIT**

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Concerning

Reverend Father

**HENRI-DOMINIQUE LACORDAIRE**

31 January 1831

# THE *L'AVENIR* LAWSUIT<sup>1</sup>

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## NOTICE

A second lawsuit had prodigious repercussions. M. de Lamennais and Father Lacordaire were cited before the Seine jury as accused of inciting hate and contempt for the government and of provoking disobedience to the law. They appeared before the Court of Assizes on 31 January 1831. M. de Lamennais was defended with considerable talent by Attorney Janvier, lawyer at the Royal Court of Angers; Father Lacordaire represented himself. Both of the accused were acquitted.

This fifteen-hour day<sup>2</sup> was outstanding for the sympathy of the crowd which filled the courtroom, and for the cheers which welcomed the acquittal of the two accused men. It was only at midnight that the judgment was handed down.

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<sup>1</sup> *Allocutions et écrits divers du R. P. Henri-Dominique Lacordaire*. Troisième édition. Paris: Librairie Ch. Poussielgue. 1898. Translated from the French by Richard L. Christian and Father George G. Christian, OP. All rights reserved. © 2010.

<sup>2</sup> “. . . You are aware of the success of our lawsuit, my dear friend; but no one could describe for you the hearing which lasted fifteen hours: its silence, its commotion, its encouragement, its applause. And yet, we had been unmasked as ultramontanes! I was unable to speak until seven-thirty; nonetheless, I gained a share in the good will and the displays of the audience. Your counsels proved valuable to me. . .” [Letter to Mr. Foisset, 3 February 1831]

“When the large crowd which surrounded and applauded the day’s winner had slipped away, relates M. de Montalembert, we returned alone, Lacordaire and myself, in the dark, along the quays. At the threshold of his door, I hailed in him, the orator of the future. He was neither befuddled nor crushed by his triumph. I saw that for him these small conceits of success were less than nothing, particles in the night air. . .”

Father Lacordaire’s talk was published a few days later in *L’Avenir*. We offer it without commentary, just as the newspaper did. The reader will judge for himself the part played by time and by the circumstances when this talk was delivered, taking into account as well the quite formal declarations which it contains.

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GENTLEMEN,

I stand before you with a recollection that I cannot get out of my mind. In bygone days, when the priest stood up among the people, something which aroused a deep love ensued at the same time; today, accused as I am, I feel that my name as priest is silent in my defense, and I am resigned to that. Nations have stripped the priest of this ancient love which they bore for him, even as the priest has stripped himself of a majestic part of his character, even as the man of God has ceased being the man of freedom. These are two inseparable titles in the thoughts of men, as in the designs of Providence — eternal bonds which link the sanctuary to the world, and which cannot be broken without the priest seeing the God he adores perish with the freedom which he gives up.

This, Gentlemen, is my situation before you; at least, this it was before you had heard the eloquent speech which revealed to you Mr. de Lamennais, as the restorer of the Christian priesthood among us — I mean to say, the one who has reformed in the person of

the priest, the union of God and men by means of liberty. Unlike his attorney for the defense, I cannot provide you with proofs for my longstanding love for this cause which I defend today. I am only a young man, only a little-known Catholic; my memories of public life do not extend beyond three months, and the rest of this unknown life is not worth the effort of relating to you, so little does it amount to. And yet, Gentlemen, I feel the need to tell you about these hidden sentiments of my soul which will be proof of my good faith only to the extent that you recognize therein the accent of sincerity. Yes, be patient and let me speak to you as if to my elders before I speak to you as my judges. Would that God place on my lips only such words as would not wound the hearts of men, nor the modesty which befits my age and my situation.

I was very young: God had perished in my soul, and freedom was not yet reigning in my homeland. God had perished in my soul because I was born at the dawn of this XIX<sup>th</sup> century, amid noise and storms. Freedom did not reign in my homeland because, following major misfortunes, God had given to France a man even greater than its misfortunes. One day, the great man left the heart of glory to seek a grave in the midst of the seas; but liberty did not return during his absence nor did God return to my soul with the ensuing years. Yet I truly loved this liberty whose name so frequently resonated in my ears, and I actively sought this God whom I did not know, even though the entire earth was filled with his presence.

