

FOREWORD

A NARRATIVE

CONCERNING FATHER LACORDAIRE

Poussièlgue Frères, Publishers

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From:

**ŒUVRES
du
R. P. H.-D. LACORDAIRE
DES FRÈRES PRÊCHEURS
MEMBRE DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE**

PARIS

LIBRAIRIE POUSSIÈLGUE FRÈRES
RUE CASSETTE, 27
1872

Note:

The reader who desires more complete details will find them in the *Vie intime et religieuse du P. Lacordaire*, by Father Chocarne, and in the *Vie du P. Lacordaire*, by M. Foisset. – It would be overdoing it to praise here the worth of these two splendid works, each one with its particular viewpoint. The public is aware of both books; many souls could attest to the benefits they obtained from them.

F o r e w o r d

A Narrative Concerning Father Lacordaire

Jean-Baptiste-Henri Lacordaire was born at Récey-sur-Ource, in Burgundy, on 1 May 1802. At age four, he no longer had a father; his mother, a wise and strong Christian, was left in charge of guiding his beginnings in life. The first decade was spent calmly and innocently within his family, in that solid education of our ancestors, almost unknown in our days of decadence. But he had to get prepared for the future; and so, Henri was enrolled in the high school of Dijon. Already at this time, religious indifference and often doubt were inhaled with the air in the Empire's high schools, where almost nothing supported the faith. Like so many others, the new student drank from this poisoned goblet the forgetfulness of the sacred beliefs of his childhood. "His first Communion, as he himself relates it, was his last religious happiness and the final ray of sunlight from his mother's soul onto his own. Soon, the shadows thickened around him; a frigid night enveloped him totally; in his conscience, he no longer received from God any sign of life."¹

As a mediocre student, if you can believe him, no success brightened the movement of his early studies. He earned such striking triumphs in public speaking that, several years following his departure from the school, its walls still preserved their echo.

From that school, the bright orator transferred to the Dijon School of Law. There, little satisfied with the dull study of the Articles of the Code, and deprived of the lights from on high — the only ones able to enrich life without warping its direction — he quickly joined a number of young students who, like him, "wanted to be something other than average lawyers, and for whom the homeland, glory, civic virtues were a more active scene than the chances of a commonplace fate. Soon, some private gatherings and lengthy walks brought to their minds the highest problems of philosophy, politics, and religion."²

Among these young men with liberal aspirations, Lacordaire immediately rose to the top rank. "We can still hear," wrote one of his former study companions, "those

impromptu creations filled with flashes of inspiration, of unexpected sources, of insight and of wit. We see that twinkling eye, we hear that clear, vibrant voice, giving itself over to the unbounded spirit of his very rich character.”³

However, in spite of these labors and these compliments, faith still eluded this young man. His idealistic soul had quickly judged and scorned Voltaire with his mockeries. He already proclaimed quite loudly that godlessness leads to depravity; that corrupt behavior will give birth to corrupting laws, and that licentiousness carries nations toward slavery without leaving them time to let out a cry. But he set out well only to stop at the deism of Rousseau and to stray into the political theories of the Social Contract.

Law school completed, he came to Paris for his apprenticeship. Unbeknownst to him, as he understood much later, he had knocked at the gates of eternity. In this new setting, he did not remain unknown for long. Berryer, who had heard him plead, assured him that he could consider himself in the first rank of the bar. Moreover, following one of his speeches, the first presider, Séguier, turning toward the other judges: “Gentlemen,” he told them, “this is not Patru,⁴ this is Bossuet.” His friends foretold for him a most outstanding future. Nonetheless, these gilded hopes could not protect him from a hidden sadness: neither friendship nor glory, which very quickly pressed around him, nor the thousand dreams to which his imagination, in a charmed moment, gave life every day, were able to dissolve this mysterious nuisance. What, then, was going on in his twenty-year-old heart? Unrecognized, God deigned to pay him a visit; feelings about celestial matters awakened Lacordaire to an ever better grasp of the insignificance of creatures. For two years, these troubles kept growing in his soul and completed the task of purifying it. The religious problems of Dijon returned to his thoughts; he took up again, alone with himself, his objections from the past and the replies from his friends; but his intelligence, already matured, was better able to distinguish the feeble from the strong. In his resolute musings, the historic and social evidence about Christianity brought him back to the faith of his mother and of his childhood. An internal light and a hidden impulse, which only the grace of God can provide, brought an end to the activity: he was overcome by God. But for him, becoming a Christian anew meant to transform into believers those of his contemporaries who did not possess this good fortune. “He saw the world as a very sick person and considered that there was nothing comparable to the satisfaction of serving the patient with the Gospel and the Cross of Jesus Christ. An eager, fiery, earnest, impulsive, but resolute

yearning for the priesthood took hold of him: he wanted to become a priest.”⁵ Without any further delay, he went to request of Msgr. De Quélen, then Archbishop of Paris, that he welcome him in his diocese and in the Saint-Sulpice seminary. “Be my guest,” the prelate told him, while stretching out his hand; “you defended perishable causes at the bar, you will be defending one cause whose justice is eternal.”

To the seminary Henri Lacordaire brought the new-found faith, his fine and strong will, but also his political leanings and his impetuous nature — so contrary to the reserve of the clerical vocation. “Without wanting to, he stood out from the usual demeanor of students. Assured of the motivation which was leading him to the priesthood, at first, he did not consider curbing the outbursts of an intellect that had debated so many theses, and of a character which was not yet resilient”.⁶ Moreover, his pious and prudent advisor, concerned about the impetuosity and the contrasts of this uncommon nature, hesitated for some time to recognize in him a chosen one for the sanctuary. But his amenability, his perseverance, and the better known-integrity of his intentions ended up dispelling the prudent apprehensions of the teachers. On 25 September 1827, Father Lacordaire wrote to his friends: “I have been a priest for three days and for eternity.” Invested with the priesthood, he refused, without hesitation, the distinguished post of Auditor of the Rota, which would have led him to the episcopate. It was not honors that this convert came to seek in the sanctuary, but God, the cross, and souls. Appointed chaplain to a humble convent of Visitation Nuns, and at the same time to Henry IV College, without delay he busied himself with bringing back to the faith and to the sacraments of the Church, the young persons entrusted to his ministry.

