

## OBSEQUIES OF MR. GRÉGOIRE

31 May 1831

Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, OP

---

One day, France will be a land of freedom. This is the expectation of the world. One day, some old prejudices having finally disappeared, its citizens so long disunited will make of it a country where no one will regret living because everyone will find there peace, respect for their religion, and the hope of being supported when their rights are threatened. At that time, we will no longer see the government, natural protector of universal freedom, seize with violence a church, condemn a priest to choose between leaving the building or commit a sacrilege by his presence, and after he has left, to introduce there, with armed men, an unknown priest and to bring him a casket for him to bless. We are certain that our descendants will not attend such terrible anomalies, but that they will pity their fathers for having lived at a time when such unpardonable events could happen. Whether we consider, in fact, the behavior of the government towards religion, from the viewpoint of freedom, or that of its own interests, we remain confused that it dared to do what it did. Now, there are destinies to be fulfilled and the destinies of fear were always the worst among all those that deserved to be detested. Charles IX was afraid on the night of Saint-Bartholomew.

Religion has lived under many regimes; it saw pass by all the revolutions that rocked the world, because it is as old as the world. It followed men everywhere they chose to carry their restless life, and nowhere did men refuse it their hospitality, considering that it was a stranger and that it loved them. After it had been received, nowhere did people treat her cruelly, and when they began to forget the memory of their gods, they continued to respect them as defenseless beings who deserved an even greater protection given that they no longer believed in them. Up to the end of paganism, when philosophy had dethroned it and poets mistreated it in theaters, it remained sacred in its temples; its images never received insults; its priests lived as orphans, nourished at public expense, because of the blessings they had brought on the country when the latter was young and needed piety.

The priests were citizens who had not lost the rights of citizenship by having devoted themselves to a service that lost its honor. At least, they were like unfortunates separated from society and who were owed enough mercy to spare them injury at the foot of the altar. Never did a pagan nation, never did the monsters who governed those people send soldiers to violate the dying majesty of religion, nor battle for a bit of human mud by trampling over the ashes of the gods. Pagan temples fell with the people who had built them; but as long as those nations were alive, no one was so bold as to touch them nor so cowardly except to put up with them. It was necessary for Christianity — that religion admired even by its enemies — to raise its altars in the world so that for once one would see what had never before been seen: the place of prayer and of sacrifice changed for twenty-four hours into a defiled cemetery, in the name of fear and of the sovereign. Human remains are sacred, we know, but not in the temple where they were brought by force; for then, they are but sacrileges.

And those cowardly defilers! Do you know how they made known their attempt against our religion? It was from Police Headquarters, from the wretched waiting-room where incessantly crowd the pickpockets, the lost girls, even the most wily spies, that an official notice informed us: on the morrow our faith would be dishonored publicly at exactly 10 o'clock in the morning. They were right, and Heaven is just; the sacrilege had to pass through this sewer.

In what country did this sacrilege occur? In a country of servitude? No! No reigning despot tyrant would have lived for two hours after having done that to the disgraced people of the two worlds. But it was encountered in a country that was neither slave nor free, unfortunate plaything of two contrary thoughts: love of freedom and defiance of God — the most noble country on earth, the most blest after it will have brought together in its love what its kings had separated by their politics, our own beloved country, France. It is in its capital, to the cries of Catholics who die for it on the edge of Europe, in the presence of the Charter that she recently gained and which promises to everyone equal freedom for their worship, from the hands of a Ministry which she despises, that this grave injury was perpetrated on Catholics, who are also her children, even though they are the least in its esteem and in its maternal heart. France cannot abandon them. Their freedom is its own; the names of the outlaws have changed so frequently that it needs to be careful to keep its defenses against all of them, lest lightning strike those who did not believe themselves in

danger. If what the Catholics have suffered is justified, the suffering can be repeated all over the country; it can be attempted against the Jews, against Protestants, against the followers of Saint-Simon<sup>1</sup>: each one has its temples and its tombs, each one has a discipline to be maintained. Just like that, we are all at the mercy of the first person who would receive the sacrament with us from his grave; no believer, under whatever name he adores God, will be able to set up a stone on French soil whereon he could lay his forehead as man, with the assurance that his kiss will not be defiled. Oh! Let us not turn our country into a land accursed to that degree! Sufficient places are open to everyone; allow the poor French individuals who have suffered and who received from their ancestors, along with the troubles of life, the name of God: allow them to bless a few feet of French soil, to make them sacred under the protection of public compassion, since freedom is an ineffectual safeguard.