I was still very young; I saw this capital city where curiosity, imagination, the thirst to learn, made me believe that the secrets of the world would be revealed to me. Its weight overwhelmed me, and I became a Christian; a Christian, I became a priest. Allow me to rejoice in that, Gentlemen, because I never understood freedom better than on the day when I received with the holy anointing the right to speak of God. Then, the universe opened up before me, and I realized that there was within man something inalienable, of divinity, of eternal freedom: the spoken word! The priest's word was entrusted to me, and I was told

to carry it to the ends of the world — with no one having the right to seal my lips a single day of my life. I came out of the temple with these lofty purposes, and I encountered on its threshold law and servitude. The laws did not allow me to teach the young of France under a very Christian King. Moreover, if I would have wanted, like my fathers, to escape into the wilderness, there to build a place for prayer and for a bit of tranquility, other laws would have been found to banish me from there. All the activity of power tended to grasp into its hands the absolute control of human intelligence, except to dole out on the entreating and slavish Catholic Church a few concessions of royal piety in favor of the sublime majesty. It was there, it was during the absolute reign of five or six men over all men and over God that the system came to a climax. Accordingly, I determined to combat it all the more ruthlessly, given that all the memories of my childhood conspired against that system.

But, what to do? I was alone. When one is alone in the world, one has to hide and wait. I hid and I waited. Three years went by; that is very little in a man's life, but a great deal in a youth, naturally lively and unable to bear a burden for very long. I got tired of this life and I looked far and wide to see if there were not on this earth some place where a priest could live free. In these times when the homeland overburdens, who has not turned his eyes toward the republic of Washington? Who, in thought, has not sat down in the shade of the forests and the land of America? I cast my eyes there, weary of the scene which they observed in France, and I resolved to request a hospitality which it had never refused either to the priest or to the traveler.

To be sure, one does not leave his country without regrets and without goodbyes. There once was a priest in Europe who had never accepted the favors and the shackles of power, a priest who mourned the fleeting fortune of religion and whose eyes as those of a prophet had discovered the grave where false successes would be entombed. I have seen him only twice in my life and for only a few minutes each time; but I did not want to leave France without getting closer to this person, without asking for his blessing upon a young

man, brokenhearted by instinct over pains similar to those which consumed his invincible spirit. I saw him; I greeted this great and simple man under the unassuming roof of his forbears; he allowed me to love him. Today, I find myself again at his side, accused like him of the same crime. Providence could not do any more to prove to me that it had granted the blessings of the teacher upon his disciple. I stand here for having defended that freedom which I went so far to find, following a revolution which has ruined, whatever else might happen, the hopes of an absolute power. I am here for having uttered the lofty cry of America: God and liberty! I am here, close to the man who has begun the reconciliation between Catholicism and the world. Ah! Allow me to tell him how much I am touched by the lot which God has given me by providing him as my teacher and father. Do allow these expressions of filial piety to fall on a heart so long unrecognized by men! And allow me to cry out with the poet: *The friendship of a great man is a blessing from the gods.*

And there you have, Gentlemen, the story of the brief years of my life. I believed that it was linked to this case by ties which your hearts have all understood, and I have entrusted it to you as if to my forbears. But, enough is enough. It is time that you retake the severe task which the law has placed on you: you are my judges, and I am the accused.

I am accused of a two-fold offense: provoking disobedience to the law, and to hatred of and contempt for the government. Although the Attorney General has combined these two counts of indictment into a common dispute and appears to have little interest in the first, I will separate them distinctly and I will venture especially to defend that very count which he feebly upheld: because my defense is completely hidden within it, and needs to come out in a lively and forceful manner. I will present long arguments, Gentlemen; and I have the feeling that this announcement is bold in view of the outstanding eloquence which still preoccupies you, and which will beset you with protracted regret in hearing my voice. Nevertheless, if talent is lacking in my endeavors, there is something which will replace the genius of my lips: it will be the soul of an accused, relying on the

justice of his cause, and not seeking between his conscience and yours any other intermediary than his weakness and his innocence. On this support, Gentlemen, I do rely; it belongs to me; it is not in your power to take it away from me.

