

REPLY TO THE *TEMPS* AND THE *COURRIER FRANÇAIS*

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Today, the *Temps* and the *Courrier Français* have begun a small crusade against *L'Avenir*, concerning the obsequies of Mr. Dehertier, late Constitutional Bishop of the *Aveyron* region.

The *Temps*, “in view of the skepticism that is destroying the masses, after having corrupted the top levels of society, had often hoped that some eloquent voices would arise to reanimate slackened beliefs and rejuvenate them by the baptism of new ideas. The idea that launched *L'Avenir* had appeared to them as attractive and lofty, but it should have said that the way forward lay in blending, as in the example of Leibnitz and of Bossuet, and by enlarging the religious society instead of limiting it, by welcoming the dissidents and not excommunicating them.”

Even though there is a laughable aspect to those words, nonetheless we wish to take seriously their intent. We will admit that the slackened beliefs needed a baptism, that one had to proceed by way of merging and by enlarging the religious circle. The slackened beliefs needed baptism, not a new one but the old one, because the mistake lies only at its source. Neither men nor current matters deserve such appreciation as to make a religion that saw so many events and men come and go find hope in a spirit other than its own. But that old baptism would have been new, it would have brought to life primitive Christians who asked nothing more of authority than freedom; and who, carrying it from ground level to the scaffold had, between the reign of Tiberius and that of the Eunuchs, emancipated the conscience, to the benefit of the world, of worship, and of the word. Perhaps such men would have been useful for these current times. To recall them to life required preparing the hearts of people for a major reconciliation; and since France is the nation that God has placed way ahead of all the others in its love for the right and in affection for the beautiful, this nation, the elder of the family, needed words so blessed and fraternal, so free and so evidently above everything that lips soiled by the spirit of the party could utter, it was

impossible for France, given what God had made it, to be mistaken. Those words were indeed spoken, and however unjust we view them today, perhaps some men will be born who will understand them. We repeat this for their sake. Thus, we have told the French people, in Christ's name: "You wish to be free, and it is right; it is the calling of men and of nations. Your kings did not give you freedom; formerly, when they helped your intrigues become so infamous under the name *Communes*, the latter were intended to destroy their nobility and not to set you free. Under them and before them, only religion offered you some freedom; the more kings were moving away from Christianity, the more you saw an increase in that absolute power which you decidedly overthrew because you are the remnants of a Christian nation, consequently unable to tolerate bondage. In the end, we have to admit that the Church of France had served your cause poorly; it had entered into an alliance with Louis XIV that hastened many troubles. But it can be excused in that it was you yourselves who spent several centuries in persuading her that the person of the king was, on earth, independent of all justice, sovereign in the manner of God, and almost adorable as He is! She believed you, you who, by a budding disbelief, were inclined to raise above everything that throne which you sought to overthrow twice in forty years. Today, the Church of France discards your errors, remembering that religion was freedom, and comes to ask of you its share in it at an hour that is not belated since you have not yet been able to free Europe and your country. Besides, what she asks is not at all extraordinary. She invokes your laws, she asks that you carry out your charity. Give to Catholics what you have promised to everyone: freedom of the press, freedom of instruction, freedom of conscience, freedom of worship as granted to all other religions; separate Church and State in sincerity; allow each religion the virtues and talents it can muster for its defense; make of all the altars not a single altar, that would be the violent ruin of all of them; of all convictions not one and the same conviction, that is a matter best left to time and to the victory of truth. Rather, keep every altar where it is and to whom it belongs, every conviction to the spirit to which it is attached, establish between all the altars and all the convictions this sublime and sacred agreement: that each one will be free at home, that the Catholic will not enter the Protestant's residence without permission of the minister, nor the Protestant in the Catholic's church save with permission from the bishop! Only in this way will freedom arise, will possession of universal tolerance be assured to all with rights equal to those of others, and that fusion of minds, which man cannot bring about by the sacrifice of his thought, because that would be suicide of conscience — rather a fusion that works slowly by the contest of equal arms in all the beliefs, until such time as one having triumphed, the human race will applaud and recognize in its solitude the word, spoken

once, never to fade away.”