The hour and the circumstances were hardly favorable. Godlessness was in vogue among children as well as among their fathers. Disheartened soon after by the unfruitfulness of his labors, the chaplain poured out his melancholy in a report addressed to the Minister of Public Instruction concerning the religious and moral situation in the Paris colleges. Yet, he felt within himself an excess of enthusiasm, as well as a need to give himself to souls. Anticipating from his fruitless beginnings that France would reluctantly offer substantial results to his ministry, he resolved to request from America a newer and more fruitful field for his apostolate.

The day for his departure had been settled, when the 1830 Revolution erupted,

crushing in three days the most ancient and most majestic European monarchy. In those hours of danger, France had need of all its children. Father de La Mennais, in contact for some months with Father Lacordaire, easily made him understand that this was not the time to leave the motherland; rather, he suggested joining him for a work that was Catholic and patriotic at the same time, whence would come, he hoped, the deliverance of religion and the restoration of health to the nation. This project was the founding of the newspaper *L'Avenir* [The Future]. Lacordaire believed he had found in this proposed undertaking the opportunity to serve simultaneously his faith and his homeland. Consequently, he accepted with enthusiasm and with an invaluable commitment. Before long, he was one of the principal editors of *L'Avenir*.

Could this newspaper live up to its ambitious promises? The qualities and the failings of its editors forecast its outcomes. The founder was La Mennais, a fiery soul, with an impassioned eloquence, ever in need of enemies and battles. Besides, he was an unconventional genius who spent his life in overstating all causes: in politics, long a partisan of unchecked absolutism; then, by a sudden change, even though it was to be foreseen, carried away into the whimsies of a freedom without rules; in religion, an admirer without insight into the remarkable role of the papacy; and at the end of his wretched days, cursing the entire Church of God along with the papacy.

With the publication of his first volume of *L'Indifférence en matière de religion* [Indifference in matters of religion], La Mennais had aroused in his favor extraordinary enthusiasm. He was hailed as a new Father of the Church; even though the rest of his works did not satisfy the anticipation of perceptive Catholics, La Mennais in 1830 nonetheless remained, in the eyes of many, the most powerful writer of the Church in France. Next to the chief, there arose the collaborators, and the first among the most brilliant, Lacordaire. He brought to the common enterprise — with that ardent love of God and of the Church that we have already seen — an admirable disinterest, a boundless commitment to the association of which he was a member, a force of remarkable concentration, a nobility of thought in some way innate, a sparkling imagination, a liveliness of spirit which never ran out. But given his youth, he lacked that maturity, that insight, that comprehensive view which, except for a special gift, only come from an experience of men and of situations. This shortcoming, due to the young priest's age and to the times, must have been for him the cause of much derision and missteps along the new road on which he had embarked

with such fervor. Besides, the storm unleashed in those days of turmoil was so violent, the nearby ravines that lined the roadways were so numerous and so deep. that they could have brought on vertigo in most robust genius.

The revolutionary waves that had so quickly carried off the secular monarchy of the Franks had appeared for an instant to carry off and crush religion. Given that the throne, far from knowing how to sustain the altar, had not been able to protect itself, those fiery Catholics of *L'Avenir* came to the conclusion that, as early as possible, the ancient alliance of the two societies, spiritual and temporal, had to be sundered, that the civil power had to be abandoned to the road where it wished to venture, that the Church, strong enough with God alone, be left to continue to march in isolation toward its eternal destinies. This decision, while avoiding certain misfortunes — inseparable consequences of the sins of man — created a state contrary even to man's very nature, which, while designated to safeguard the free exercise of his prerogatives, rapidly undermined its foundation. To grasp this, the editors of *L'Avenir* needed a more penetrating study of the human heart, of social revolutions, and of the immutable teachings of the Church, rather than of the shifting sands whereon they fought day by day. Those for whom the present interest in facts held such a decisive authority would especially have needed the prolonged experience of what man becomes when he is thus divided. They lacked this experience. Then, fully confident in their plan, they proudly changed their motto to: *God and Freedom*. Under this last word, they confused with the freedom of duty necessary for man to arrive at his genuine greatness, all the freedoms, even those which set man free from duty and compromise the rights of God, namely: freedom of conscience, reciprocal independence of Church and State, suppression of the subsidies of the faiths, freedom of the press, etc.

As to what power, outside of God, could see to it that this freedom would not become license, neither the master nor the disciples were greatly concerned. With banner in hand, they threw themselves into the fray with the excitement of youth and, without any further delay, they joined the combat.

In those everyday battles, Lacordaire, supported by his new friend, Mr. de Montalembert, then barely twenty years old, was in the front ranks. He was the one always found in dangerous posts. It was he who, in the hope of ensuring for priests a more holy independence in the struggles of the faith, begged the clergy to relinquish the subsidy of the

cults which was a benevolence that enchained them even as it shamed them. Moreover, these theories, more seductive than solid — as he later recognized when he disproved himself (*Ère nouvelle*, 1848) — were tossed every morning to all the echos of publicity in a striking and spirited style. But, beside these errors, arising from inexperience on the shifting sands of revolutions, Lacordaire defended well some theses in which the vigor of his style became a fearful weapon in favor of justice and truth.