If I incited others to disobey laws, I have committed a grave fault: because laws are sacred. They are, after God, the salvation of nations; no one should grant them greater respect than the priest, who is entrusted to teach people whence life comes to them, and whence death. I admit, however, that I do not experience for the laws of my country that famed love which ancient people bore for theirs. When Leonidas died, this was engraved on his tomb: *Passer-by, go tell Sparta that we died to obey its sacred laws.* As for me, Gentlemen, I would not wish to have this inscription engraved on my tomb; I would not want to die for the holy laws of my country. Indeed, the time has passed when law was the revered expression of the traditions, the manners, and the gods of a nation: everything has changed. A thousand eras, a thousand viewpoints, a thousand tyrannies, the axe and the sword, clash in our muddled legislation. To die for such laws would be to revere together glory and infamy. There is one law which I respect, which I love, which I would defend: it is the Charter of France. Not that I adhere to the variable forms of the representative government with an enduring ardor, but because the Charter upholds freedom, and, in the anarchy of the world, there remains for men but one homeland: freedom.

That is why, Gentlemen, you cannot appreciate the first offense attributed to me unless you seek to learn which item of our legislation I attacked, what bearing it has upon servitude or freedom in France. That item is the one which relates to the Concordat; this is the fact. But what is the legislation that deals with the Concordat? Did I really attack it? If I had done so, was it not my right and my duty? A study of these three questions comprises my whole defense concerning the first count of indictment.

What is the legislation of the Concordat?

Gentlemen, there exists something which nations call God, something they adore, and which remains after they no longer exist — to receive from new peoples unending homage. That something which does not die found itself in all places where men built their lodgings, whether of a century or of one day; it has been the host and the faithful contemporary of all their generations. His power within human societies is an indisputable and universal fact; multitudes believe in him. But besides his power, there exists that of man; man who is his work, his image, his created splendor; man, that remarkable being! God did not make man his servant, but something of a rival. He did not tell him: “This land is my house, and there you will be my slave.” He told him on his very first day: “This land is yours, and my power will not overcome your power: you will be king.” Thus says the Bible.

The power of God and the power of man — one personified in the priest, the other in the king — are then both necessary, both indestructible. But what will they do in order to be able to subsist together? It is in vain that they are assigned various and circumscribed roles: to one, conscience, to the other, external law; to one, the spirit, to the other, matter. Man is an indivisible creature who cannot be divided according to the whims of thought. He does not become pure spirit in the temple and a machine in the forum. Death alone separates in him what is dust from what is not.

You are aware of the difficulty, Gentlemen. There are three simple and frank solutions: either man oppresses God, or God dictates to man, or man is politically free from God and God is free from man.

And so it was that, in England, Henry VIII oppressed God; he made himself at once prince and pontiff; he established dogmas and laws, and you sense that there is no need for a concordat in such an arrangement. That is to say, there is no need for an alliance between the prince and the pontiff, since the prince and the pontiff are one and the same person. One



does not deal with himself unless it is to deceive the people, when their faith is rewarded with the honors of some bloody and royal mockery.

To the contrary, in the Middle Ages, God reigned over man, religion over law, and a concordat was still a useless matter, because it presupposes two equal powers, when in fact no equality exists between the one who reigns and the one who obeys.

In the end, the United States of America today presents to us a new display of freedom arranged to favor at the same time both man and God. Under that faraway sky, where civilization was born from the religious wars which were bloodying Europe, some fugitives lay down with their outlawed ashes thoughts of tolerance and peace. Their descendants remembered the ills of their fathers and on their tombs, scattered in the wilderness of the New World, they imprinted a charter unknown to all previous ages. They promised God to leave him free, demanding in exchange that he pursue their errors only after this life, and never allow man to know the awful judgment. They were faithful to this charter, the most prominent to have been signed by mortal hands — while we in Europe, the persecutors of their forbears, we today dream of the freedom which arose for them from our proscriptions. There, the stones of the temple do not belong to the state, but are the inviolable house of a citizen. There, the priest is subject only to common law; the bishop is chosen freely, without the intervention of an authority which is jealous and ludicrous, when it is not godless. There, Christian fathers can rear their children in their faith. Everything is allowed, except for what the law forbids to everyone: law does not forbid anyone from serving God, according to his lights.

In no way does this regime allow for a concordat; in fact, it rather negates the very need for one.

