

BUDGET FOR WORSHIP UNDER THE REPUBLIC

Article IV

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Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, OP

The most deceptive objection against the budget for worship, and the only one that is so, arises from the state of dependency to which religion is reduced in its relations with civil authority.

It is true and cannot be denied that, for fifty years, the Church in France has been deprived of the freedom owed to it, either from its title as a divine institution, or as a matter of conscience, or by reason of the charters which have proclaimed in our country the liberation of relationships between man and God. Whatever the blows struck by Providence, despite the resultant flood which has so often carried off various dynasties, the same hand has unceasingly pressed hard against all religions, and against the Catholic religion in particular. Would that be because religions receive from the State their daily bread? Would it be possible for a religion to be inscribed in the budget of a nation without being inscribed in the budget of servitude? If that were the case, what would all of us have to do — Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, followers of Judaism, all of us in whom lives the true faith, and even a corrupted faith — what else could we do but to take the money of betrayal, and, like Judas, fling it into the field of blood?

Besides, is it really true that, in France, the budget of worship is the cause of the oppression in which tremble religious ministers and establishments? We do not believe so, and as proof, we have what appears to us a decisive reason. Belgium is also a country with an ecclesiastical budget, and yet the Church there is no less free than in the United States. The bishops meet periodically, establish schools at all levels, have created and managed a university without constraints, today the only Catholic university in Europe. They see

flourish before their eyes a multitude of religious institutes and charitable organizations; they lack no rights of a society which comes from God, and which enjoys the loyalty of a nation; and yet, they are inscribed in that frightful book of the budget. How would the same cause produce in France and in Belgium such different results: there, almost total dependency, here almost limitless freedom?

No, the budget accounts for nothing or for very little in the state of dependency wherein religion among us has dragged itself for fifty years. Obviously, the cause is to be found somewhere else. But asked where that could be, we would say that the cause lies in the laws and customs which, independent of any budget, hobble religious action in France and do not allow for its natural development; it lies in the laws and customs which forbid even the most simple charitable associations unless they have been approved by the State; laws which forbid living in community and the practice of the evangelical counsels; laws which allow all kinds of schools at the pleasure of a lay monopoly; laws which do not allow three bishops to meet together, and which, from whatever angle they are considered, create an obvious or hidden obstacle on all the roads which religion seeks to travel. From beginning to end, the laws of France form a conspiracy against religious liberty; and yet, we are asked why religions here are not free. Well, they are not free because they are in chains. Eliminate the budget, and that will be one less budget, and that is all.

Will someone say that eliminating the budget will necessarily, in repayment, remove obstacles? That is a major illusion. The same hand which would be happy not to sign any longer the claims of the clergy on the public treasury would be even happier to tighten the knots which stifle the priest under a begrudging legality. The suppression of money would only increase dependency, because dependency comes not from money but from itself. Religious dependency has been naturalized in France; it stands as a principle and not as a consequence or an effect.

For fifty years, France has sought the custody of sacred things. As long as that aim persists, whether the clergy be poor or rich, whether it be supported by the faithful or by the State, its status will not really change. What is the use of ill-treating yourself? How would France want liberty for the Church, when the Church itself does not seek it, and, which in sixty years of revolutions has only shifted the weight of legislative and administrative burdens from one flank to the other, since it has not gotten tired of carrying them? We

always speak of France as a free country, because, there, almost anything desired gets published, and almost whenever desired, a revolution is undertaken. This is a very naïve view. France is a volcano which rejects tyranny by philosophical eruptions, but whose wide and deep crater always retrieves the stone which it heaved to heaven, and will burst forth again, perhaps to receive the stone anew.

The Church complains of not being able to enjoy freedom of association: but who, in France, possesses that freedom? The Church complains of its inability to assemble the bishops of a metropolis: but what group, in France, has permission to assemble? The Church complains about the yoke of the administration: but who, in France, is not under this yoke? The Church complains that all its members are condemned to isolation and to the weakness of individuality: but who, in France, is anything other than an individual, even the prince, when there was one? Alas, all our ills are common; if there is any consolation arising from dependency and misfortune, it is certain that no one is denied it.

No, indeed, we do not seek among the others in the budget an explanation for the mystery of our religious subjection. If France were a free country, the Church of France would be a free Church. This Church has done all it could to free itself, or, at least, it did a lot. It is the only body in France that has preserved intact the genuine concept of human liberty; although it has not saved everything, at least it saved belief, morality, religious discipline, spiritual authority, the distinction between the power of God and that of man, the word in Christian pulpits, the right of charity: all these are secure principles of conscience without which personality itself is overcome under the patricidal embraces of the State. If the Church has not done more, it is not because of the money which it received, but rather because of the universal passivity of minds and hearts which would not allow it to do battle. The liberals sacrificed the Church as did the absolutists. Alone against everyone, hated, mocked, young, and poor, the Church was nonetheless able to maintain its life and to preserve in its life the highest and most sacred rights of humanity.

Apart from the Church, what have we seen that is free? Only one thing: the press. Who, someday, will compare the life of the press and that of the Church — one inscribed in the budget, the other untainted by any apparent contact with it? We should not conclude that the budget is corrupting by nature, but only that it buys those who wish to sell themselves; of this we never doubted.

In all times and under all regimes, human authority has been able to corrupt or enfeeble the consciences of the ministers of God. Louis XIV was more easily the master of a bishop enjoying four thousand pounds of ecclesiastical revenue than Louis-Philippe of a bishop supported by ten thousand francs from the budget of the State. Only the soul can grant independence; that is why the question of the budget has nothing to do with the question of religious freedom.

And yet, the demand is repeated and the common maxim is thrown at us: “Whoever is paid is subservient to the one who pays.” In this article, we turn the question around: it is no longer the point of showing that in fact the dependency of religions does not arise from their inclusion in the budget, but rather of determining that this enrollment in no way entitles the State to subjugate religions. God willing, we will succeed. At a moment when France has finally decided to shake off the tradition of legal despotism under which it has long suffered, all the more is it crucial to bring some light on the delusions which could still mask to its eyes some aspect of this despotism.

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