In those times of political and irreligious passions, almost every day brought to God and to His Church some new outrage from the governing and from the governed. Priests were disgracefully insulted; some toiling and poor Trappists found themselves driven from their monastery as if malefactors by a minister of the King; some mayors and prefects had the doors of churches smashed in to obtain, by force, a semblance of religious burial for some public enemies, who nonetheless held persistently to holy ceremonies. Lacordaire usually took it upon himself in *L'Avenir* to avenge God and the Church for these ridiculous claims and sacrilegious encroachments. Many a persecutor whom the fear of God would never have stopped, drew back more than once in fear of that unrelenting pen which knew so well with a single stroke how to deflect abuse and discredit it. At the same time as he established himself as God's avenger against the persistent annoyances of the godless party, Lacordaire equipped himself as a champion of freedom of instruction.

To reclaim in favor of the Church the divine right to teach souls, inherent in Her mission on earth, would undoubtedly have been to render legitimate homages to a much disregarded truth, which is less a privilege for the Church than a benefit for men. But Lacordaire deemed that on practical grounds — where he had descended because it was there that the heat of battle took place — this demand would have done a disservice to his cause, to no one's benefit. Less sacred, less extensive, but better adapted to the misfortunes of the times were the rights which he came to recover.

By some shocking discrepancy, a government, the so-called protector of freedom for everyone, despoiled families of the freedom of instruction in order to take the monopoly for itself. A State without religion, that is to say, without ethics, installed itself as the indispensable guide for youth and gave itself the mission to shape the souls of upcoming generations. Therein lay the monstrous evil and the blatant injustice which had to be neutralized before anything else. Lacordaire undertook this task. Since it was as difficult

in practice as it appeared simple in principle, he was not content to write, he also wanted to act and to speak.

The Charter had promised to provide in little delay for the freedom of instruction; but the government delayed with all its power the fulfillment of the promise. What it refused to grant, Father Lacordaire and his collaborators of *L'Avenir* resolved to take. To this effect, they opened in their care a school for children. Two days later, it was closed by order of the Government; the illustrious schoolmasters had to appear before the Chamber of Peers as violators of a law of the State. They acted brilliantly in their own defense. Already moved by the young and lively eloquence of Montalembert, the judges fell under the charm of the words and the person of Lacordaire, who, by the fortuitous audacity of his extemporaneous presentation, knew how to rouse the attention of the less sympathetic. Condemned as a formality and struck with a light fine, they left court as winners, in the main, over their judges. Indeed, Lacordaire had forced the judges to agree to this major battle, which, after twenty years of struggle, was to end in a decisive victory.

Despite all these activities, *L'Avenir* was approaching its end. While its editors, through their boldness, their disinterest, and their talent, attracted the sympathies of a portion of the young clergy, the dangerous, excessive, and even false side of their theories, the daring of their controversy, the intensity of their style provoked against them many denunciations. The bishops justifiably protested against this teaching without their mandate, which took upon itself alone what would nonetheless inevitably involve the Church, disturbing Her traditions, and possibly bringing about a dangerous turn in the national revival of religion. These complaints reverberated as far as Rome and roused there some valid fears. Given his loyalty, Lacordaire could not bear an uncertain state of affairs and to remain under suspicion. He proposed to his friends, who approved without hesitation, traveling to Rome to submit to the Pope the questions on which their orthodoxy had been called into doubt, promising ahead of time total obedience to the decision of the Holy See.

On the day of the Nativity of the Savior, the day on which the angels promised peace to men of good will, Lacordaire went to kneel at the tomb of the holy Apostles, there, with a sincere heart, to request truth and light; both were largely granted. The Holy See could not approve all the beliefs nor the general tendencies of *L'Avenir*. Nor could it make up its mind to condemn publicly some persons whose knowledge and criteria could have

gone awry, but whose worth and loyalty were not in question. Between approval and blame, only silence remained. It was this option that the Holy Father chose. He had the editors informed that their principles would be studied, and, while waiting, they could return to their country. “This was to allow time to cover in its folds the writers, their beliefs, and their writings.”⁷ In the peace and light of the Eternal City, Lacordaire easily understood the silence; he saw in it a tacit but clear disapproval, yet an especially fatherly act of the Holy See. “I do not know the day nor the hour,” he later wrote, “but I saw what I had not seen. I learned from my own experience that the Church is the liberator of the human spirit.”

Alas! At the same time as the humble disciple submitted himself with commendable simplicity, La Mennais rebelled in his heart. Vainly did the young priest say to him, with irrefutable common sense: “Either our coming was not necessary, or now we have to submit or remain silent.” Vainly did he show him with what blow he was to strike all at once his reason, his faith, and his honor. Vainly, after having prepared him for obedience, did Lacordaire follow him to the solitude [of his country home - Trans.] there to support him. “The wound of irritated pride was alive in the heart of the master; every day, the sword was returned by the very hand of the one who should have pulled it out and replaced it with the healing balm of God. . . . Moreover, sporadic and threatening words came out of that mouth which had previously expressed the anointing of the Gospel.”⁸ This heart-rending scene was beyond the forces of Lacordaire. Besides, convinced of the uselessness of his efforts in favor of the already fallen man, he decided on the only solution available to him: separation. He left his former master with good-byes filled with reverential pain. Thereafter, he reclaimed the freedom of his personal convictions and the precise direction of his destiny. Thus liberated, he returned to Paris, uncertain of what would become of him, and what, in the eyes of God, was the value of the action he was undertaking. But he had carried out his task, and for that he was satisfied.

Therein lies one of the most outstanding moments in the life of Lacordaire.