And so then, Gentlemen, just what is a concordat? What is this alliance which does not find its place either when man oppresses God, or when God reigns over man, or when freedom is a common good between man and God? I need to tell you, Gentlemen, so that you may understand the grief and the indignation which have enlivened my pen at the first news that the civil power had not yet renounced to impose bishops on us, by authority of the concordat — on us who have been emancipated by the blood of our fellow citizens. Because, indeed, the blood that flows for freedom benefits everyone, even enemies; the blood which does not bring benefit to all was not spilled for freedom. But, before anything else, I must declare: as priest and fully subject to the Holy See, whose rights I fully supported in my article, I cannot rise against the concordat except within the limits of its recognized rights. Having consented, albeit reluctantly, to their establishment, the Holy See made use of a power before which every Catholic conscience must bow. Everything which it did was well done. There are, in fact, times when great wrongs cannot be avoided other than at the price of great accommodations. The authority of the Father of all Christians, ever sacred to everyone, has never been more venerable and more precious than when, bowing to the harshness of unyielding circumstances, it receives something of a consecration for a painful sacrifice. But I must omit here that which belongs to theology; I need to place myself in the sole perspective which you are able to grasp, you who are my judges and who may be neither Catholic nor Christian. And so, I will tell you only what concordats were in the intentions and in the hands of governments.

In the history of peoples, Gentlemen, there come times when absolute power establishes itself on the debris of ancient laws when weakened morals and unnerved religion allowed a son of man — in olden times, raised up as prince by the people — now to elevate himself above his promises. And thus are born concordats. The prince does not wish to oppress religion because he needs to make use of it as an instrument. He does not want to have it rule over him because he himself intends to rule over everything. He does not want it to be free because he is very much afraid of freedom. Accordingly, religion will

offer him a protection that will eliminate, in one sweep, oppression, filial obedience, and independence. He will draw up with religion a treaty abounding in respectful language in which he will arrogate to himself the right to name bishops. What is important for him is that the people, deprived of all true rights in the choice of their pastors, of all interventions in ecclesiastical matters, see nothing else but the monarchy, even in the sanctuary, along with a reflection of the court in the episcopacy. Master of the hierarchy, in certain respects, the prince will weaken Christianity or will elevate it according to his whims, maintaining between himself and God a more or less equal balance, regulated in his mood swings, by the progress or weakening of his piety. The priesthood gets used to this yoke; it convinces itself, little by little, that religion flourishes or decreases by virtue of orders emanating from the throne. The people separate its cause from their own; they are bored in those freezing temples where they attend ceremonies only. The frightened priesthood attaches itself more and more to the prince who has ruined it, yet who offers it gold and incense, lest it be despised. In addition, the prince stations soldiers around its tomb, for fear that its corpse be taken away.

Such wonderful protection which leaves to God neither empire nor liberty, but which provides him with a palace, imperial rank, a share in the budget, and the assurance of never being feared or even oppressed! This protection overpowers the freedom of peoples along with that of God, because these two causes are inseparable: when God is enchained in their temples, before long the people are enchained in the forum. Neglected by religion, their efforts to gain liberty lead only to anarchy; they no longer knew how to be free, and yet they cannot be slaves. By turns, they pass from the shame of disorder to the shame of servitude, unable to bear for very long either one or the other because both are godless, appalling, and have an enduring prominence only until they halt, when everything is consumed and when the search for goodness no longer gives birth to sedition.

Nevertheless, Gentlemen, do not put your trust in these general overviews; question history; consider when among us the concordats saw life and what the fruits were which the governments made them produce. The year was 1516. There sat on the throne of France a king who loved war and did not like parliaments, and who had the renown, I believe, of inventing censorship, who burned the Protestants in France, and who bribed them in Germany. Concerning this, Brantôme was astonished at how the king reconciled *this fire with this protection* — a brilliant and absolutist king who was the dawn of Louis XIV, promoting letters and populating his court, according to Fénelon’s remark in his *Direction de la conscience d’un roi* [Direction of a King’s conscience], with those women who played from then on such a striking and shameful role. It was in the person of this prince that there began the destruction of the ancient monarchy of the Franks, and the undermining of the liberal institutions which the latter had brought from the fields of Germania. It was he who intended to break the old ties of the nation with Catholicism in order to be able, at his leisure, to dispose of the ecclesiastical benefices, in the extreme goal of “satisfying and subduing the nobility,” as was stated by the celebrated historian from Switzerland, Jean de Muller.

