

ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CHURCH OF FRANCE

(2 May 1834)

Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, OP

Thirty-four years ago, the Church of France presented to angels and to men only extensive ruins. The remains of its hierarchy, cut down by a revolution which spared no virtue, wandered, for the most part, in exile. Its temples were converted to secular uses; some were torn down; others closed and emptied; still others given over to that schism¹ which had been inaugurated, under Louis XIV, by the men of Port-Royal,² and which, expanded 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 mills, farms, prisons, or uninhabited places. The Church retained nothing of the heritage which She had acquired through centuries of charity. Since She herself was barren, no one could foresee Her bringing forth near the overturned altar those men, who one day would be able to help their exceptional predecessors in removing 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 for through three centuries of labor and which had given birth to so many men and to so many extraordinary events, no belief could have emerged. The Revolution had taken down a monarchy, won battles, frightened Europe; it had done everything, except that which could alter the world. If the Revolution had arisen two hundred years earlier, France would have become Calvinist and republican. The limit had been crossed at which error still had enough stability to be the common belief and the link 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*.³ Although the Church in France had been disturbed by

an obstinate schism⁴ — which tore its insides for one hundred fifty years — it was impossible for the Revolution to establish a national belief. France did not believe in the schism, nor in reason, nor in the Supreme Being, each in turn recognized by the Republic. The solemn moment had arrived for it to believe in everything or in nothing. I say “the solemn moment” because, following the one in which truth reigns without debate, there is no other more significant time on earth.

In fact, 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 with greater acceleration the principles which remain in its comprehension. Minds become surprised to see error escape before them; they follow where it leads, but, as soon as they attempt to grasp it, it fades away, it escapes their grasp even more quickly, like a phantom whose reality fades before those who attempt to touch it very closely. And then, all of a sudden, error loses its substance and man finds himself alone, naked, without beliefs, gasping for breath in the face of truth. This is the moment which I called “solemn,” when God wishes to bring people back to Himself; it is by this route that He makes them follow. He pushes error to its ultimate where it is clear that it can do nothing, that, in fact, it is nothing. Or rather, He allows it to go along on its way, all alone, because, by itself, error gravitates to nothingness.

Subsequently, the destiny of peoples weighs in: forced to choose between what is and what is not, to believe in everything or to believe in nothing, people either have to die or return to the truth. Indeed, people would not know how to live without relationships and without faith, and consequently without truth. Moreover, if they no longer live from that share of truth which error contains — because it has stopped being their link and their faith — they must necessarily live by truth itself, which is solely able to subdue, to unify, and to satisfy their mind.

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 saw it with the same understanding that, fifteen centuries earlier, had revealed to Constantine the fall of idolatry. When a sect of deists approached him to ask him to recognize their worship as that of the State, he responded that, already in his mind, he had answered all those who hoped to acquire 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 that power which truth had gained in a struggle in which everything seemed to have been lost. 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 intelligent men.

Later on, when time had increased his power, we see him receive the imperial anointing from the hands of the Pontiff whose predecessor had crowned Charlemagne. Thus did he provide an astonishing lesson to those who could not comprehend that a “foreign priest,” according to their way of speaking, could exert any influence on the creation of thrones and on their power.

The Church of France crossed the Empire with dignity, restoring its cathedrals and its seminaries, consecrating each year at the altars of Christ a new generation of servants, who knew how to resist the man who found no resistance anywhere — a generation surrounded by relationships, by its jealous, poor, modest, and charitable foresight, and already made famous through the illustrious writers whom God began raising up as their defenders.

