

SUPPRESSION OF THE BUDGET OF THE CLERGY

Article III

(2-3 November 1830)

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When we take a moment to reflect, it seems that this is a very precarious and unfortunate stand for a Church reduced to living from the charity of those who believe in it. To ask for alms every day and to receive them! Every day to imperil before the people the majesty of religion by the spectacle of its unravelling! It was not with the attitude of begging that the Jupiter of Phidias had added, in the spirit of Greece, to the grandeur of the Gods. If the salary given by the State destroys something of the independence of the priest, at least the State is an invisible and powerful being; the blows that it directs at the dignity of the Church are not noticed until very late and by eyes capable of judgment. But the villager who gives a coin to his pastor knows that he has claims on him for that one coin; the dependence increases by the very insignificance of revenues in virtue of the law which states that a servant with one hundred francs of salary is less free than a minister at one hundred fifty thousand francs.

This objection, which preoccupies a few minds is so unjustified that the most honorable and liberal professions are those in which the salary comes from individuals, while the functions paid for at great expense by the State need guarantees against power so as not to fall into the abyss of groveling. How badly is Christianity understood if one does not see all that is good in the kindly relationships of the faithful with the priest! Forget for a moment depreciated traditions; that sad exchange of blessings and money, which is, after payment by the State, the cause of our misfortunes. Forget them; build me a cabin for use as a rectory; take a stone from your fields for an altar; let the barn that houses your harvests be the church. Think you that God would not prefer to be free with us under a roof of straw, than a slave with his children in a palace? Think you that the priest in his cabin, will have neither mother, nor sister, and that his homespun clothes will be less independent than silk

ones? God did not think in this way; in former times, God did not grant a share to the holy tribe in Israel. He made it a race of orphans, preferring to leave love for his brothers as inheritance rather than the fields of Judea. And so, each house carefully kept the share of the Levite, the share of the disinherited, the share of the tribe that never had any in the succession of the patriarchs. This was the primitive image of the Christian priesthood, which, when its hour had come, was born even poorer and never entrusted itself to live save at the table of its children.

We know about the lives of the first disciples, the sharing of goods, the alms they sent from one end of the world to the other, and the work of hands that comforted the efforts of charity. And so, if a man withdrew into solitude, he did not lack friends who brought him a share of bread from the family. “But he asked them to bring him a hoe and an ax and a bit of wheat; he studied the land around the mountain, and working a small section best watered, he planted there. In this way, he reaped every year something with which to make his bread, and had the joy of not being beholden to anyone.¹ “This life did not last just one day; it lasted during the time of forty Caesars, so simple and so powerful that the whole empire destroyed itself against it. Victorious Christians never imagined that they were supposed to rush onto the imperial treasure in order finally to become free men. They demanded of victory only a continuation of the past, with the addition of peace and justice.

Unfortunately, victory gave them no advantage. “I, Constantine Augustus, and Licinius Augustus, fortunately assembled at Milan and considering all kinds of concerns that interest public prosperity and peacefulness, have believed that it would be in the interest of a great number of men to regulate first of all the matters of divinity. Accordingly, we have resolved to grant Christians the freedom to follow their religion, and to everyone to embrace whatever one he wishes. . .”² At the end of the decree, the two emperors ordered the restitution of property seized from the Christians by unjust plunder. This is how Christianity was naturalized under the Empire, protected by two principles common to everyone: liberty of conscience and respect for ownership. Later, the emperors gave to churches out of personal generosity and granted them exemption from public services, the ability to receive legacies and donations; moreover, they assigned them pensions from the revenues of cities. But the independent ancient and patriarchal constitution of Christian

priesthood was never altered; the priest continued to live among the people like a father nourished his children. A church was a family; it is true that, little by little, the family became rich, acquiring lands and servants. Nonetheless, it always remained a family. No one imagined making the priest a civil servant. No one dared to offer chains to the descendants of the first three Christian centuries, masters of the world, for having been its victims.

The barbarians who destroyed everything could not do anything against so powerful an institution. While the armies and the money of the Empire, blocked on all roads, could no longer bring life to the ends of the provinces, the Christian priest, whether carried by the waves or left standing on the shore, loaned himself, so to speak, to all revolutions, to all divisions of territories, to all destinies, however bizarre the fate of battles made them. He was father, and as long as the children live, the father does not die. What would the Catholic Church have become if, at that time, it depended on the treasure of Constantinople? What will the Church of France become if a civil war squandered the fortune of the State? It is a worthless religion that perishes along with the treasure!

This is why God has worked miracles to separate the truth from the public treasury; moreover, the manifestation of His Providence on this point leaves no doubt to anyone who has read the history of religion. It is enough to think of Rome, the capital and the bond of Christianity, to grasp this idea in its utmost clarity. Neither the East nor the West were able to remove Rome from the hands of a priest, since the day when the eagle fled Italy towards the Bosphorus, and unbelievable events, from century to century, made a throne of the apostolic chair and an eternal city with nine generations of ruins. "Accordingly," said Fleury, "one can believe that it was by a particular effect of Providence that the pope found himself independent and master of a State powerful enough not to be easily oppressed by the other sovereigns." Yes, no doubt, we can believe it. It was necessary for the character of an independent paternity, which is the soul of Christian priesthood, to have a brilliant symbol. All would have been lost, if some prince had placed the Roman Church under salary along with its leader. Up until Constantine, that danger did not exist, and God did nothing to prepare for the bishops of Rome temporal sovereignty. But, as soon as the alliance between religion and the Empire had been signed, one could see all at once

the splendor of the Caesars flee to the edges of Europe; thus was the pope preserved from the shame of one day being their courtier.

Nevertheless, the Roman Church remained poor; she continued to live from alms more than from her inheritance so that the Christian priesthood would never forget that the charity of the faithful constitutes its genuine fortune. Daughter and mother of the world, Rome receives and gives life, blessed to await the mite of her children, that she will never exchange for the gold of kings. Kings have already proposed an exchange; they build palaces for her; they hoped to see her captive of their budget; all the earth knows her answer.

May it please God that someday the Church of France give to her jailers the same response and that she recognize, finally, that her present temperament is contrary to her proper history and to all the traditions of antiquity! A Church paid by the State is something new that will never be blessed, a frightening example left to our descendants, that has shown but a feeble portion of its benefits. It was a day of plunder, the eve of a schism, when the State had first promised us a salary: streams of tears carried away its promise. It was on the day after the anarchy, on the eve of despotism, that, for the second time, the State promised us a salary. Eight years later, our Pontiff, the Vicar of God, was made prisoner by the hand that paid us our salary. I had not thought of it before: woe to me if now I ever receive from the State a mite tarnished by this memory!

ENDNOTES

1. *Vie de Saint Antoine*, par Saint Athanase, traduction de Fleury. [Life of St. Anthony]
2. Lactance, *De la mort des persécuteurs*, II, 48. [Death of persecutors]
3. Quatrième discours sur l'histoire ecclésiastique, n° 10. [Fourth lecture on ecclesiastical history]

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