Louis XIV gathered from the hands of Richelieu the new monarchy stemming from Francis I. The latter did not reach an agreement with Rome on a concordat, as such, but in a certain way what he did in the *Declaration of 1682* led to the creation of the *Organic Articles* — the final expression of the most absolute power under which Christian peoples had ever suffered. You have heard, Gentlemen, what was said on this matter by the Attorney for the Defense of my illustrious teacher; I will not repeat those articles which his words branded with indelible scars. Their destiny has been fulfilled; justice has come for them. The slavery of the Church soon produced its natural fruit. Truly, nobility was *satisfied and subdued*. It corrupted the clergy by tossing into its abbeys, in its cathedrals, in all the ranks of its hierarchy, along with virtuous and wise men, many others who were only ambitious or victims, and whose lesser fault was to introduce the aristocracy of their

manners into the kingdom of God, who made himself Man and who had lived so humbly and so uprightly among us. The second-order clergy was relegated among us at a limitless distance from the first. Indeed, one of the most pious archbishops of Paris never invited a priest to his table without first having been informed that he was of royal blood. One day, one of his nephews came to see him in the company of two friends from the seminary; at dinnertime, the uncle asked the dreaded question, and, since the unfortunate young men had the misfortune of not being gentlemen, they were sent to the office. If God had come onto earth in those days, he would not have been able to sit at the table of some bishops.

The servitude of the civil order developed with the same speed as that of the religious order; all the institutions of France had already perished when the 1789 Revolution broke out. It put an end to this three-century monarchy, while the civil Constitution of the Clergy gave the last word to the Revolution of 1682.

A man was born. He wanted to restore order and, believing that God could help him in this plan, he decided to do something for him. But he was called Napoleon, and it was impossible that any idea would have come to his mind other than that of a concordat. Accordingly, he drew up a concordat; reuniting at the same time the work of Louis XIV to that of Francis I, on the following day he published some *Organic Articles* which inflicted pain on the venerable pontiff — destined to suffer one day a much greater ingratitude. The effects of this new regime are well known to you, Gentlemen, and I will not lay them out. The Attorney General complained about the undue haste which led the clergy of France to align itself to the fortunes of a defunct power. No doubt we think that a more popular role would have been preferable; we had called for that, with all our wishes. But we must be fair and not demand of men, after three centuries of a servitude born of legislation and consecrated by remembrances, the independence which we ourselves have taken away. Is it our very own fault if the princes, the magistrates, the philosophers, the liberals, have enchained us with their laws? The Attorney General here claims for himself their execution.

He accuses me of having protested against servitude, of having provoked disobedience to him, and at the same time, he reproaches my brothers for the outcome of this so protracted and painful servitude. Oh! Let it finally end! Break, break the chains which you have forged; summon us to the common freedom, to the generosity of the motherland, and you will learn that to turn the priest into a free man does not require either the time or the effort which our slavery cost. In our turn, we reproach you for having disobeyed the first of your laws and for perpetuating under the misleading name of liberty the traditions of Francis I, of Louis XIV, and Napoleon: these three representatives of absolute power among modern peoples.

To be sure, I am not being unfair at all regarding their glory nor regarding the eminent bishops whom God raised up under their reigns. I am aware of their names and of their labors: Bossuet and Fénelon lived in those times when glory strangled freedom. And yet, how much greater was this Fénelon than his invincible rival! He wept over the venerable institutions of the homeland; he acknowledged in the Holy See the eternal defender of the charters of the Middle Ages as well as of the future freedom of nations. His shadow, Gentlemen, has been touched by your cheers of today; it has stirred in its coffin at the new day which has just dawned and at the fearful words which accused the eagle from Meaux [i.e., Bossuet - Trans.] to the highest heavens. In my turn, I also accuse the latter: may his work disappear! May he perish, that genius who would resist Rome and freedom!

The legislation which I attack is a work being judged today. But did I have the ability to attack its prescriptions? In fact, I did not even have it, Gentlemen: because what did I do? I protested against the nominations of bishops emanating from the civil authority, — I am wrong, not emanating from civil authority but from our *oppressors*; that is the term I used. Since the Attorney General pondered long the term, I will do the same. *Our oppressors!* This word has caused you anguish. You asked me to account for it; you

examined my hands to see if they were bruised by the marks of the shackles. My hands are free, Mr. Attorney General; but then again, there is more to me than my hands. I, the self which I am, is my thought, it is my voice. And, just so you will know, I find oppressed in my homeland what is divine in me, what is human in me, this thought, this voice, in short, my whole being! Yes, you do not bind my hands, and it would matter little to me if you had. Indeed, this would be either justice or violence: justice would not be oppression, but violence would always remain against it. And yet, even if you do not shackle my hands, you bind my thoughts, you prevent me from teaching — myself, to whom it has been said: *Docete!* [Teach!] The seal of your laws is on my lips; when will it be broken? This is why I have called you my oppressors, and I greatly fear receiving bishops from your hand.