Hardly out of his youth, Lacordaire was accustomed for some time, without realizing it, to experience the fascination of this domineering man, and almost cherishing it — his soul still bruised from the combat wherein, against his hopes, he had been vanquished; located between a past which was breaking up and a future already

compromised, he was sure-sighted enough in his faith, strong enough in his will, and humble enough in his heart to distance himself from his teacher, at the risk of being deemed a traitor or an ingrate in the eyes of those who saw things from a baser perspective. His profound suffering came from being unable to prevent the shipwreck of the obstinate pilot whom he had obeyed up to that point.

For more than three years, he pursued, at least in his enthusiasm, the soul of his friend, Charles de Montalembert, who could not make up his mind to abandon La Mennais. Moreover, by that inexhaustible charity — which is also an insight — he finally succeeded in “making him understand and revere the only power before which one grows by bending down, and to place the Church ahead of everything else in his behavior and in his heart.”

On his return to Paris, Lacordaire presented himself to the Archbishop, Msgr. de Quélen, who greeted him with open arms, like a son who had escaped from some grave danger, and gave him the post of chaplain at the Visitation (Convent). This was the same cell, the same mission as before; but how changed was the situation! There he found, as he himself tells it, “a thousand doubts, a thousand contradictions in the heart, no old friend, and nothing new.”

Alone, the target of universal contempt, without information from outside, surrounded by stumbling blocks, what would become of him amid the temptations to despondency or revolt which inevitably vied with each other during his hours of solitude? Between these two waysides, what rather gentle hand could support him, and what brake was strong enough to prevent a fall? God saw to it by leading him to meet a fine and noble Christian soul, Mrs. Swetchine. Lacordaire was lacking both experience and a guide. In support, she provided him with the care of a thoroughly maternal heart, the wise counsels of a fifty-year existence, occupied with the study and the activities of the upper classes, and at the same time, having the supernatural understanding of a fervent convert to Catholicism.

It is easy to understand how much this influence filled with tact and goodness must have contributed to uplift Lacordaire beyond the narrow or envious passions which had dogged him for quite some time, and to maintain his soul in peace, work, and charity.

Meanwhile, La Mennais, following numerous ambiguous and soon retracted

submissions, presented to the world his *Paroles d'un croyant* [Words of a Believer], a bombastic and hate-filled diatribe against kings and priests, and an obstinate incitement to revolt against authority.

The remains of glory that surrounded the author and the few rays of the Gospel which he knew enough to blend into the gloomy darkness of his pamphlet, earned him a scandalous success. Lacordaire believed he owed it to his own honor and to his faith to display to everyone the great divide which distanced him from the apostate priest and from his teachings. To that end, he wrote this *Considérations sur le système philosophique de M. de Lammenais* [Reflections on the Philosophical system of Father de La Mennais], in which he attacked in their foundations the errors of his former teacher, who had buttressed all of them by the supposed infallibility of the human race — which to La Mennais was the sole source of certitude in the world.

Following these works called for by circumstances, to which endeavor would Lacordaire devote his life? Pressed to enter into the battles and the turbulence of journalism, he refused to do so, saying that he had completed his time of service and had suffered more than his share of wounds. Indeed, truth alone had always been the passion of this august soul. It was Truth that he had been looking for in the discussions of his youth; it was the glory of Truth which he was able to see beyond the diverse banners under which it had momentarily been forced to display itself. It was in Truth that the secret of eloquence was to be found; that eloquence, which he used to say, consisted *in creating heat out of Truth*. When for him this Truth was Jesus Christ and the Church — Truth that does not deceive itself, Truth that saves — he had no other wish than to dedicate himself to sharing it. He wanted at all costs to make it attractive to those who did not know it, so that, by dint of admiring it, they would arrive at loving it, and in loving it, they would find their salvation. Accordingly, he restricted himself to study, silence, and solitude, with the idea of writing a book on the state of the Church and of the world in the 19th century. “As for his language, he decided that it would be a work uniquely devoted to youth, in the apostolic manner, that is, in the form wherein are brought together religious beauty, history, and polemics, in order to expand Christianity in minds and there, give rise to faith.”⁹

Again, it was God Who took care to lead him there.

Around the same time, a proposal was presented to Lacordaire that he offer some lectures to the students of Stanislaus College in Paris. Was that not a summons from Providence? He believed it was, and so he accepted the task.

The results surpassed all hopes. Early on, some balconies had to be built in the chapel; subsequently, the students had to yield the space to a crowd of listeners among whom the most illustrious men were found assembled. Alongside the exalted admiration, however, criticism soon raised its head. Was the teaching of the author the authentic doctrine of the Church? Was his presentation Christian? And did it not change the pulpit into a secular rostrum? These misgivings quickly became grumblings; and these concerns, magnified by a prejudiced spirit, were transformed into accusations. The young lecturer was denounced to the Vatican, to the Archbishop, to the Tuileries [before 1871, a royal palace - Trans.], everywhere. Weary of these anonymous attacks, Lacordaire, at the end of three months, wrote to Msgr. de Quélen: "Not knowing either my errors, nor my enemies, nor what they want from me, I remain silent as a child of the Church." The conferences of Stanislaus College were interrupted. But the young orator had found there, in his striking success, the secret of his predestination in this world. He had only to wait for his hour. A few months later, he heard it ring.

One day, although little inclined by nature and by education to support such novel eloquence, the Archbishop of Paris himself invited the orator of Stanislaus to present some religious lectures in the pulpit of Notre Dame.

