

TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

(28 May 1848)

Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, OP

The design for *L'Ère nouvelle* appeared on 1 March of this year. It solicited both subscribers and underwriters. On the following 15 April, it had obtained 1,500 subscriptions and around 10,000 francs in underwriting destined to cover the expenses of its establishment. Today, 25 May, *L'Ère nouvelle* numbers 3,200 subscribers, and every day on the streets, according to the practice introduced since the last revolution, 1,200 copies of its issue. This success is the greatest ever seen up to now for the religious press; it allows us to announce to our readers that *L'Ère nouvelle* from now on is an established activity.

This establishment imposes duties upon us, duties on our subscribers. Let us start with ours.

A newspaper is a force for good or for evil. Today whoever does not create a paper or has not subscribed to one, is — except in the case of inability — a man who abdicates part of his strength, and a very considerable part at that. Contempt for a newspaper is senseless because the paper either kills us or makes us live; there is in the world no more important issue than life and death.

In directing a newspaper, our first duty is to regard highly this influence that we hold from Providence, and to do everything needed to preserve and augment it, to the best of our ability. If we lacked concern for the profession of writing every day in favor of truth and of justice, why else would we have any? It is true, the paper passes with the day; it is not a monument about which we could say with Horace: *Exigi monumentum aere perennius*.¹

The greatest writer in the world demeans himself in the daily expression of his thoughts; instead of casting them into immortal bronze, he abandons them to the sudden and unknown winds that carry to oblivion all that is regular. But this is exactly where the

dignity of this ministry lies. Glory rewards works that persist; it can do nothing for those that do not. It has to leave them entirely to the judgment and the memory of God, for Whom there is nothing more sublime than what the earth does not reward.

Who is the man, knowing how to write, who does not desire earnestly the value of rest and the magic of infrequency? Where is the soul that is sensitive to the charm of style and capable of arousing it, that does not yearn for the blessed intervals of solitude? The newspaper man no longer knows them; dependent on a ceaselessly recurring hunger, he needs to become as fast as the wind and just as commonplace. He rises to those sublime heights where, in the shadows, unnamed sacrifices take place. He writes under that same inspiration which gives the missionary his eloquence, the soldier his courage, the poor his virtue.

Our first duty, then, we repeat, is to value highly our occupation as journalists. Our not valuing it would prove one thing: that we are unworthy of it and do not understand it.

Moreover, we need to establish solidly the journal entrusted to our care by divine Providence. Up to now, the ownership and the direction of *L'Ère nouvelle* had not received a guaranteed and conclusive format. We had not expected so rapid a success, one that took us by surprise and almost embarrassed us. As a result, there arose many intolerable complications from which subscribers suffered. Today, those complications have seen their end; our offices were relocated to a place closer to the general bustle.² As for the property, from now on it rests on the head of Father Lacordaire, as does the intellectual direction of the paper. In accepting the property and the direction of *L'Ère nouvelle*, he does not intend to hold on to them forever, but only as long as the public circumstances that called him, after so many years, to the ranks of the daily press. His resignation from the National Parliament in no way meant his departure from our midst. In the Parliament, he encountered the need to join a political party or to step aside. We are not a political party; we wish to be and we can be ourselves and only ourselves, which is to say, Christians firmly attached to their earthly homeland. Nonetheless, we judge all human revolutions from a more useful and more certain viewpoint than those who see them only in the light of worldly interests. Father Lacordaire was taken from us by the duties of the Assembly; he has been returned to us by his voluntary renunciation of political life. He will leave us only on the day when judgment will give him the duty to attend to works of an order more pressing for him; moreover, he believes himself assured that, with the help of God, his conscience will warn

him long before judgment does.

We have spoken of our duties; now let us speak of the duties of our subscribers.

The subscriber to a serious newspaper, and especially to a Christian one, is not a vain devotee of frivolous pages. He wishes to be instructed day by day about the remarkable events taking place in religion, politics, literature, sciences, and the arts; that is his right. But he also wishes that the paper, which he honors by his everyday attention, arrives at a conclusion. Indeed, a paper that does not reach a conclusion is a childish work, a simple sheet of paper destined to the leisure of an egoist or of an idiot — which is literally the same thing.

