

SUPPRESSION OF THE BUDGET OF THE CLERGY

Article IV

(5 November 1830)

Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, OP

Catholics! We were telling you a few days ago that your oppressors will not be satisfied with demanding prayers from you in exchange for their money, but that all activities of your religion would undergo the same treatment. We repeat that today, but with head covered and in unspeakable pain — because what has never taken place before in the world has now been noticed. What no other religion has had to bear, until now, has just been imposed on you. To how many others besides you could this have been done with impunity?

One of your brothers has refused a deceased person the words and the prayers of the final farewell of the Christians. He left the care of honoring the strayed ashes to those who could tell them: “You who have loved during your lifetime, love us in the beyond.” Your brother has done well: he acted as a free man, as priest of the Lord, determined to keep his lips unsullied by servile blessings. Woe to him who blesses in spite of his conscience, who speaks of God to the dead with a mercenary heart. Woe to the priest who utters lies beside a coffin, who directs souls to the judgment of God through fear of the living and for worthless money. Your brother has acted properly: are we the grave-diggers of the human race? Have we made a pact with him to flatter his remains, more unfortunate than the courtiers on whom the death of the prince confers the right to treat him as his life deserved? Your brother acted properly; but the shadow of a proconsul believed that this much independence was not appropriate for so shameless a citizen as a Catholic priest. He ordered that the body be presented before the altar, even if violence was needed to do it, and picked the locks on the doors of the sanctuary wherein rests — under the protection

of the laws of the country, under the watch of liberty — the God of mankind and of a large number of French people.

His wish was fulfilled; a squad of the national guard presented the coffin into the interior of the church; power and death violated the dwelling of God, in full peace, without any popular uprising, by orders from the administration. The dwelling of a citizen is not to be violated except by the intervention of the law; the court was not even alerted for it to say to religion: “Cover your face for a moment before my sword.” A simple sub-prefect, a dispensable wage-earner, from the interior of his home, protected from arbitrariness by thirty million men, has sent a cadaver into the house of God! He did this while you were sleeping quietly on the sworn oath of 7 August, while prayers were demanded of you to bless, in the person of the King, the head of the freedom of a great nation. He did this before the law, which declared that the cults are liberated — but what is a liberated cult if its temple is not liberated, nor is its altar, if mud can be brought in there, with weapons in hand? This is what he did to half of all French people, he and his sub-prefect!

I do not know the laws of the Church sufficiently enough to understand whether it is still permitted to offer the Holy Sacrifice in a place dishonored by such cowardly violence. Indeed, who today has the time to study the repealed laws? And yet, there is one law that is known without having been learned and that always has in the world living defenders: this one no longer allows the church of Aubusson to be considered as a holy place. A location that is at the mercy of a first sub-prefect and of the first body that arrives is not a holy place. The church of Aubusson is no longer part of the world; *blood has not flowed, but the freedom of people poured out through all the pores.*

Now, Catholics, what will you do? What will I say to the oppressors in your name? As for me, I cannot avoid a reflection, which is: if you placed your altars in a barn that belonged to you instead of in a building belonging to the State, whether local or at a distance, you would be forever disentangled from these onslaughts of power. A few bales of straw would defend you better than the columns and the marbles that have been stolen from you to obtain the right to give you hospitality reluctantly and without compassion. What is there in these walls that binds you so

strongly? Your fathers built them; but your fathers are no longer there; not even their dust was left behind. Magnificent and empty monuments, that only one thing remained which could have made them holy and worthy of God, one thing that is everywhere on the soil of France: freedom. Oh well! Freedom no longer lies at the corner of the altar; it has just been granted the right to a long-lasting asylum of servitude. Let us close the doors, then; may servitude sleep in silence under the watch of sub-prefects. One day, when the years and solitude will have darkened our domes, caused our arrows to bend, broken our stained glass windows, half-way downed our crosses; when the light of night slowly allowing our blessed stones to topple, lights up the ruins of the sanctuary through the vaults. One day, when passers-by, holding their children by the hand, are asked: What are those old towers and those walls that are crumbling? The fathers will look up; they will take their little ones and lift them up to the window so that they can see and say to them: In former times, men who prayed to God were there and then left because freedom was expelled from there.