But this leave to protest was granted to me by the law itself. The concordat and the *Organic Articles* acknowledge that the Sovereign Pontiff has the right to refuse the canonical institution [of bishops - Trans.], and the priest designated for a see is charged with carrying to Rome in person the necessary documents, lest the government exercise a refusal. As a child fully subject to the Holy See, I am only raising the voice of a son who implores his father, while calling his attention to a danger. I declared that I would carry my protest to his sacred feet, and this is what I am doing at this very moment, under the very eyes of justice.

Besides, Gentlemen — and I say this to show you how absurd are the laws which intervene in matters of conscience — suppose that my protest had exceeded the measure of a simple warning, of a cry of pain: what would ensue? I would have broken with the laws of Catholic unity. I would be guilty in the eyes of God of the greatest crime which a man could commit. But is a schism a civil offense? Can you bring it about by your verdict? Wretched chaos is that eternal confusion of what falls under the hand of man, and of what escapes deep within the conscience, there to mock the exertions of a childish despotism. If we wanted to select bishops of our choice, are you the ones who could prevent us? What

if we wanted no part of your bishops: — is it you who would bring us to their feet, there to receive their blessings? Fruitless efforts! You are powerless against the conscience, even when it is straying. The conscience! The conscience! That kind of brass is everlasting, indestructible.

Moreover, Gentlemen, had I attacked the first section of our legislation relating to the concordat, I assert that it was my right and my duty.

It was my right. The concordat, in fact, is only an alliance, a convention between *the government and His Holiness*. It is the term used in the *Bulletin of the Laws*. The law which intervened does not alter its nature; it is merely an accessory which follows it closely. Yet a treaty is open to being dissolved when one of the parties no longer finds there all the advantages which it had sought. In the concordat, the Catholic Church is one of the contracting parties; the Catholic Church has encountered only oppression, masked under promises which were violated the next day by the *Organic Articles*, with remarkable insolence. I will not enumerate these breaches of sworn faith; they are well identified; they made of our religious legislation an abominable outrage against the right of people — and I will repeat these words: an abominable outrage! Hold on, there! I as Catholic, it was my right to demand its dissolution, my right to cause it to wither.

It was also my duty as citizen, since I demonstrated that this legislation was a work of despotism and that the Solicitor General himself agreed that it was desirable for us to set out in new and truly liberal directions.

Again it was my duty as a Christian, because the first good of men is to keep for themselves and for their posterity the traditions sacred to their faith; and this can be done among Christians only to the degree that their bishops are courageous agents. They did indeed have some of these courageous guardians of their faith, as I have already said, even



under the very administration of the abuses which I deplore. The piety of the princes, public modesty, and the imperishable protection of Providence have kept watch so that the Church of France did not lose, under the yoke of an oppressive power, all the strength and all the honor of its episcopate. But in Europe, the princes are no longer the first-born of Christianity; indifference has passed into the palaces of kings from the homes of citizens. Around the temple, public opinion is no longer like the voice of God. Everything has changed: the Europe of the converted barbarians has disappeared, and has left to Catholics only their faith, their independence, and the God who told them: *I am with you to the end*. In this annihilation of all human causes which had weakened the deadly influence of power and on which our Pontiffs had relied, only the yoke is left for us — the yoke of man, the yoke of a time, which, like the sea, abounds in storms and depths. Will we abandon our bishops along with Christianity to the mercy of those powers who do not know God, who come and go, who are no longer even images of instability, given that their rapid fall destroys the very effect of their succession? Would we support having our bishops at the mercy of a royal court or of a ministry?

The Royal Court! What is that? “In a sense, the most honorable reproach which can be made to a man, is to tell him that he is not familiar with the Royal Court; that very admission suggests that there is some kind of virtue to be found in him.” It was not a satirist who spoke this way about the life of the palace, calling to mind so many dishonored traditions, from those of the satraps of Asia up to those of Louis XV: it was an austere and respected writer who had known the court at its highest point of politeness and propriety, under a monarch who remains a model of this lifestyle, which he would have made as towering as it could be; this was La Bruyère. And I am quite willing to read you his description of the chapel at Versailles, so that you may judge if the courts are a place from which the leaders of the Gospel should be sent to nations starving for sacred lessons. “The prominent men of the nation assemble daily, at a certain time, in a temple which they call Church. In the back of this temple, there is an altar consecrated to their God, where a priest

celebrates mysteries which they call holy — sacred and awe-inspiring. The eminent ones form a circle at the foot of this altar and remain standing, their backs turned directly away from the priest and the holy mysteries, their faces elevated toward the king, who is seen kneeling at a rostrum, to whom they seem to have devoted their whole spirit and heart. One cannot help seeing in this practice a type of subordination: the nation seems to adore the prince, and the prince to adore God.”<sup>3</sup>