The Empire fell. At the first rumor of its fall, at the reappearance of the old French kings, the eighteenth century was stirred up in its coffin. It believed that there was in its breast only one sword blow from the conquered emperor: it decided to tempt fate. As in former times, buried paganism was called up by Julian⁵ and played under the sun this curious ancient scene of which the world had kept a souvenir, in the same way, the eighteenth century emerged from the tomb with its bygone deities: Voltaire, Rousseau, d’Alembert, Diderot, Condorcet, Cabanis, and a thousand others who flocked to it. While the Church, always more fruitful, gave birth to new beings who filled Europe with their contemporary renown, this procession of the dead was sent to meet them. Unfortunately for truth, it was not alone in the presence of error: very weighty political discussions complicated the struggle. A likely fear was that the flow which carried the world toward God would be stopped for a long time when suddenly, a clap of thunder once again overturned the ancient House of France, and for a second time, provided the eighteenth century with total power over society.

Never was such an outstanding and more fabulous triumph followed by a more striking and sudden moral catastrophe. Since the eighteenth century had only fought against the ashes of the dead, it found in that triumph no spark that could enlighten anything at all.

Three components make up a social order: religion, power, and freedom.

As for religion, the eighteenth century sought in vain for one which it could provide to the people. The only existing one it found was the genuine one, if only that of a lowly priest who placed an altar in a shop; there, with the best of intentions, he offered to create a service which would be at the same time Catholic and French — a mockery which goes to show the depths to which error had fallen for thirty years. To be sure, the first revolution had found some bishops, some priests, a schism, a heresy; it was indeed something, and it had a name. What name will history give to the cult about which I speak? So there was need to choose between two alternatives: allow France to enjoy quietly the religion that the eighteenth century had earlier promised itself to destroy utterly, or else overthrow from top to bottom, this great country — to ask once again for the ability to bring about a resolution which neither power nor persuasion had previously been able to do. The first option prevailed. And yet, the eighteenth century destroyed an ancient church, tore down a few crosses with its icy hand, muttered a few sacrilegious prayers over some caskets, ruined the archbishop's residence in Paris,⁶ and obtained for its illustrious men a silent and empty grave it named the Pantheon.

As regards power, the second condition for all society, the problem appeared easier to resolve. A prince of royal blood was chosen, but the eighteenth century — a bit embarrassed for having recourse to princes — shouted to him: We are the ones who made you; it is because of us that you are elevated, because of us that you rule, because of us that you are popular and revered! Barely had the suspicion arisen that the new monarch had a thought of his own — namely, that he was exercising some power — the idol of opinion fell when faced with that opinion. Left standing was simply a man guarded in his palace by some soldiers, a master of slaves, supported by the weapons of some against the hatred of others, the principal spring of a machine called *society* by philosophers, pleased with their work.

One thing remained as the principal rallying issue of the eighteenth century, which is, in fact, a necessary condition for any social order: I speak of liberty. Liberty is the collection of rights which no legitimate society can tear away from its members without violating both justice and reason. However much dispute arises about the extent of those rights, they certainly do exist. It is certain that no power, however strong it had been, ever completely misunderstood them. Christianity introduced many of them and some of great importance in the world: it took away from princes the spiritual direction of their subjects, and created, under the name of the liberty of the Church, the liberty of nations. Unhappy with this great work which it did not understand, the eighteenth century, quite to the contrary, sought to base the liberty of nations on the destruction of the Church. But up to that time, it had succeeded only in bringing forth the Republic and the Empire, those two giants of despotism. Everyone waited to see what the revolution of 1830 would produce as regards liberty. It turned out that, except for some trifles, the revolution added nothing to the civil and political liberty previously established by the former kings. At most, it applied the seal of victory. If it had done any more, the Church would have found itself unfettered; in other words, the eighteenth century was taking its own life. It stopped, suddenly afraid, when it realized how deeply God was involved in its plans.

In vain did the young of that worn-out generation cry out to have it forge ahead. They themselves could not escape the abyss that had forced their fathers to retreat except by plunging into another abyss. Reduced to the impossibility of discovering a new liberty which was not a liberty of the Church, they brusquely declared that the issue was no longer between servitude and liberty but between one scheme and another, between monarchy and republic. Besides, tired of fighting over words, the nation called for a fundamental change in the distribution of property. It was then that a world-wide law was revealed: that liberty is not in itself the goal of man; that being negative in its nature, it merely scatters the obstacles which would impede man and humanity from reaching their goals. Clearly, one can be free and miserable; consequently, beyond liberty there is always the good and the evil that we hope to achieve by its help. Now, property being the sovereign good of those who have not heard the words: *blessed are the poor*, it follows that, sooner or later, the anti-Christian revolutions will be resolved in an overturning of property.