The test was serious. The godlessness of the 19th century, having revealed itself thoroughly in the horrors of the Revolution, cultivated the soil of France in a more surreptitious way and thereby in a more ominous way. Almost all of the men who had some influence on public opinion: men of science, of the press, of the courts, had made themselves its accomplices. "Generations emerged from infancy only to scorn or detest the Gospel; and, for the height of seduction, freedom, running ahead of them, cloaked with its magnanimous likeness the godlessness which was devouring them."¹⁰ But lo and behold, a child of this faithless century, until yesterday still enamored by its wanderings, presents himself in the pulpit with the arrogance of repairing the ruins of the old Catholic architecture and of avenging it from contempt. The undertaking was daring; moreover, on the day when the lectures were to begin, "the Church of Notre-Dame was crowded with a

multitude which it had never yet seen. All the young people, friend and foe alike, along with that curious throng which a sizable capital always holds ready for everything that is new, had come in pressing waves into the ancient cathedral.”¹¹ The success of this first talk was so absolute that the Archbishop immediately wanted to appoint Lacordaire as honorary canon of his Cathedral.

But if it was a notable outcome to have created a fresh audience and to have brought about the enthusiasm of one day, the most difficult task remained: how, in fact, to tie down for some time to a study of doctrine these men who had been carried along by the frenzied movement of political affairs? And how to link them to a priestly word which so accurately presented the meaning and the emotions of the century only to make them think of eternity? To maintain these waves of hearers, always restless, impatient, and naturally given to revolt, the young lecturer concluded that he had to abandon the apologetical plan ordinarily embraced: one which begins with the foundation of the religious structure, rising by degrees to the summit, passing from the invisible God, to Jesus Christ, to the Church. In order to seize this century quickly in the very heart of its preoccupations and of its daily battles, it was necessary to take hold of its passion for opinions concerning society, freedom, reform, human dignity. It was necessary to show the century that the Church is a society, that it, too, is concerned, for the benefit of man, with reform, happiness, dignity, liberty; that Jesus Christ is also legislator, that the Gospel contains an all-embracing covenant and a constitution.¹² As early as in his first addresses, Lacordaire engaged in the study of this vital and unimpeachable reality which is called the Church. He demonstrated that she is divine in her doctrine, divine in her constitution, and finally, divine in the results which she produces on the soul and on society.

After having studied the work of the Church, he came naturally at speaking about Jesus Christ, her author; and, having studied Him in His preexistence, His life, and His survival, he proved with unmatched power, love, and brilliance that this Jesus, son of Mary, is truly Son of God, God Himself. Then, leading his audience into this temple, which they would never have believed to be so magnificent, he examined more profoundly the basis of Catholic teaching: God and His intimate life in the Holy Trinity, creation, the dealings of man with God, divine government, its laws, its confirmation in eternity of penalties and rewards, and its zenith in the reciprocal incorporation of God to man and of man to God by the Eucharist.

Thus, by a creative combination of principles and facts, Lacordaire had arrived at organizing a new procedure in which truth adapted itself to the spirit of the present century, without ceasing to remain eternal. At the same time as he won over his listeners by the timely newness of the plan, he delighted them by stamping with the seal of Jesus Christ whatever was appropriate and true in the aspirations and ideas which excited them so much. Even though he established the need for faith above all else, he bowed with a sympathetic respect before reason, which is also a daughter of God, and becomes all the more important to the degree that it realizes better how to confine itself to its field, under the guardianship of Infinite Reason. To that century which spoke of freedom, this young preacher could say without fear of being contradicted: "I speak about it as proudly as another would." But at the same time, he reminded the century that true freedom is born of the Gospel, was baptized by the Church, and flourishes only where the Church protects it. Whenever he spoke of the sadness and the greatness of the motherland, his emotions became so strong and his language so compelling that it was right to tell oneself: "Far from smothering the lofty sentiments of our nature, faith purifies them and amplifies them even as it consecrates them."

And all these elevated ideas, all those lofty sentiments, emerged from his heart now like lava from a volcano, which nothing could resist, now like vibrating steel which makes souls tremble completely, sometimes like a living breath which sweeps over their folds, sometimes like a hidden power which lowers itself to them, the better to lift them up to unknown regions where one catches a glimpse of God! The attitude of the orator was revealed in the middle of his thought like a flaming torch; and the gesture which completed the word, repeated the word again, after the material sound had faded away. Occasionally, the soul of a listener carried away the body in its enthusiasm, and made him stand up; sometimes, to allow an oratorical movement to take hold, one held his breath in anticipation; sometimes admiration rose up in the heart in such powerful waves that it burst forth in impassioned applause. After having left the holy site, one remained for awhile under the influence of these inexpressible emotions. In an attempt to verbalize them, a man of the world, totally beside himself, invented this unusual formulation: "After God, this is all there is!" Moreover, the success was stupendous; perhaps some day people will find it hard to believe the account of it.

All ages, all classes, all parties, all the illustrious seemed to have agreed to a

rendezvous in front of the Notre Dame pulpit. If the believers constituted the guard of honor, one could easily recognize the sons of Voltaire intermingled with the remnants of the Revolution and of the Empire, the unbelievers with the rationalists, and next to them, a crowd of souls eager for truth and disconcerted in not having found in modern socialism the secret of life and of happiness for the human race. Thus, the wall of separation erected between the Church and society by numerous centuries of calumny, between the homeland of heaven and that of earth, this wall was falling every day from the powerful thunder of that voice — like the walls of Jericho at the sound of Joshua's trumpets!

This outstanding lesson, repeated at two different periods, lasted for ten years. In the interval, an unforgettable event transformed the orator into a new man.

For two years, Lacordaire was continuing the sequence of his lectures when suddenly, on his own, he abandoned this glorious road (1836). Despite the entreaties of his Archbishop, Msgr. de Quélen, who proclaimed him a new prophet, he came down from this pulpit of Notre-Dame to withdraw for some time, as he was wont to say, before his weakness and before God.