For an organization man, the obligatory conclusion of a paper is to praise his political party, to support it, to push it along, to belittle all the others, to bring to triumph a certain number of men captive to a certain number of ideas, be they false or true. Everything that does not reach this conclusion disgusts him, seems to him cold, useless, boring, abstract, unworthy of being read. The serious man is more difficult to satisfy; he wishes to discover in every political party the good and the bad, to blame the bad, to approve of the good. He does not wander away from reality to the point of losing a view of it, but rises above it sufficiently to judge matters calmly, and demands to be kept regularly in that serene region wherein reality receives the eternal reflection of the just and the true. For all that, it is not for him a simple intellectual walk; he reaches a conclusion as well as the company man, but his conclusion, coming from a higher realm, goes farther ahead, like a heavy body falling from the sky that plunges deeper into the ground, depending on the higher point of the ether it came from.

What the serious and Christian man is for himself, so too must his newspaper be. He scorns the broadsheet that every morning brings him only amusement for one of his hours or the rages of the spirit of the political party. He would blush at throwing his time and his money into the pit of temporary conclusions; he reads a newspaper to learn and to combat: to learn about truth and justice, to fight in their favor. His subscription is enrollment in an army. Perhaps the army does not have a startling uniform, is less numerous, less endowed, less strong than another. But he gave his name for the good, he did not give it for glitter, numbers, wealth, or power.

This is what our subscribers need to be. If they are not, there was an error on their part, they misled themselves about us. So that they might finish getting to know us, we will tell them, in few words, to what conclusions our work leads.

Europe has been in dissolution for sixty years, but a fruitful dissolution; it is at the same time in ruins and in progress. Europe is in ruins because it no longer has religious principles, because its kings, laws, people no longer have faith nor the understanding of faith. Europe is in progress because its ruins unceasingly reveal to it the impotence of man without God, and that the vigor of Christianity, compressed into its innards by three centuries of anti-religious oppression, is struggling to swell over it and invigorate its life. This is our first conclusion.

In this state, one must take into account the political, administrative, and material reforms. These have their importance but they are incapable of getting to the root of evil and of healing it. This is our second conclusion.

One needs to respond to all the activities of people marked with a character of justice, and have for their faults inexhaustible pardons, because their troubles have endless depths. This is our third conclusion.

One should not ascribe to any political party because, without exception, the parties offer to the miseries of European humanity only incomplete and ineffective remedies, based solely on earthly schemes whose actions could only be temporary. This is our fourth conclusion.

Every time a government is overthrown because of its failings, one must wholeheartedly welcome the arising government as a resource, a hope, a need, sometimes even progress, and offer it — with the loyalty even of Providence — unselfish assistance. This is our fifth conclusion.

Catholic Christianity will be restored in people and in behavior or else order will never be restored. This is our sixth and final conclusion.

All that has been said and will be said by *L'Ère nouvelle* results in these conclusions and is contained in them.

Consequently, the following should not subscribe to *L'Ère nouvelle* or should give up their subscription:

All those who see Europe and France as a source of revolutions for no other reason than a vague and irrational worry of nations.

All those who believe in ruins without believing in revival.

All those who hope exclusively in political, administrative, and material reforms.

All those who do not perceive the moral and material misfortunes of nations and who see them as chimera or absolute necessities.

All those who place their entire faith in a political party.

All those who refuse to accept governments that arise from the mysterious womb of social tempests.

All those who do not believe that Catholic Christianity came from God and is the principle, the means, and the goal of order in the bosom of nations.

This said, our subscribers know what they have to do: to leave us, or to stay with us. Along with them, we make up a troop of three thousand and more men; the campground has been laid out, the tents have been erected, the trenches have been dug; we have our leaders, our faith, and our goal: let those who are fearful withdraw; let those who lack faith go where they will. As for us, sincere men, who have left the congeniality of our occupations or who have unnecessarily burdened them with the painful task of the daily word, we, too, know what we will do. We need three thousand subscribers to break even; if we retain them, we will be faithful. We will dedicate to them the enlightenment of our days and the dreams of our nights; we will consume for them, and for the cause that we defend with them, all the energy of our soul; if necessary, we will sacrifice even the proud reputation of our pen and of our mind. But if the subscribers abandon us, if we fall below the number necessary for our existence, on that day everything between them and us will be finished. We will not have the candor of struggling for loans or lawsuits against the inactivity of our coworkers. We will leave the battlefield where we will have died to other

more dedicated or more fortunate persons, to abler or more daring ones. We will never be seen again; they and us, the leaders and the soldiers, we will await before God the day when our feeble efforts will not be efforts devoid of reward.

ENDNOTES

1. I require a durable bronze monument. - [Trans.].
2. From 67 rue de Vaugirard to 13 rue du Cherche-Midi. Paris

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