Another reason presses on them: it is written about John, son of Zechariah, “When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said

to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and *the poor have good news brought to them.*”⁷ Thus did the Savior of the world draw up among the proofs for His mission, equal to the greatest miracles, the preaching of the Gospel to the poor. Indeed, since that day, teaching and help of the poor has been one of the permanent marvels of Christianity, the most eloquent sign of Christ’s divinity — this sign, which error had to undermine but was never able to imitate except to its confusion. Perhaps one day the anti-Christ will raise some of the dead to life; but what decidedly he will not do is to have the poor evangelized. Then, as soon as the world, leaning to its ruin, makes new efforts to escape the law of its Redeemer, the fate of the poor, that is to say of humanity, will become all the more to be pitied, will bear witness to the final generations that the God of the Christians was the one and only good God. This characteristic of Christianity made such an impression on the spirit of nations that no religious and political revolution would be able to survive in current times unless it improved the condition of the masses. Now, what does liberty mean for the masses, since slavery, under its diverse forms, was gradually abolished in Christianity by the ever active power of those great apostolic words: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”⁷ What good for the poor is an electoral law which does not make him an elector, for want of money; a law of jury which does not make him a juryman, for lack of money; a law of municipality which does not call him for counsels to the commune, for lack of money; a law on the press which does not allow him to write, nor to understand what is written, for lack of money? What does liberty do for the poor man when it excludes him from everything, precisely because he is poor? What does equal access to employment and unlimited competition between citizens give him, he who lacks the basic elements necessary to compete for anything at all? Money is the key to everything, the price of everything, the measure of everything, and the poor man does not have any! Precisely because he does not have any, he is unable to acquire any, except by accident; furthermore, there is a law which condemns the large majority of men from ever having any.

And yet, the people who are the instrument of revolutions have need to profit in some way. Even anti-Christian revolutions have to offer something to the people, to prevent them from noticing that only with Jesus Christ do the poor gain. The agrarian law of the

ancients was nothing but covetousness; the agrarian law of moderns is itself a struggle against Christianity. When the words “blessed are the poor” have been removed from the belief of men, when were destroyed innumerable works by which these other words were fulfilled: “the poor are evangelized”; the resulting void indeed needs to be filled. The first revolution filled it with the goods of the nobility and of the clergy, and with a law which decreed in families equal rights to inheritance. But the emptiness quickly swallowed this booty. From the very fodder given to it, the revolution spawned a race of even more numerous and more famished masses, which in their turn, cry aloud, demand their share, and demand it from those who alone today have the means, those whom with frightening contempt they call *bourgeois*.

In fact, what for the masses is a bourgeois? He is the heir of the bishops, of the priests, of the lords. He is the avaricious lord, amassing for his relatives who no longer have bondmen or love. He is the priest who shuts the door of the monastery to the poor, by very quickly throwing him a piece of bread, instead of opening to him, warming him, serving him at table, then leading his guest to the church, decorated and illuminated, in the middle of the saints, with music and incense, in order to exhilarate him with a bit of joy so he can continue on his pilgrimage, praising God. He is the prevaricating bishop, who gratuitously has killed in the heart of the poor man the faith, hope and charity which nourished him, the only advantages which he had, and which kept him from envying more fortunate others. Under such circumstances, how could property not be subject to new disorders? How could the question of liberty — less than insignificant for today’s masses — not have been transformed into a civil war between those who have possessions and those who do not, between the masses and the bourgeois? This was an inevitable danger; in disclosing it, the revolution of 1830 clearly laid bare the social powerlessness of the eighteenth century.

