

RESPONSE TO THE *QUOTIDIENNE*
ON THE SUPPRESSION OF THE BUDGET
FOR THE CLERGY

(15 November 1830)

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Should the clergy give up its endowment? Is it able to do so?

The *Quotidienne* [newspaper] replied: It should not, nor is it able to do so.

The *Avenir* [newspaper] replies: It is indeed able and ought to do so.

The clergy is able to do so, even though it is not the absolute owner of its endowment, even though it is accountable to its successors for these remains of their patrimony. Indeed, there is something even more precious for which it is accountable to them, an older treasure of which it is written that one would sell all he has to buy it. I admit that inheritance is sacred, but perhaps so also is faith. I do not understand too well who will inherit our immortal reliance on the Treasury, after we have preserved the inheritance at the price of the salvation of our descendants. The clergy, it is said, is a moral entity that never dies. This is a mistake: it did die in Africa, in Asia, in Greece, in half the world. It can die in France; what use will it have in its tomb for some inalienable rights on the State? Gold is not like the bones of prophets; it does not snatch the dead out of their tomb.

Accordingly, I rephrase the question to convey its precise import, which is: Can the clergy renounce its endowment to save its faith?

Indeed it can.

Our ancestors presented to the Church gifts which had one only purpose: the glorious continuity of the Christian name; however disfigured their benefits have come down to us, their original purpose has not changed. The conservation of the faith is a sacred condition of happiness; the advantage of the Church is the canonical measure of what she can do regarding those gifts, which is to say: she can do everything. When Pius VII, of everlasting memory, endorsed the plunder of our goods in France, in exchange for a modest indemnity, he did not await the response of the future, he found it completely realized on the tomb of our fathers. He would not have the validity of the concordat depend on its ratification by posterity; rather, having in mind those who no longer existed, he solemnly declared his irrevocable will in favor of those who were to come.

Today, the clergy can forego its endowment, if it needs to.

It needs to.

We have tried to offer some proofs of this, but we did not take as the basis of our reasoning an improper expression: we recognized that the clergy was not receiving a *legal salary*. But the Empire converted its indemnity into a salary; the Restoration made it a salary; the Revolution of 1830 made it a salary. All of them found in this a means to oppress the clergy. The history of the Constituent Assembly, the speeches of Maury and of Mirabeau, all possible concordats change nothing in this situation. It is what it is.

Now, we, indentured Catholics, wish to be free, and we look for what impedes our becoming so. One day, we finally concluded that we were men; we judged ourselves to be in the presence of God and of laws. Seeing our oppressors before us, we admired whence such boldness could come to people who were more afraid to die than we were. Clearly, we were lacking some facility: but which one? It is not that of numbers; we have the majority. It is not the power of laws; they belong to us as much as to them. It is not the one that gives us faith; we are the only ones who still believe in something. And yet, we lack one facility: which one? It is, in fact, *moral force*, the power that comes from the heart. How can we obtain it? We are paid by our enemies, by those who regard us as hypocrites or imbeciles, and who are convinced that our lives depend on their money. They are no doubt our patrons; worse than that: as our patrons, they have come to believe that they have given us a favor, an absurd one at that. Their handling of it has become so injurious that the men

who put up with it must necessarily fall beneath contempt. Consider a patron who, on meeting his creditor, would throw some money into the mud while telling him: “Work, you loafer, work.” This is how our enemies treat us; moreover, today marks thirty years that we have been bending down to pick up the money.

After that, the question is asked: what relationship is there between our subjection and our endowment? As for myself I ask, rather, how have we found the courage to cover our injuries with magnificent names and then call our laments simply shows of ostentation? The relationship that exists between our servitude and our endowment is that the endowment strips us of all dignity, all honor, all moral force: — it gives us the heart of slaves. Would to God that the clergy be salaried, namely, that it receive from the nation an honorable return in exchange for services deemed to be necessary! But, unsuitable as it is, the word *salary* is not even appropriate for the disgraceful pittance that is granted. Nor is charity its name, because benevolence and compassion are found in charity, while neither is to be found in the hand that feeds us. The day will come when a priest appears at the Treasury, and the last employee will ask him to lower his eyes: I dare say that this has already happened.

But what will our enemies do when we are no longer in their pay? I have no idea. Will they invent new pretexts to subdue us? I do not know. Freedom is not won by one’s considering beforehand the means to be used to grasp it. When one wishes to be free, he rises one day, reflects for a quarter hour, kneels in the presence of God Who created man free, then boldly marches ahead, eating his bread as Providence sends it. Neither princes nor laws give freedom; indeed, Catholics, you have the proof, you who live under the same Charter, under the same King as all the French people. You are the only ones to be crushed by the same legislation that grants your fellow citizens an independence that no nation has ever before enjoyed. What is it, then, that gives freedom? I repeat: neither princes, nor laws. Freedom is not given, it is taken. And if you have lost it, if you have been deprived of it under kings who claimed to be your friends, do not look for any other reason for it than this: you waited for it at the door of their palace. That is an adequate answer; freedom never steps down the staircase of kings.

Freedom is taken; but in order to take it, one must be a man.

Now the clergy is weak because it is paid by those who hold it in ridicule.

Then again, we lack one other ability: the power of unity. The budget absolutely separates the interests of the clergy from those of the people. A priest paid by the State is an isolated functionary whose interests have nothing in common with those of his parish. He is chased away then returns again. What does it matter? He is followed by regrets which have nothing of the influence that the spirit of community gives to things and to men. Between a priest salaried from the public treasury and a priest living from the charity of the faithful, there exists the same difference as between a mayor named by the State and a mayor chosen by his fellow citizens. Let the first be discharged, no one will mind; touch the second, and the community will be aroused. Accordingly, it is easy today to oppress thirty thousand priests, scattered over a vast territory and amounting to nothing among the people.

But let them give up the chains of the State to contract bonds of love with their fellow citizens, and, soon mingle into the population, they will become one of those freedoms: they will recover physical strength along with moral power.

You cannot resolve this by asking how the clergy will be able to live. That is another question; it is not an issue of freedom, but one of hunger. One thing remains constant: as long as the State pays the Church, it will oppress her.

Now, how can the Church survive without its endowment?

While I was previously unmindful, all the more now am I unaware of how she will survive without freedom. Today, no one is protected by power, nor can he be. Freedom is the only guardian of the city. Pity the individual who is not free in a country wherein freedom is the only thing respected! If it becomes necessary for the Church to recover its independence and if she cannot recover it except by abandoning the remainder of her patrimony, it matters little that I not know how she will survive. God knows it in my place; God has foreseen the sacrifice. He has weighed together the needs and charity; neither we nor the birds of the air will find His Providence lacking. The worker will receive his food because he has been promised it. Not one hair will fall from our heads, because they are counted. A few souls may perhaps suffer from a new organization, less favorable to the

desires of their piety. If they ask for an accounting, we will answer them in this way: We have done something very difficult out of a great love for you, something which cost many tears. Christ was dying because of the servitude of His own; He had to be rescued. Pray and suffer without cursing. From the beginning, we have asked God to send us the greatest portion of pains and privations.

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