He then went to request of Rome a haven where he could engage in more peaceful study, as a refuge for prayer against his detractors who had not yet gotten their share of his huge successes. As for the rest, he ignored it; yet God continued to lead him by the hand, and readied for him graces even better than those of the past. Lacordaire had hardly arrived in the Eternal City, and had just been received by the Holy Father with paternal kindness, when La Mennais, by his *Livre sur les affaires de Rome* [Book on the concerns of Rome] ended up showering Catholic hearts with sadness. This work was a lengthy and offensive slander against the Holy See, whose judgment La Mennais himself had accepted as decisive in the matter of *L'Avenir*. The name and the person of Lacordaire were too intermingled in those pages for him to remain an indifferent spectator in the face of this deception. He replied to it with his admirable *Lettre sur le Saint Siègre* [Letter concerning the Holy See], wherein he praised in a style replete with brilliance and emotion the providential mission of Rome and the glorious association of its destiny with that of souls worldwide. These forceful pages found severe critics in French Gallicanism. But the Sovereign Pontiff agreed to approve them; this was enough to vindicate the author and to reward his heart, the heart of a child of the Church.

Nonetheless, amid the holy influences that overload the atmosphere of Rome, one single thought, which long ago had appeared in the soul of the young priest, definitively took root there and now reached its blossoming. It seemed to him that God was asking him to take one more step on the path of sacrifice by consecrating himself to the Order of St. Dominic and to its re-establishment in France. Something told him that only in this move would he find the culmination of his undertakings, the fruit of his trials, and the fullness of his life. In the face of this divine calling, some almost insurmountable obstacles stood in his way: his love of independence, his lack of resources, the hostile laws of the Revolution, and the moral barriers erected by public opinion in France.

Before these ever-present difficulties, “his soul fell under him like a knight under his horse. Nonetheless, urged on by a gift stronger than himself, he finally made up his mind. But the sacrifice was bloody: while it had cost him nothing to leave the world for the priesthood, it cost him everything he had to add to the priesthood the religious life. He was happy, pleased, without a care, and here he was, about to load on his shoulders, not so much an austere life, a woolen robe, but the heavy burden of a family to rear and feed! Selfishness was telling him: Stay where you are. Jesus Christ was telling him: when glory and quiet were offered to me, I chose life and death on a Cross.”¹³

Once he had made his decision, he experienced neither weariness nor regret but moved forward courageously despite the obstacles that awaited him. The calm and gracious reception which his astonishing plan encountered in the city of Rome surprised and touched him. The Pope deigned to bless him with the greatest benevolence, while the General of the Order of St. Dominic, far from rejecting him or delaying his request, received him as a messenger from heaven. But how to get a foothold in that land of France whence the religious, after so many services rendered, had been banished completely by prejudices, passions, and laws? Lacordaire, whose perception rarely failed him in decisive moments such as this, understood that in the state in which events placed him, he could not find a more equitable judge and a more influential defender than his homeland. Accordingly, he entrusted his cause directly to it with his *Mémoire pour le rétablissement des Frères Prêcheurs en France* [Re-establishment of the Friars Preachers in France].

In this work, he laid out with explicit frankness and respectful boldness his project, his motives, the claims by which the Order of St. Dominic could recover from France its

right of citizenship, and the very moderate limits within which he, as restorer, and his companions were preparing to make use of them, requesting only the freedom to live as paupers of Jesus Christ and to devote themselves to their fellow citizens. France responded to this call by the silence of respect and understanding.

The groundwork thus arranged, Lacordaire considered that God's moment had arrived. He left for Rome followed by two young men associated with his plan; at his arrival, he received the habit of Friar Preacher from the very hands of Father General. Becoming a simple novice, the Notre-Dame lecturer uplifted everyone by his humility, simplicity, gentleness, his love for repentance. At the end of the year of probation, he pronounced his solemn vows. Finally, he was a religious, and St. Dominic saw "France return to the banquet of his family!" France! His homeland! The new monk was himself anxious to see it again and bring to it the first fruits of his apostolate as a Friar Preacher. Boldly he crossed the provinces wearing this religious habit, which everywhere astounded observers without provoking insults. Soon, by the attentiveness of the new Archbishop of Paris, Msgr. Affre — who did not wish to allow his predecessors to appear more favorable — Lacordaire appeared with his head shaved and his monastic cowl in that pulpit of Notre-Dame after two years of silence, still echoing with remembrances of his thunderous voice. He had come to deliver a sermon about charity for the poor visited by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, that remarkable enterprise of our century and of our country. He had taken as the topic for his lecture *the religious vocation of the French nation*, "so as to envelop with the popularity of ideas the boldness of his presence."

The triumph was brilliant. The crowd, which overflowed from the front doors to the chancel, was more understanding than ever, enthusiastic, and carried away. Now this lecture was something more than a marvelous display of eloquence; it was a genuine victory because this preaching monk was by himself an army, and, by the daring of his presence and the command of his word, he had conquered a place in the sun of France for all the religious and all the monks, his brothers, who would wish to pitch their cenobitic tent there. If this victory was not yet decisive, the first stroke was as successful as it was daring, and no one could ignore its significance.

In addition, as an extension of his speech and the exposition of his religious undertaking, Father Lacordaire — this will be his name from now on — was bringing to

France a book: *La vie de Saint-Dominique* [The life of St. Dominic]. Written in the seclusion of the novitiate, these pages reflect its pleasant colors and inhales its perfume. We can comprehend everything that the Friar Preacher borrows from the cloister of sparkling lights, supernatural authority, engaging comfort, and wholesome shelter. The author reflects on himself only to describe with love his hero, who is also his father; without knowing it, he reveals what he aspires to become from then on. He will maintain the same direction, the same pattern, the same abilities, the same life, but nonetheless with the addition of the spirit of a notable Order and the heart of a well-known saint.