This is the baptism that the publishers of *L'Avenir* desired for the religion of their forbears and for their fellow citizens: the age-old baptism of freedom. This is the reconciliation they sought, the reconciliation of freedom. This is the melding of beliefs that they wished for, because it is the only one possible, a fusion that is achieved through freedom. But if it was beyond their ability to obtain such important results, they sought, or at least they tried, to gather from the parties that were tearing France apart, some men who could attest that they were not accomplices in those deadly divisions, who asked only for peace and freedom, who were ready to sacrifice persons to things, provided those things were common to everyone, provided that once in forty years of misfortunes individuals would shake hands with this oath, the last of oaths that man will make: *freedom for you and for us*.

Many Catholics, many Catholic priests answered this appeal; we give our word to the country that the clergy of France, despite dissensions which we cannot hide, hold to these beliefs in such a way that it is impossible today for them to disengage themselves! There are others who pushed aside the baptism of freedom, others who pushed aside the reconciliation of freedom, others who wanted no part in this fusion that the *Temps* reproaches us for not having tried to obtain. Indeed, the countercharge is so simple that we lack the courage to bring it up. It is tiring to be right against opponents who never have regrets. For all that, let us say so anyway, because after these men there will be others: what has the government done for the freedom of religion, for the separation of Church and State, for freedom of instruction? What difference is there between the current times and former ones, except that the earth and the sun have kept moving while men remained motionless, except that the clergy was in bondage yesterday, and the complaint today is that it is not sufficiently in bondage? What have newspapers done for freedom of worship, for the separation of Church and State, for freedom of instruction? What has the *Temps* done, the *Courrier Français*, what have all newspapers done? When there was a question of some law suits, the papers did not even honor with one word the men who dealt with the slander of their own brothers in order to enlighten those papers. The *Messenger des Chambres* acknowledged yesterday, as if by accident, that at least we have the worth of not counting on a restoration for our welfare. And yet, hardly a day passes without our being accused of hypocrisy. It seems that the writers of this country have become incapable of recognizing a genuine cry of conscience.

This very day, let people judge between them and us.

The Ministry ordered the celebration in a Catholic church of a funeral service in honor of a man estranged from the Catholic church. For one day, it took over the temple, the sanctuary, the tabernacle; it accomplished all it wanted on that day; consequently, on another day, it will again do all it wants, converting it into a synagogue, or a mosque. This is a glaring violation of the Charter in that it is an act of religion ordered by the State, and the State has no right to demand any act of religion. It is an act of religion hostile to another religion, it is an act of religion hostile to all religions. Indeed, if the Ministry followed this system, as it pretends to have the power, it could have the bodies of Catholics taken to the Calvinists, the bodies of Jews to the ones or the others — that is to say, it could disrupt the peace of all consciences and the majesty of all religions. We have said that this was a crime, and we know of no greater one: it is to abuse death even against God. What does the *Temps* have to say to that?

“If the Catholic religion were still the religion of the State, or if freedom of conscience were not even an idea, the priesthood would have some right to call on the civil arm against the schismatics, to prevent their entrance into churches, and to exclude them from consecrated ground. But we live under the dominion of a universal tolerance that allows the government to notice and to react only for the maintenance of that freedom. It has loaned its temples to priests, Catholic, schismatic, or orthodox, because it is not allowed to decide which one is right, nor to embrace one quarrel over another.”

The State has loaned its temples. I concede; but if it had loaned its temples for stables, could it not, on a day and at a time of its choosing, take them back and devote them to another purpose? No, the laws forbid that. The owner would need time to leave, to take out his horses, to find another location. Even animals cannot be expelled from a building of the State in the manner the State uses to expel God, when convenient. It has loaned its temples, I agree, but is this loan not subject to some conditions, of which freedom is the first? Is there in the world any government that would dare to say before men: ‘Here is a house, place your altars there, altars holy and free; but remember that I will have offered there sacrifices that will please me by such men as I choose!’ Even a stable would not be accepted at this price. And here it is a question of religion, which, in all centuries, was the binding force of society, which was the hope and the life of a multitude of men! Ah! We have fallen on times worthy of pity; never has the human conscience been so outraged!

The *Courrier Français* is much less dangerous than the *Temps*; skipping quickly from one crime to another, it ridicules simultaneously, in a few sentences, our indignation at the sacrilege of the church of Saint Louis and at the plunder of the Abbey of Melleray. These men do not even take time to laugh at the events! They can grant them only a smile then they die. They pass quickly, I agree; but there is something that passes even more quickly than they: their predominance.

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