To this vast shipwreck, we must add a ruin, no less significant, no less sad, for those people who had placed their hopes outside of the Catholic Church, solely in the powers of humanity. I am referring to the reversals of all the popular reputations gained during the sixteen years of the Restoration. From the prince down to the lowly editor of a newspaper, no name remained as it had been. Victories which usually lift everything up, this time brought down the victorious. Error betrayed its presence in the actions of men as well as in the progress of society. Where are the orators who shook up France? Where are the

renowned politicians? Those philosophers who gathered the young around their pulpits, what became of them? Those who proudly spoke of the future, who mourned with such eloquence the fallen Vatican,⁹ because it had been a major element of man's past, where are they? All have disappeared like Alexander at Babylon, during a banquet; they held the cup from which, after them, the human race was to drink, so immeasurable was this cup, the cup of a new covenant, of a previously unknown life; they said "Drink." Where are they now? Languages have been garbled on their graves, as they were long ago at Babel; they made known to the interpreters of the divine language the mysterious meaning of this story placed in the Bible at the cradle of societies. It is the story of the everlasting misery of men who aspire to perfection by their own abilities, who place stones on top of mud, mud on top of stones, and who label this activity with the pompous name of progress. From the heights of heaven, which they hope to reach, God looks down upon their work with compassion; then, one day, He shatters the pride of the descendants there where He had shattered that of the fathers.

Remain silent; allow the noise of the present-day world to rise in your hearts. What do you hear? Indistinct voices which call to each other without ever answering? Unforgettable monologues in a crowd, pressed together with mouths open; the cry of the lost man, at night, in the middle of the desert; of travelers without a goal who say to themselves: Let us go on; hearts wearied from having lived; uncommunicative mouths which speak only two words: Perhaps! Alas! No harmony, no solidarity save that of complaint. If only there were still some battlefields where people could kill each other with some kind of glory; if only there were revolutions which, while bringing fear to life, do give it some excitement; if only there were blood, from debauchery, from amphitheatres, from gladiators, something which would keep us from feeling in the depth of our hearts, the grace from heaven, which falls into them, in spite of ourselves! But no; society carries us along with an unconcerned and cyclical movement, in spite of catastrophes. Only literature, the expression of our lunacy, raises up around us a world to our liking.

This is the result of the last triumph achieved by the eighteenth century. The Church of France, always governed by the same laws in the civil order, has neither gained nor lost anything because of it; yet it did gain all that error had lost of its moral influence. The divine plan for the Church, or rather for religion, became increasingly clear. In large part, it is the same plan that, before the coming on earth of His only Son, God had used to

prepare the salvation of the human race. “In past generations,” said St. Paul, (God) “allowed all the nations to follow their own ways.”¹⁰ He gave them four thousand years to fashion the world according to their pride. He allowed conquerors, legislators, wise men, to exercise on men the power of force and persuasion. He saw to it that no fortunate circumstance be lacking to them; and, surely, no one is unaware of the degree of culture reached by minds in antiquity. Nonetheless, the more nations followed *their own ways*, the more they got lost. No power, no laws, not even reason could gather humanity together and bring it comfort. Force had produced the Roman Empire as its greatest achievement, and assembled almost all the known nations into a despicable pack, under insolent masters who one day would become monsters because of their inability to maintain without self-deception the weight of their fate. Laws, which everywhere favored servitude, had created no durable and universal order. Reason, lifted up as high as it could be by illustrious men, brought about only transitory and contradictory schools, did nothing for morals, and before long pushed to the extreme, it became lost in hopeless doubt.

Many troubles had warned the world that it was not in its natural state. God had revealed Himself to it by His very absence; He had become, according to the prophecy of the dying Jacob, *the expected of nations*. Finally, when the time marked by Providence for the fulfilling of the sacrifice, whose blood, destined for the salvation of everyone, would flood the past as well as the future, men lifted to God their humbled heads, were disposed to receive grace and truth. This is not to say that they were in the proper state to receive the Gospel, but only that their general inclination was toward the faith. Many philosophers embraced Christianity, and Saint Justin, one of them, explained to us in the narrative of his conversion, the causes which at the time drew philosophy toward God.

