

COLLEGE CHAPLAINS

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The University is amusing itself by engaging in disturbances on its deathbed. The illustrious lords of the Royal Council made known that there were in their colleges some chaplains who were lodged, fed, heated, lighted, paid, and enjoyed, moreover, the status of proctors — a fact that greatly surprised them. All things considered, they decided to pass an ordinance. This ordinance deprived chaplains of the rank of proctor, reduced them to teachers of the freshmen class, withdrew common meals, and reduced their salary, following the hierarchy of the colleges, to eighteen, fifteen, and twelve hundred francs, while maintaining their lodgings. It is useful to reflect somewhat on this ordinance.

Nothing is more to be pitied than a college chaplain. Butting against the mistrust of lay teachers, unknown by the students who see him only at the altar, with no connection to them at all, but surrounded by an indifferent and awkward respect, he wanders like a melancholy specter in a house of strangers. He is neither father, nor professor, nor servant, nor even priest speaking to men with the independence of faith: he is something that has no name. Invisible and alone all week long, on Sunday he proceeds twice to a chapel where his flock has been gathered for him; there, he barely knows but a few of them. If, by reason of evangelical goodness, he has succeeded in getting these youths, assembled for a moment, sympathetic to his position, willing to listen to him, he will not be jeered! He will be tolerated with a kind of charitable pity, and, if he does not take too long, the students will leave satisfied. And there you have it for a week, because I am not mentioning the Thursday office that costs but a half hour of patience to the victims of the university Mass. In the meantime, the unfortunate priest arranges to have a few students be interrupted in their studies to tell them: “Peace be with you. I am among those who seek the lost souls of Israel to give them life. *Ego sum qui loquor tecum* [It is I who speak with you. - Trans.]. Will you receive me, or should I leave?” The children reply as it pleases them to this stranger who speaks to them, then go on their way. This is how the days and years follow each other. I remain silent about the annoyances of trifles, of humiliations deliberately prepared, of

everything unexpected from people and things; I remain with the situation as it is in itself. I know of no one who does not join to this profound lack of human consolation a very great privation of divine joys. The last pastor of a village is at home; no one is forced to attend his Mass; he knows his flock; he will see fathers die and sons born; he has done something good for someone among this number of men with whom he is living — but whom has a college chaplain benefitted? He assists, like a witness from heaven, to the corruption of all that is most congenial in the world. If, perchance, he rescues from vice some happier child, he sees him disappear after a few days and dares not regret it, so strongly did the student's innocence have need to flee.

I pity the chaplains of the University but I accuse the ingratitude of a body that is not afraid to debase unhappy servants and begrudges even the worthless title under which they hid the chaplains' insignificance. If at least that insignificance served no purpose! But it did serve a purpose, it served to trick families by an exterior trapping of religion. The parents are led to the chapel; there is talk about the chaplain, his virtues, his age, his talents; finally, there is a priest, giving rise to an abominable hypocrisy fought in the heart of the University by hatred and by avarice, with the result that those three passions take turns in coming to the fore; at one moment the University caresses, then it tarnishes and despoils its priests, until finally, unable to satisfy entirely its avarice or its hate, or maintain its hypocrisy, with deep sighs, it longs for the time when there will be no other religion than the alphabet! There is never a hint of that situation because a situation like this has never existed before. As always, the priesthood had been charged with the education of nations; never had a body of indifferent or deist laymen been seen as obliged to extend their hand to priests, to ask for their robe to cover themselves. Now, a state against nature gives rise to feelings against nature; even honesty, shocked and not knowing whence comes evil, or afraid of knowing, seeks anxiously for solutions. Such a university director, tolerant of religion, detests it wholeheartedly because he is under obligation to have a chaplain. It would be better if everyone were free, but another characteristic of the University is to detest freedom of instruction, which in itself increases its hatred for religion because it is fear of religion that leads it to detest freedom. In a word, there is in this matter a mixture of contradictory passions that confuses the mind and yet explains the ordinance of the Royal Council.

The Royal Council granted chaplains the rank of teachers of freshmen; no doubt, it believed it had done a lot, it believed it had acted logically; after all, what relationship

exists between a chaplain and a teacher, and what is a priest, if not a professor of religion? With all due apologies to Mr. de Montalivet, however, what he took as logic is very clearly irreverence. We agree that there exists no relationship between a proctor of studies and a chaplain, and it was in that very fact that their realignment was insignificant. Now, to assign the rank of teacher to a priest, is nothing else but to blemish his teaching and to place it on the same footing as the teaching of Greek or Latin in the minds of students. If the Royal Council does not understand the power of names, what does it know about philosophy? Let it research in languages the various names given to men who speak of God by order from God; let it pull together all its shame and, for once, try to blush.

But that is not all; now that the chaplain has been ranked among teachers of freshmen, will he receive the corresponding salary? Yes, the established salary, namely, that salary by which it is impossible for a teacher to live unless he can eventually reach the top level. We lack the courage to go any further. The University completes its career in a worthy manner. Before dying, it sought to add a bit of gall to the already very bitter bread that it gave the clergy in return for its services. Not satisfied with having stolen from it the education of men, even to calling into question its share in common freedom, it cuts short a vestige of hospitality. The University remembers a time when the clergy of France returned from exile, stooped and maimed, and it gave the latter a miserly asylum in one corner or another of its establishments, thus consecrating its budding tyranny at the lowest price possible and wrapping itself joyfully with the arms of our elderly priests who could no longer carry much gold because they had carried so much misfortune. The University remembered that time in order to revive it, and I too remember it! I saw the priests whom the University bribed in their final years, men whom we had the unhappiness of not respecting any more than the University did, because childhood notices admirably not the genuine worth of men, but the usefulness attached to them. No one is surprised that the University bewails an age when it was young and it cost so little to deceive families by hiding behind the whitened hair of a priest. We are surprised only to see it forget two things: that it has gotten older itself, and that freedom is in motion. We are surprised also that the University can still find in the clergy some priests who are able to put up with its injuries; we were not abandoning them to its impotence, a race of shameless men that it is, who repay sacrifices only with insult.

It is true that we have been told to bear everything. This maxim is sound, and we would be the lowest of men if we betrayed our ministry because of a bit of money lost or

vanity wounded. But is it decreed that we should uphold by our presence an institution that leads astray the youth of our country? Have we been commanded to throw a perpetual veil over a corruption of twenty years? Are we allowed to deceive families who rely on us? And if those very people to whom we are indebted for so protracted an indulgence that we squandered tearfully, if those people come kicking at our suffering, is that not a warning from God more than troubling ingratitude? Is it not time for college chaplains to consider the responsibility they take for those people and convey humbly to their bishops what they can report about the troubles with which they are familiar? The chaplains of the royal colleges of Paris have already fulfilled this duty; last year, in a well-known report, they revealed the dismal secrets of the University. Their example, if there were imitators, would hasten by a few days the fall of the monopoly; should this be without ecclesiastical or legal results, it would nonetheless remain a duty fulfilled. In all times, the hallowed duty takes place on those days when a shaken society attempts to settle down. Woe, then, to him who remains silent.

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