Encouraged by these favorable beginnings, Lacordaire returned to Rome with ten young Frenchmen who themselves wished to become Preaching Brothers. There, they lived together, engrossed in intense meditations and the strengthening exercises of the novitiate when an unexpected order was given for them to scatter. Lacordaire had to remain alone in Rome; five of his companions were to pursue their novitiate at Viterbo, and the other five in Piedmont. It was said that the adversaries of the orator of Notre-Dame, by dint of representing the new religious now as an impetuous revolutionary, now as an unrepentant follower of La Mennais, and by goading extraneous influences to work in the dark, brought about this painful blow. It was feared that this unmanageable youth would reveal symptoms of revolt, by which to judge their venture; or, that, at the very least, the dispersal of the members would infallibly be the ruin of the work, thereby obviating the need to proscribe it. Indeed, how greatly does Providence know how to bring to naught the resistance of men!

Lacordaire and his disciples gently bowed their heads and prepared to obey with simplicity and with such speed as to cause admiration in the elderly prior at Santa Sabina. Tried by misfortune, their vocation seemed to them more real and more attractive. Their dispersal increased their resolve, refined their charity, and strengthened their courage. This is because in the hearts of these still lively characters, God had placed the faith of the patriarchs; by that faith, the blow that should have destroyed the enterprise dedicated it.

Separated from his brothers, Lacordaire, for some years, divided his time between Italy and France. In Italy, he was preparing himself for his apostolic labors and immersed himself in the study of St. Thomas, “regretting that he had not quenched his thirst earlier from these deep waters,” some of whose lectures — especially those about God and His attributes — are, in fact, so fortunately enriched. At winter’s arrival, he returned to his

homeland and there, preached during Lent in the various dioceses where the bishops in jealous competition sought his preaching. During four months of 1841, he kept the city of Bordeaux captivated by the charm of his word. Enthusiasm was at its height; the Archbishop of the city could say, more than twenty years later: “The effects resulting from these lectures had been huge and long-lasting.”

In 1843, it was Nancy’s turn. Enlightened by the new apostle, many souls there renounced their former disbelief. Among these converts there was a young man “who for some years had been wandering in the impassioned areas where the world and the Gospel engage in a final battle.”¹⁴ In joy and in gratitude for his return to God, Mr. de Saint-Baussant wanted to give to his benefactor the first convert who was to lodge the Order of St. Dominic on French soil. At this news, godlessness exploded in slander and violent threats in the press and in the rostrums of the Chambers. Already instinctively hostile and fearing to appear as holding out a collaborating hand to these returning monks, the government hurried to add to the malice the weight of hateful and vicious persecutions. But nothing could make Lacordaire turn back, entrenched as he was behind the ramparts of Common Law. By the tenacity of his stand, he forced all his enemies into silence. The foundation became a reality. Finally, the Friars Preachers were re-established in the land of France, their cradle, the original field of their apostolate and the arena of their first martyrs!

That same year, the sky was covered with clouds. Weary of waiting for freedom of instruction continually promised by the Charter and always refused by the powers-that-be, the Catholics called loudly, even with dedicated boldness, for what was but a minimum of their rights. In person, the bishops directed this vital campaign. As for the faithful, each one was at his post, and in competition, they encouraged each other. The sons of the crusaders were indeed resolved not to retreat any longer before the sons of Voltaire. On the other hand, the State intended to hold on to its monopoly; the entire University administration was rallying to defend a domination in which it found itself very content. At that time, the Archbishop of Paris, the future martyr of the barricades, Msgr. Affre,¹⁵ believed that he had to double his entreaties to Lacordaire in order to call him back to the pulpit of Notre-Dame.

Up to that point, the religious had resisted his entreaties. He remembered with joy the labor of the lectures which he had started in Paris — ably continued by an illustrious

and saintly Jesuit, Father de Ravignan — and mused that his own words, no longer useful to Notre-Dame, could, in the provinces, move souls and germinate many harvests. But the present hour was the hour of danger, and so, “he felt it his duty to reappear at the center of the war against the Church.” Consequently, he accepted. Like a genuine religious, he wished to show himself in the habit of his profession, which was itself a liberty, and which, moreover, in the pulpit was in a better place than anywhere else, being the habit of a Preacher. Amid the seething passions, in vain did King Louis-Philippe himself insist that the archbishop prevent this monastic preaching, warning him that in the event of a disturbance, the government would not provide the protection of a single soldier. The only concession that Lacordaire granted, not through intimidation but by compliance with the wishes of the Archbishop and through pity for the ridiculous threat from the government, was to cover part of his white robe with the cowl of a canon.

At Notre-Dame, an audience as numerous as ever awaited him; by his third sentence, he had created for himself “a sacred haven” in all the aroused hearts. A predicted disturbance was replaced by the silence of admiration. The hostile press displayed a similar respect for his teaching. On each Sunday for two months, an ever increasing success proved to everyone that the Monk Preacher had not taken either his country or his time for granted. As he himself admitted, it was the most dangerous and the most decisive of his battles. It strengthened the courage of many, heightened the authority of religion, and was a fitting preparation for the parliamentary struggle of that memorable year and the following, when the religious Orders, violently attacked at the rostrums, were defended such as they had not been since 1789. (Mr. de Montalembert).

From 1843 to 1851, each winter during Advent, Lacordaire continued his lectures at Notre-Dame amid the eager throngs who never became weary of listening to him. With the arrival of Lent, he preached the Gospel countrywide: Grenoble, Lyons, Strasbourg, Liège, Toulon, and delivered outstanding panegyrics for Bishop Forbin Janson, General Drouot, and Daniel O’Connell. At Lyons, such was the size of his audience that as early as six o’clock in the morning places were taken for the conference, which was not scheduled to begin until one hour after noon. Towards the end of the series, the speaker was borne as if in triumph from the church to his dwelling, amid public acclamations. At Strasbourg, the Jews, the Protestants, the Rationalists vied eagerly with the Catholics to fill the vast cathedral, to crowd at the feet of the speaker, to relish his eloquence, and to meditate on

his lessons.