There are godly men, was it said to those individuals who were weary of their unfruitful research; there are godly men, who, from the very origin of the world, conversed with God and who predicted from century to century events which are happening today: we call them prophets. Take them up and read them. The simple comparison of this divine word to the human word drove to their knees the philosophers of good faith. The two works having been almost totally separate, we could clearly see God, and we could clearly see man.

For a long time, the memory of this comparison remained present in all intellects. For a long time, Christianity's sovereignty went uncontested. Eventually, the people who every day saw their redemption from farther away, persuaded themselves that it was possible to preserve the benefits of Christianity while ceasing to be Christians. They even denied those benefits and accused the Savior of mankind of all the ills of humanity. They agreed among themselves that the era of reason had arrived, that for centuries the Christ had delayed His appearance, but that finally the future and time had prevailed over Him. At that moment, if it can be said without blasphemy, God found Himself as if embarrassed. He had to distance Himself from these proud generations, and allow them to flounder in their nothingness, because God, who gives all to man and receives nothing from him, cannot countenance pride. But how to leave the world for a second time? Had He not placed His Church in the world with the promise of immortality? Had He not said: *You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it?*

Before these words of the new and eternal covenant, it had been easy for Him to allow *the nations to follow their own ways*. And yet, even though they had embraced the primitive and patriarchal traditions, no living and infallible authority retained their original purity in its heart. It was a widespread "Protestantism" which thus far did not even have a Bible. But the divine constitution of the Catholic Church did not allow the nations to fall so deeply into degradation. Constrained to respect His word, God chose another way to absent Himself, insofar as possible, from a society which did not recognize Him: He allowed His enemies to prevail, they and their principles, in the government of human affairs. The Church, despoiled in almost all of Europe, excluded from public counsels, weighed down by restrictions, a kind of disturbing foreigner, was reduced to the minimum of life needed so as not to belie the divine oracles, and to be present at the great spectacle which once again would reveal to men the extent of their powerlessness. This manifestation has already begun, as we have seen. How much time, and how many trials will be necessary to bring it to completion? When will the day come on which nations and kings, acknowledging their errors, will together rebuild the demolished Jerusalem? No one knows. Our duty is to act as if it were to be tomorrow.

The Church of France, which had a prominent role in the misfortunes of truth, seems destined also to have an illustrious role in the restoration of faith. The revolutions which she experienced served only to extinguish in her bosom the errors of the preceding

centuries. Purified by persecution, she reduced her adversaries, unable to falsify her, with the choice of allowing her to live, or of destroying her and with her all order and all society. Unlike the Church of Great Britain, she did not have to live through centuries of oppression before glimpsing the distant light of her deliverance. Even though she does not obviously enjoy full liberty, at least she has retained that liberty which truth never loses unless it has been betrayed by its natural defenders. The illustrious writers whom God raised up for her and who up to now erected the only durable monuments of French literature in the nineteenth century, are a further sign of the designs of God in her favor. God sends men capable of leading minds to the good only to those nations He wishes to save. From another point of view, where we see appear superior minds, this is a sign that human thought leans in that direction. The genius is but a trail-blazer: he is the first to show himself, that is all; like the pilot bird who precedes the colony of his flock, but is himself impelled by the general movement of migration. It would have been impossible for the eighteenth century to produce de Chateaubriand, de Bonald, de Maistre, de La Mennais, de Lamartine, just as it was impossible for ours to produce Voltaire and Rousseau. The wind which brings to the world good or evil geniuses has indeed changed direction. It is an easy fact to verify for other countries of Europe, but a more delicate one in France, because France, having plunged faster and deeper into error, was the first to reach the furthest boundary where the lost human mind begins to discover, like a new land or new skies, the ancient truth. Consequently, the Church of France, from this point of view, still has an advantage over the other Churches of the continent. The latter struggle against Protestantism or against an unbelief which up to now has not been victor or master. The Church of France, which escaped from Protestantism, and precisely because she did, early found herself entangled with the unbelievers, lost her blood and her heritage in the combat; and now, rising from her ashes, young and virgin, she has only one error left to conquer, an error weakened by the victory, a half-dead Sybil, which has forgotten the language of the future. Finally, since by its position, by its literature, by its character, by its influence and its revolutions, France has become the most active home of the human spirit, its Church necessarily gains from this an importance which no doubt contributed to the countless blessings which she received from God in the past forty years.

