

STAND AND DUTY OF CATHOLICS
DURING THE NEXT SESSION

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In two weeks, the legislative session will begin. The Ministry will be master of the two chambers: the master of the House of Peers, by dependence on the uncertainty of fate prepared for it; and master of the other House, because of the majority brought about by the election laws that made one hundred fifty thousand Frenchmen, without our knowing why, the infallible voices of the wishes and the needs of thirty million men, equally French. That Ministry will be master of two Houses, which with these two chambers — one representing nothing, and the other representing barely one hundred fifty thousand citizens taken at random — will weigh the promises of our Charter; but what is that Ministry? It is the same one that up to now has thought so little of them, that with the help of its predecessors, with whom it is jointly liable, has given us a municipal law without giving life and freedom to our townships; an electoral law without elections by the immense multitude of Frenchmen; a law on the application of a jury to political offenses, but unable to remove from the Courts of Petty Sessions most of the political offenses; the same one that formerly inspired the Prince with those innumerable talks in which there was always a question of law, never of freedom, except to define obedience to the law, that made him promise his unending protection of the Catholic religion, as if the Prince had the right to protect a religion, and that forbade him from uttering the shadow of a word about the freedom of teaching; the same one who violated the church of the *Abbaye-aux-Rois* [Abbey of the Kings] only to introduce there some schismatic priests under orders to offer the Holy Sacrifice over the body of an excommunicated person;¹ who, a little later, will give bread to the people with the stones of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, so that it not be said that a convict destroyed it; the same who chased some children from a free school, they and their teachers; who threw out of his residence a Frenchman whose insolence was so great as to transform an asylum

open to knowledge and to the poor, and that, for two months, had the doors sealed, lest the crime be repeated; the same one who miserably sacrificed the throne of Belgium to the English; who delved into intervention of the protocols and the abandonment of Poland; equally culpable for having remained silent and for having spoken disparagingly to the Foreign Office and in the fields of Ostrolenka; shameless hermaphrodite, male before the weak and female before the strong; the same one, who, instead of planting in France freedom for everyone, ghostly heir to the empire and to the restoration; maker of political additions; finally after a year of a revolution that was to change the world, set up, trembling, in the ruins of the Bastille, a frightening stone and had engraved on tablets of bronze over the tomb of Marat, a glory that he does not know what to do with and that demands of those ingrates only one favor: to be forgotten! This is the ministry to which are entrusted the remnants of a charter already damaged, these are the men who, helped by two almost subdued Houses, will regulate as sovereigns the responsibility for insignificant things, for religious freedom, and freedom of instruction, and everything presented that has two faces, one turned toward the past, the other to the future. As counterbalance to the Ministry and the two chambers, there will remain the uprising with hunger or boredom in its crossroads, some spurious children of the republic, the shadow of a great emperor, the portrait of the prince as a child, and, what is more powerful than all that, man as God has made him, destined to be free because destined to be Christian; that man occasionally frozen in fear by the leanings of the centuries when he looks behind or at his feet, but who quickly remembers that his brow was made to look up to heaven, and his race to know, to love, to serve in freedom.

The session which opens under these auspices will decide the most important interests of Catholics. In the previous session, the latter had been considered only in their shared role as citizens, and occasionally also as victims, when their complaints gave a final tone to generous lips. Now they will learn what is intended to be done with them. These Catholics — more nobodies than wicked, according to the ancient definition of slavery — filled with prophetic disdain that announces their fall at the beginning of every century, despoiled of their belongings, unsure possessors even of the altar before which they pray, without schools, without priests renowned by their knowledge, expelled from power, will ask from the leading civilization and monarch only one thing of all that they no longer have: freedom of instruction. It is no longer possible to silence their demand; some explanation is necessary, some answer: yes or no. Dependent on one or the other of these

answers, society will change the future.