Catholics! Posterity will applaud you for a long time; there is no man who would be able to forget what you would have done to take away the last inch of ground from absolute power. As early as today, under the protection of common laws, you will benefit from a poor and honored freedom of which no one would be able to deprive you. The house of God would be inviolable, because it would be the house of a citizen. No one will look on it as a communal location to enclose sheep, by virtue of the right of empty pasture. If a sub-prefect has the folly to send a cadaver by a squad of the National Guard, all of France, today insensitive to our injuries, would rise in indignation against him because, in your freedom, he would be attacking the freedom of everyone. Apart from that, what is happening? The man who has defied so many French people in their religion, who treated a location where men bend their knee with greater irreverence than would be allowed in a stable, that man is sitting by his fireplace, peaceful and pleased with himself. You would have made him become pale if, considering your God dishonored, you, with a stick in hand and a hat on your head, took Him to a hut built with pine boards, swearing not to expose Him a second time to insults in the temples of the State.

Besides, we believe that it is the duty of the pastor of Aubusson to pursue before the courts the sub-prefect who engaged in such a flagrant violation of religious

freedom. It is important that the matter be decided and that we learn whether justice regards such an action as a right of the State in its relationship with religion.¹

ENDNOTE

1. On the occasion of these articles on the *Suppression of the Budget of the Clergy*, *L'Avenir* published in its issue of 8 November the following two notices.

“In a report that the *Correspondant* published on the budget of the clergy, the point was made that the clergy did not receive a salary but instead touched a benefit. This is true in law but not in reality: what does a right matter before a practice of thirty years that every day takes on more absolute mastery? In that report, it is also held that the annual salary ought to be converted into perpetual revenue from the State. This is still true in law; but of what value is a right when no one thinks of making it into reality? Besides, one is really blind if one believes that a record of revenues would give to the Church the freedom that the budget had taken from her. Public opinion will always consider the clergy as paid. Whatever the manner of distribution, the revenue would always keep him in perpetual contact with the administration. In that case, the possibility of a general or partial seizure would be a nightmare. At the first danger for public fortune, ecclesiastical revenue would be coveted. This would be substituting one distress for another, one bondage for another. The intentions of that report are good; its only defect is to present to Catholics a middle way, which, far from being the transition to a new order, would be a deplorable consolidation of the old.”

And then:

“The *Constitutionnel* of yesterday presented us with three questions, regarding our fourth article on the *Suppression of the Budget of the Clergy*. Why carry God into a hut of pine boards? Why go there with a hat on the head? How can He be the God of most French people only if He is the God of all mankind?”

“Answer: When we will have returned to the State all the churches that it lends us, we will be far from adequately rich to build others. But we could have some, made of pine boards, as in several places in the United States of America. We will carry God with a hat on our head because

(processions having been forbidden) this would be a more natural way to walk, one less capable of shocking the sensibilities of others. Finally, our God is *necessarily* the God of all mankind; but He is *legally* the God of the majority of the French people. If we had used one or the other of these expressions by itself, our reasoning would have lacked either logical power or dignity; logical power, if we had spoken only of the God of all mankind; dignity, if we had not spoken of the God of the majority of French people. The contradiction in terms is neither a joke nor nonsense. It is the result of necessity.”

“Very seriously do we give this answer to the *Constitutionel*: We are pained that the general tone of our article did not offer it honorable words which are reduced to this idea: that freedom always frightens men in authority, and that by abandoning the church of Aubusson, we would have performed an act of freedom fully in accord with our right and with the dignity of men whose religion has been wounded in its heart.”

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