This situation imposes weighty duties on the French clergy: not only for the flock entrusted to their care, but also for the influence they could exercise throughout France on the fate of Catholicism and of the world. According as France, the elder daughter of

unbelief, approaches God more or less slowly, the general destinies of faith will take more or less time to be fulfilled. Even though this approach depends, in large part, on causes altogether unrelated to the will of men, even though the Church plays a role more passive than active in the destruction of error, and that only her immobility — which uses and exasperates the futile plots of some very powerful geniuses — is, in fact, an everlasting means of progress, nonetheless it cannot be denied that the virtues and talents of the clergy reinforce each other in the development of truth. Men have a part in all that God does for them, even though it is not the most important part. That is why the French clergy must always keep before their eyes the grandeur of their mission; never more so than today, since they have reached a decisive and very fragile stage in their new existence.

Up to now, the Church of France, ruined by the Revolution of 1789, has acted like a mother of a noble race who lost her children in service to the country, and is anxious to produce additional offspring. The Church of France, by reason of repeated care and charity, with an understanding more admirable than is generally believed, was able in thirty years to repeople the sanctuary. The result is a masterpiece of skill and of the grace of God. But, while giving to people pastors to replace those who had died, she was not yet able, despite her hopes, to offer them professors, save in very small numbers, nor to revive the divine sciences, snuffed out with the martyrs who had been their last and illustrious holders. The preaching of the Gospel, the distribution of the sacraments, this was the most pressing work; it had to be taken care of. Today, even though all the vacancies have not been filled, nonetheless the Church of France is no longer under the dominion of such an absolute need. The superabundance of clergy can be seen here and there; the surge of holy generations swells around the altar; for some, there appeared one thing that everyone had lacked: time. As soon as a Church has the luxury of time, by that very fact, she is forced to consider the restoration of religious sciences, under penalty of shirking her duty. Absent this action, she opens herself up to the greatest dangers that any Church could face. There appears in its bosom a vacillating multitude of minds which does not know how to manage its spare time and its activities. Unprepared for the holy ministry because God has inspired them with another calling, these minds seek in vain a haven where their energy can be fostered, purified, placed into service for common works in the Catholic journey. They grow weary or become excited apart from each other; they see themselves wasting away without benefit to God. The loss of so many minds capable of doing something good is indeed a great misfortune. Not without impunity can beings be stopped in the movement toward their

goal; the river whose course has been impeded, becoming greater by reason of the obstacle in its way, will break through the powerless dikes holding it captive. Minds which have no regular outlet sooner or later meet each other in their painful searches, will join together in an unhealthy joy, will become irritated by the awareness of their present state and by the remembrance of their inaction. Lacking regularity, this society will one day fall like lightning, long stored in the clouds, on a Church without theologians, a Church which will have as her defense only her sharing in the general promises of immortality.

These reflections were made for all men who busy themselves seriously with the future of Catholicism in France. Many attempts were made to reinstitute ecclesiastical studies. Bishop Frayssinous of Hermopolis tried during his administration to create a vast establishment destined for education in the sacred sciences. For as long as his means allowed, Archbishop de Quélen of Paris laid the foundation for a similar institution. The late Cardinal de Rohan, Archbishop of Besançon, left in his will certain sums for this noble purpose. Nonetheless, there was an impediment which prevented any similar endeavor in the Church of France to achieve true success. Minds were greatly divided concerning questions of the greatest importance, and in particular, concerning instruction in philosophy.