The government was greatly mistaken if it considered the sacrilege of the *Abbaye-aux-Bois*<sup>2</sup> as an act of impressive politics. No doubt insurrections are dangerous; they change authority inside and out; but the peace that was bought with the crime is not a satisfactory peace. Instead of one danger that threatened it at one moment and in one place, the government created for itself countless dangers. Every township has a man who would be very pleased to humble his pastor after his death and leave a bit of rumor on his grave; prefects will imitate the ministers, mayors will mimic the prefects. What churches will be sheltered from sacrilege? What tabernacles will remain undisturbed. Not long ago, their rest was disturbed so as to snatch from them the remains of our ancestors; was it necessary to disturb that rest so as to introduce foreign ashes? Outside the country, the government will not be any happier. Nations that have not lost their common sense will be all the more stunned than they were at the painful disorders of February, by so serious an attempt carried out in cold blood by authority. They will believe that, with us, there is no more faith, freedom, nor the last vestiges of social principles, but an anarchy governed by cowardice, a cadaver in which no blood flows because death has frozen it even less [*sic*] than fear. The rumor will reach even those brave Polish people who are building churches to God, to thank Him for their victories; they will no longer wonder how it came to be that they have been abandoned by the West. We owe them at least this: not to defile the temples where they have prepared a haven for their bones sacrificed for freedom. And look! While schismatic Russia dishonors their mutilated remains by offensive abuse, other schismatics in France dishonor even their graves!

May God have pity on them and on us. May He lift up their glory as high as is our misery so that Catholic blood having once more saved Europe, the brilliant nation of France may not always be unjust, and that she offer to all her children that very noble hand which has done such great things. God loves it unceasingly; He remembers that our history and His were for a long time intertwined and that there are immortal pages bearing the title: *Gesta Dei per Francos* [Works of God through the French people - Trans.].

In the meantime, poor French Catholics, let us learn even from our misfortunes to love freedom more than those who had promised it to us. Let freedom remain sacred for us, since we have such a great need for it! It is not freedom that we have to complain about, but its enemies — our very selves since we have attempted so little thus far to wrest it from those who do not wish to give it to us. We should think about our injuries; to understand what has made them possible, we need to imagine what our ancestors would have done had they been in our place. Long ago in Constantinople, one of their churches was affronted; the people took the stones, one after the other, and transported them solemnly beyond the Bosphorus, into Asia, where they rebuilt the sacred building; then, when the century improved, once again they took those precious stones, one by one, beyond the Bosphorus, into Europe, and again placed their church in the imperial city. They named it *The Resurrected*, from a name that has remained popular and that all the barbarians of the nineteenth century were not able to blemish. This is how we become free; indeed, Catholics, we cannot become free in any other way!

There remains for us to place at the feet of our Pontiff the homage of our respect, of our sorrow, of our admiration. He did not divulge his misfortunes.

**ENDNOTES** [Trans.]

1. Charles-Henri de Rouvray, Count de Saint-Simon, (1766-1825); French philosopher and economist, head of a political and social school.

2. Abbaye-aux-Bois: former convent, given this name in 1667. Famous as residence of Madame Récamier from 1814 to 1849. Its church was the site of the sacrilegious funeral service (1831) mentioned in this article.

---

Translation from the French © 2012 by George Christian, OP, & Richard Christian. All rights reserved.  
Excerpt from *Lacordaire Journaliste*, 1830-1848. Delhomme et Briguet. Paris, 1897. [Compiled by Paul Fesch]