This was the sight which the Versailles chapel presented, and the extent to which the idolatry of man was carried into the sanctuary reserved for God. St. Ambrose did not come out of this school: he had need of other teachings to stop at the gates of the temple called *Spain*, soiled by the blood of Thessalonica.

And yet, Versailles — the Versailles of Louis XIV — was the most refined court of the universe; it had a master, who, among his many personal gifts, had an exquisite discernment about things. What would it be like, Gentlemen, if I spoke to you about the Royal Court as constituted by the regent, and about the bishops which it gave us from the bosom of its degenerate luxury? Among these choices, there is one whose notorious scandal offers grounds worthy of reflection because it teaches Christians just how far civil power can carry the mockery of God to the bosom of a people who still respect it. Fénelon’s see was vacant; no one should have been the object of greater veneration from authority, because no see had ever been occupied by a man whose memory was so pure and beloved. What did the regent do? He named to that see the former valet of his pleasures, the tutor who had abetted the depravity of his youth, and despite the latter’s complete shriveling in public opinion into the lowest of men, the regent thrust him on the altars where Fénelon had prayed.

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<sup>3</sup> La Bruyère’s *Characters*, chapter on the Royal Court.

(At this point, Mr. Lacordaire reads the details about the nomination of Cardinal Dubois, which can be found in *l'Histoire de la régence* [The History of the Regency] by Marmontel, and cites a leaflet on the era of Louis XV.)

Forgive me, Gentlemen, if I bring up these facts; the lessons of history are never profane on lips consecrated to truth. We must be allowed to talk about some degradations whose progression we wish to stop and whose causes cannot be attributed to us, because the regime of the concordat was established at a period when the palaces of princes had not given to Christian Europe those astonishing spectacles of corruption; the nobility and the clergy had continued to preserve the majesty of the Frankish kings. Today, the veil has been lifted. The memory of these excesses, present in all minds, was present in mine when I drew up the Catiline-type diatribes for which the Public Minister demands justice from you. No, he would not persuade me that I am guilty; even had he divine eloquence, he would not convince me that we should consider ourselves fortunate to receive from the Royal Court our leaders and our saints. No, the stand contested by pride, self-indulgence, flattery, dissembling, blindness, — the presence of marbles and precious rugs: this is not where we hope to find manly souls. Tempered anew in the sufferings of exile and the blood of martyrs, the greatest part of the French episcopate survived until now without succumbing to this frightful influence. But it fears for the future; it fears even a virtue which could not promise to escape the corrupting favors of power except by the benefits of its persecutions. Like us, the episcopate is weary of bishops of the Royal Court; the universe is disgusted with the situation.

There is no longer a Royal Court, it will be said. I hope so, with all my heart. The Royal Court and freedom are two irreconcilable notions; the people of Greece had an undying hatred for the Royal Court of Persia, and rightly so. Where there is a Royal Court, liberty has no future.

As a result, it will be the ministry that will name our bishops. But what is a ministry? It is a gathering of six or seven men who perhaps have more intelligence than the others, and who follow each other very rapidly in six or seven residences where all the affairs of France are lodged. Besides, they are Christians, eclectics, Jews, atheists, according as it suits them, and this is incontestably their right. But, what do the bishops and they have in common? Why must we go to ask of these current favorites the men who are to bless us, whose blessings they themselves despise? When a bishop was in charge of ecclesiastical matters under the regime of the state religion, the Protestants were given a special administrator who openly professed his religion. Nonetheless, the organs of the liberal party vigorously complained about this violation of the freedom of conscience. Today, now that religion is separated from the State, we find placed at the head of what is called *Worship [the Cults]*, men who have not subscribed to any religion. Universal patriarchs, they appoint godly bishops to bring about the reflowering of the glorious days of Catholicity, as well as the presiders over the consistory who recall the times of Luther. Just as Caesar was dictator in four languages, the latter patriarchs speak to each religion in its very own language. They tender oracles in the name of all the gods, in a kind of living pantheon where ridicule is the principal deity.