One celebrated individual with whom we had contacts, which were later disturbed by the uncertainties of the time, wanted to build on the ruins of all the ancient philosophical systems a new philosophy, destined, according to him, to seal in their very foundations the alliance of faith and of reason. This philosophy, rejected by the body of bishops, nonetheless had made great headway among the clergy of the second order. Other discussions joined to that one, resulting in inexpressible pain. Encountering everywhere a doctrinal power foreign to theirs, in which they had no influence, and which caused great dissension among the clergy, the bishops arrived at a natural mistrust against the movement of minds. They correctly feared that if they founded something of a scientific order, its direction would fall into hands other than theirs, or that the lack of cooperation between capable men would ruin their efforts. Either directly or indirectly, these considerations led them to restrict their role to that of pastors and guardians of the faith, which, to be sure, was their first duty. On the other hand, the school, which by its own authority aspired to govern minds, fought in vain against an invincible difficulty, that of founding in the Church an institution that was independent of episcopal authority. It could not help but provoke

controversy. Thus, on one side and on the other, there was in the scientific order the lack of necessary continuity. And at what a time! — when the Church of France progressed from youth to adulthood, at the moment of her most critical new destinies, at the age when power needs to be distributed, but is not yet regulated by a judgment of equal strength. Who will be able to recount how much all of us have suffered? Our wills vacillating between bishops immobile on their seats, and the men who entrance us by the magic of their personal influence; our need for strong studies and the hopelessness of satisfying that need; our limitless desire for a unity troubled in its very foundations; the feeling of the good to be accomplished and the impossibility of doing so; the mistrust, the suspicions, the low spirits, and the century growing beside us, now full of menaces, now pushed towards God by fearful experiences. And instead of teaching her, we, unhappy outcasts of the previous day, children of saints, who died for the sake of truth, we wore ourselves out in discussions whose charm or calamities we knew only how to admire.

This situation lasted fourteen years.

As of yesterday,¹⁰ the school about which we spoke was in existence. Enfeebled and divided by a word from the Apostolic See, nonetheless it had retained a chief and some disciples. Affection, remembrances, pain, respect, a thousand noble sentiments kept it together as if alive, even though it was far from being what it had been.

Today, we can announce that this school, which we long ago abandoned, no longer exists, that all the collaboration of works among its members has been broken. Faithful to the respects of his heart regarding the past, each member now knows no other guide than the Church, no other need than fellowship, no other ambition than to gather around the Holy See and the bishops which its favor and divine mercy have given to the Christians of France. We will not judge the event¹¹ which led to this declaration: the Church and posterity will judge it. For us, who long ago contributed to the excitement of intellects, we felt that we owed it to our brothers, in these painful circumstances, to raise our voice — not to strengthen them, not to tell them that they had nothing to fear, not to show ourselves as stronger or more distinguished than they, but to reveal to them the depth of our heart. A participant in all that has occurred, informed of all the secrets of this affair, I will bear witness to God, to His Church, to the Roman Church in particular, until my very last breath.

ENDNOTES

1. Jansenism.
2. The scholars, e.g., Arnauld and Pascal, at the Abbey of Port Royal, near Paris.
3. Emphasis in original.
4. Once again, Jansenism.
5. Julian, known as the Apostate (331-363). Roman Emperor, 361-363.
6. See Internet: *worksoflacordaire* “Fundraising for the Rebuilding of the Archbishop’s Residence in Paris.”
7. *Mt* 11:3 ff.
8. *Galatians* 3:28.
9. I.e., in the former *Globe*, newspaper.
10. *Acts* 14:16.
11. 1 May 1834.
12. Publication of the book: *Paroles d’un croyant* [Words of a Believer].

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

Later republished as Preface to *Considérations sur le système philosophique de M. De La Mennais* [Reflections on the Philosophical System of Father de La Mennais]. Derivaux, Libraire. 18, rue des Grands Augustins. Paris, 1834. Translated from the French by George Christian, OP, and Richard Christian. © 2012. All rights reserved.