However faithful to the Charter and well advised by their instinct which sometimes warns the holders of power, those whose actions we traced a few moments ago, frankly grant freedom to instruction; Catholics will owe them a priceless gift: freedom — and the human race an even greater good: truth. . . I mean its manifestation by the free impact of all beliefs, from which necessarily there will arise either doubt, if nothing is true in the world, or the sovereignty of belief if something true was said to this creature who has been fighting for ideas for six thousand years. *The knowledge of good and evil* arose from the freedom of primitive ages; freedom has kept all the way to us the privilege of being the measure of what men have learned about the common good as well as about evil. Imagine if the human race had been enslaved from its birth, what would it know? In Rome, what did the slave by birth know, as he worked the soil during the day, at night was thrown into a pit with a bit of salt for nourishment and on the following day, was thrown into a pond as fodder for his master's fish? What would we know about Christianity if it had fallen from heaven in a fold of the imperial robe and it had passed from one consul to another over generations? Freedom is the sieve that preserved the faith for us and will again be its proof when he have finally obtained it, or rather seized it, we could say, from the vanquished of intelligence and of Christ: who prevented you from being more influential than us on the minds of people? We were poor, you were rich; insignificant, and you important; ignorant and you renowned by your knowledge; we were nothing, you were everything; why did you fall? Freedom was judged between you and us; now your reign is over because freedom will reign up to the end. This is the challenge that Catholics bring to the nineteenth century, the dispute that freedom of instruction has to decide.

If the Ministry and the chambers refuse Catholics this freedom, which they will be unable to do directly because of the positive orders of the Charter and of public opinion, already strongly expressed for its accomplishment, they will do so by deceptions that will end up, whatever is attempted, placing outside the law the worship of the majority of French people and the French people themselves along with that worship. Indeed, worship is not a reality except within the person who practices it; the injuries, the proscriptions do not affect the wood nor the stone, but the believers alone. It is true that between the temple and the believers there is something that we call a priest, which takes nothing away from our reasoning because to place a priest outside of the law is to place his worship there, and

consequently the French people who profess it through him and like him. Therefore, every impediment to freedom of instruction by way of exception against Catholics, would be, over and above, a violation of freedom, the formal establishment of a class of citizens deprived of a common right, and why? Because one would fear, not their arms, or their riches, but their thought; somewhat like kings shorn of intelligence and set apart so they will no longer reign, until the day when the people will inquire why it is that one trembles so much before their prison. In fact, the remedy is always derived from the illness and by the same reason that freedom preserves the faith. Oppression saves it, too; oppression is sister to freedom; they are the two poles of the world. In this immense arena wherein truth, ever gasping for breath and weakened by its victories, has only these two posts of rest at the two ends of its course: oppression and freedom.

Now, whatever side the Ministry and the Houses take, there will be for Catholics oppression or freedom; that is to say, truth will arrive in our day by running the immense ellipse of centuries, at one of whose bounds it rejuvenates itself. If Catholicism is enslaved, it will be obvious to everyone that it has won, since even when lying on the ground, it is feared, however bruised it be from the blows of reform, furrowed by the lightning strikes of genius, despoiled by kings and by revolutions. Should it be left free, the future will pass judgment, and one can say, on seeing the dread that our freedom causes our enemies, that the future has already passed judgment. In a word, the religion of Jesus Christ, the unique subject of our thoughts because it embraces and blesses all that relates to man; the religion by which Europe lapsed from freedom in preference to many worlds less corrupted; this spouse, this mother, this sister of every son of Adam who carries a proud soul in a chaste body; the religion of Christ has appeared at a time when it is the only one left that sincerely loves freedom. As a resort against its natural fullness of power, we will see only the oppression of minds. It is a giant step, *exaltavit ut gigas ad currendam viam*.² Nonetheless, Catholics should not give in to sleep. Religion proceeds on its own, it is true; it moves on like God, but we are enjoined to follow it. Every Catholic is a soldier, and this is the hour to remember it. We encourage our brothers by the love they have for God and for their children, to join together against the monopoly that has been corrupting Christian generations for twenty years, that oppresses the freedom of a great nation with untiring perseverance, as if it were the vulture charged with punishing us by nibbling at our innards for our having stolen fire from the heavens. Let innumerable petitions inform the Houses, the delegates of the one hundred and fifty thousand voters, that the intention of all of us is

to have or to take our freedom, so that, if they refuse us that freedom, they will be doing it with full awareness, and if they disfigure it, that too will be done with full awareness! We will not spare ourselves in this task; and we are able to promise to Catholics that if the Monopoly survives longer than the Charter, something else will happen that the University will not regret experiencing, because it chooses life at any cost, but in which there will be contentment for those who love justice.

As for the authority that will legislate on freedom of instruction, it will be legislating its own destiny as well. And this is the destiny: whoever will give to Catholicism dignities, gold, power, will perish; whoever gives Catholicism *water and fire*, namely, general freedom, will live and reign.

ENDNOTES [Trans.]

1. See: **Obsequies of Mr. Grégoire.**
2. Rejoices like a champion to run his course. [See *Psalm* 19, v. 6 (5).]

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