

# **SUPPRESSION OF THE BUDGET OF THE CLERGY**

## **Article I**

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The fatal word has been spoken. I believe this is how all languages express final words which contain a strong and mournful truth. That fatal word was said to the Church of France by one of her children, whose love she cannot deny, and who encountered death in her service.

Would to God, said he to her, that you were still queen! But time has taken away the crown the Franks had given you and that twenty nations, mingled in their blood, had confirmed on your head. All that is left of your inheritance today is but questionable bread and of your alliance with kings only bondage; dare to become free, even if it means becoming poor. No longer ask of the Treasury for a life that ingratitude reluctantly offers you, but lift up your eyes towards Him who sent you, without tunic and without walking stick, to bring peace to the world in exchange for eventual hospitality.

These words were spoken with another eloquence, with another tone of voice whose remembrance will be long-lasting. Some Christians, and even some strangers, were moved by them.

Christians remembered the early days of their fathers, when they were poor and loved each other, when freedom, pursued below the heavens, was reborn with them under the palace of Nero. They thought they heard the voice of their Master, telling his disciples: "Have neither gold nor money in your belts, no bag for the road, only one tunic, no shoes, no walking stick; because the worker deserves his keep." No doubt there comes a time

when nations receive God with splendor, and their supreme master, where His dwelling among men is more renowned than the palace of kings; but the poverty of the disciple must never disappear, for it is a virtue. When people withdraw their trust in God, to the point of giving Him only a borrowed haven, when they grant life to his envoys only on condition of having them as captives, this is when the disciple must shake the dust of his feet and again take up on the earth the name of sojourner. The latter is not leaving on his own, he is expelled. One never says to God: Go away. We make Him a captive when we no longer want Him.

Strangers admired a language that men will never hear with indifference since it has converted the world. They did not believe that there was still so much faith, and that religion could face up to freedom, with no help other than that of God.

How many souls were waiting for that moment! How many sought the priest these past thirty years and could not find him in a civil servant. An unerring instinct warns us about what is degrading; the Caesars would never have persecuted Christians if their prelates had condescended to accept a salary from the State. Constantine never made them an offer, at the time of the first alliance of the Church and the Empire. Christians, poor and free, signed it, wishing to remain always what they had been for three centuries; such men as there were no more to be had. Their secret, in fact, was in being men among slaves. Today, we have lost this secret, to the point of only having become captives, at a time when authority barely can obtain servants. How could we have kept the esteem of people? Moreover, how could the first cry of freedom from families not have awakened powerful sympathies? Freedom: is that the mysterious name of God that the Hebrews said was hidden in the Temple and that could not be uttered without producing miracles?

But these feelings are not the only ones aroused by the appearance of a word that contains our destinies. They have been so varied that it is useless to formulate an idea of them before beginning a discussion.

The partisans of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, those who admired the last chapter of the Social Contract, who cannot imagine a state without a religion created by legislators, those people are frightened by our boldness. Indeed, the only way left for them to have a legitimate religion is to have paid religion. They feel that, basically, the budget gives them as much power in the Church as the Pope has; this semi-papacy comforts them with the freedom of unanticipated cults, which will stand them well when Catholicism will have chanted its last Mass. Until then, they seek to degrade the Church without persecuting it. But a Church without a budget cannot be disparaged but can only be overtaken by persecution. All is lost, then, [in their eyes - Trans.], if religion gets rid of the bondage of the budget, if she says: I will be free! Because she will indeed be free, unless she is killed. This was the unshakeable position of the first bishops who allied themselves with princes: every time their consciences were being tried, they bared their chest. With them, there had been only one alternative: life or death! Today, how does one offer death to whoever demands freedom?

Alongside those men of bad faith, holdovers of a century who hoped for freedom of cults only to hate God at their leisure, there came Christians whose language evoked surprise after what we had heard from the mouth of their enemies. You wish for the suppression of the ecclesiastical budget, they said, but all will be lost, *except honor*. We no longer have sufficient faith to live dependent on charity. Think of it: no church, no episcopal residence, not one seminary, not one rectory belongs to us; all of that belongs to the State or to townships, to the very enemies of our freedom. We will indeed become free but like the proletarian that nothing can reach because he owns nothing. Such sad language which questions whether the children of darkness have greater faith and realize more exactly the power of truth than the children of light. Well! Yes, let us admit it. You will be like the proletariat, moreover with God as inheritance, with a hope that does not deceive, with millions of souls who love you. Your master did not have as much and yet he survived. Can you not conquer the world a second time? And if you cannot, why would you want the world to support at great expense a deceased shadow? Your tomb is too costly if

it does not hold life. Ah, yes! Faith has diminished; but do you know why? It is because charity has been extinguished and charity has gone out because there is no longer any poverty among us, and no more wealth, even, but a horrible agent between the two, something that appeases hunger only by consuming the heart.

Finally, some others, without either hatred or penchant for religion, have spoken of the liberation of the Church and the rejection of her budget with feelings of disinterest. Following their political principles, they understand that official payment of the cult is a necessary attempt against its independence and a cost that it is absurd to extend generally to everyone, when faith is not common to everyone.

This is how public opinion divided itself on this important matter. We will follow its progress and speed up its development with unflagging perseverance because this contains everything. Fortunate is the truth of having been the first to withdraw its hand as it was the last to extend it to authority! The alliance has been broken; it could not be long-lived between what passes and what does not die. Let the kings descend in peace into their tombs. Their fate has been fulfilled, and posterity will say who was faithful to his oaths, to oaths of York, when Constantius<sup>1</sup> “The Pale”, on his deathbed, gave to his son both the purple and the love of Christians. As for us, let us go on living; for what in fact has changed? Freedom remains, and so does God.

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**ENDNOTE** [Trans.]

1. Constantius I Chlorus (i.e., “The Pale”): c. 225 - 306 [Bad Wurttemberg / York, England]. Roman emperor.

His son was Constantine the Great.

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