Would that it were pleasing to God, Gentlemen, that ridicule were the sole danger of their existence! But every day the parliamentary movement can bring to the head of the Cults an enemy of our dogmas and of our hierarchy; an unrelenting conspiracy, perpetuated from minister to minister, could impose on some sees of France men sold to power who would deceive Rome under the veil of a prolonged hypocrisy, some Cranmers,<sup>4</sup> who await only thirty pieces of silver to hand over the Son of Man. And the hope is that we will accept good-naturedly our future extinction while we still have laws and life to prevent it?

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<sup>4</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII.

The hope is that we will respect our obsequies if their celebration is drawn out, if the procession is extensive from the church to the cemetery? No, we will not do it, Gentlemen; we will fight to the end with a loyalty that will at least honor our last days, even if it does not resurrect the times which remain asleep, covered with the glory and the benefits of Christianity.

I do believe, Gentlemen, that I have done away with the first count of indictment, and that you will declare me not guilty of having provoked disobedience to the laws. The remainder of my innocence is easy to establish. Indeed, it has already been established in the address of Mr. de Lamennais's victorious counsellor; it would be an injustice on my part to seek to add to his powerful inspirations my feeble efforts. In silence, I would better honor his talent and my case.

I reproached the government of genuine wrongs; with vigor did I reproach it for them, but without any intention of provoking Catholics to despise and hate it. Do believe it, Gentlemen, from the heart of Providence — where faith unceasingly carries back our thoughts — that we view the empires which collapse and those which rise up with thoughts more unblemished than those which stir up man when he perceives in these extraordinary catastrophes only the struggle of human interests. The freedom of both the Church and the world appears to us to be the culmination of some hidden design of God. Moreover, it is on these grounds that we judge the events which have altered the face of France. If they contribute to the deliverance of the human conscience, we will bestow upon them a share in our love. If they betray their own expectations, they will be unable to require of us those everlasting promises, which are fittingly made only to the homeland, to freedom, to God: three realities that do not die. These are my beliefs.

As for the wrongs which the Catholic Church has called to the attention of France today, you have already heard their recital. They are numerous: afflictions, congregations,

individuals have been wronged in many places; teaching has been impeded by new measures; a thousand minor despots exercised tyranny against us in the name of freedom. A prefect — to mention only one example — compared a portion of the clergy to foul animals who seek to uproot the tree whose beneficial fruit has fed them. And why? Because that portion of the clergy had refused to pray on command. Gentlemen, every time I offer the Holy Sacrifice to God the Almighty and Eternal, I pray to him for Louis-Philippe; but right here and now, I swear never to open my lips to pray for the one who would command prayer. Is that a reason, then, to treat me and my brothers as foul animals? Could any reason at all authorize a prefect to insult a part of the population in this way, to compare it to swine, and to ungrateful swine at that? And yet no one has denounced this unprecedented act, this recorded act; no one has complained about it. It traveled throughout France as if such a trifle that no one paid attention to it. I have been affected, Gentlemen, by these injuries to my brothers; I raised for them and for myself a voice excited by the appreciation of our dignity, common to everyone. Indeed, everyone, you along with us, are citizens of France, of this country which will be liberated. Everyone is accountable for its honor, is held to defend it, is bound to repel injury and oppression. This I have fulfilled to the extent that it depended on me; I am innocent of the reproaches which they sought to pile up on our heads; my task has been accomplished.

Your task, Gentlemen, is to dismiss me, absolved of this accusation. Not for myself do I ask this of you. There are only two things that provide understanding: God and a prison cell. And so, I must not fear one more than the other. But I ask you for my acquittal as one step towards the alliance of faith and freedom, as a pledge of peace and reconciliation. The Catholic clergy has done its duty; it has raised its voice to its fellow citizens; it has proffered words of love. It is now up to you to give your response. I ask it of you once again, so that those subordinate despots, hold-overs from the Empire, learn in the deep of their provinces that there is also in France justice for Catholics who can no longer be sacrificed to bygone prejudices, to hatreds of a century long past.

In conclusion, Gentlemen, here is my proposal: that you acquit Jean-Baptiste-Henri Lacordaire, determining that he is not guilty of a transgression, that he has conducted himself as an upright citizen, that he has defended his God and his liberty. And this, Gentlemen, I will continue to do during my entire lifetime.