Quite frequently, an immediate flow of grace would fill the furrow which this powerful word had dug; the unbeliever enlightened, convinced, enraptured like the centurion at Calvary, and still overcome, came to throw himself at the feet of the apostle to make amends to this Christ Whom he had blasphemed for so long, and to implore pardon from His minister. Others, having not yet given up their weapons, carried in their heart the spark of fire which had excited them. At another time, God sent them some less distinguished ministers who would never have been able to strike a heavy blow but who knew how to draw out the spark with a steady hand, alleviate the pain, and bring to the soul the life of God. Finally, those who did not understand were not laughing any more, at least about a religion which knew how to rouse up for itself such protectors; yet if they did not fall on their knees, they esteemed it a point of honor to respect and even to praise the believer. Meanwhile, the one who had carried out these marvels, having returned to his convent, applied himself to uplifting the youngest of his brothers by his serious and kind simplicity, his humility, his fidelity to all the exercises of the cloister, and especially his love for Jesus Christ. His love for Jesus Christ: who could describe it? He was the energy, the soul, the life of this outstanding religious. It surely was his private story, whose secret he revealed, when from the height of the pulpit of Notre-Dame, he cried out: “Lord Jesus, I finally come to You, to your divine image, which every day is the subject of my contemplation, to your sacred feet which I have kissed so many times, to your kind hands which have so often blessed me, to your life whose aroma I breathed from my youth, which my adolescence misunderstood, which my youth recovered, which my ripe age adores and proclaims to every creature. O Father, O Lord, O Master, O friend, O Jesus!”

Now Jesus Christ was crucified; can one truly love Him without seeking to imitate Him? From then on, there arose in Lacordaire a boundless love for the Cross. “Can we,” he wrote, “look for another head than the bloody head of our Savior, other eyes than His eyes, other hands and other feet to kiss than His hands and His feet, pierced by nails for our love, and wounds to treat gently other than His divine and always bleeding wounds?” — “Jesus Christ on the Cross: this is the pathway to heaven and to love; Jesus Christ had known no other path than that to the Pretorium and to Calvary. I leave it at that. I live and die there.” To satisfy this love for Jesus Christ crucified, the illustrious religious was unable to find punishments severe enough. Neither perpetual abstinence, nor the protracted fasts

of his Order, nor the voluntary penances in practice, were sufficient for his heart. Often, and especially following his grandiose oratorical triumphs, he asked his brothers to abuse him, to slap him in the face, to trample him with their feet, to drag him on the ground, to tie him to a cross. Even though violence took place, in the respect and the compassion to obey him, never was his unquenchable thirst satisfied. A few weeks before his death, stretched out on his bed of pain, worn out from weariness, spent of strength and vitality, he still requested a friend to make him suffer for Jesus Christ.

Despite all these works and these penances, Lacordaire was able to find time and strength to establish new convents of his Order. Thus it was that in 1844, following the Lenten series at Grenoble, despite the childish concerns and the deaf opposition of authority, he founded his second monastery in France on the Chalais mountain, a few leagues from the city. Moreover, it was there that he established the novitiate and the house of studies for his young brothers.

Amid these conferences and these foundations, the struggles and glorious victories for God and for his servant, the 24 February revolution came to destroy in a few hours the throne of Louis-Philippe. The latter was poorly supported by the capricious passions of the people and the usefulness of a policy of division wherein respect for the Church was always sacrificed to perverted opinion. The Republic was proclaimed. Lacordaire had no attraction for this government which he considered as improbable in a country torn to pieces by factions, and wherein for fourteen centuries monarchist tendencies had taken root in institutions and in personalities. Yet the monarchy had just fallen; to attempt to re-establish it after the horrific falls of 1830 and 1848 seemed to him at the moment beyond human power. Since the Republic was standing, in his loyalty to the Crown, he accepted to make the effort. Moreover, from the day after the Revolution, he crisscrossed Paris still covered with blood and barricades. Climbing in the pulpit of Notre-Dame, filled with armed people, he drew applause from them by showing them God, alone, standing, and adored in the midst of the ruins. But dreadful passions murmured in the shadows. Every day, the most outrageous ideas were disseminated as scapegoats to the multitudes, misled by an unrestrained press. Society, thus battered, was shaken to its foundations. Only by daily resistance could these dangers be overcome. The press — a press wise, strong, and sympathetic to the masses — was the only power able to provide weapons against revolutionary and godless journalism. Unfortunately, the Catholic newspapers of the times

were in little favor with crowds, whose spirit had been corrupted by reprehensible doctrines. Was it not necessary to consider creating a fresh and more popular religious voice? Some priests and illustrious lay persons, alarmed by the perils of the country, thought so and came to beg Lacordaire to assume the leadership of a fresh newspaper. “Preacher, writer surrounded by backers, all these labels generated for him some duties unlike those of a Trappist or of a Carthusian. Pressured by these friendly voices, the religious believed he had to give in to the power of events. Despite his aversion to engage in journalism, along with those who had offered themselves to him, he unfurled a banner in whose folds religion, the republic, and liberty intertwined.”¹⁶

L'Ère nouvelle was organized, with Lacordaire as editor-in-chief. But, after having thrown off a yoke which no principle could make honorable in its eyes, France had to fashion a constitution for itself. In this difficult and complicated task, it was impossible for the future legislators not to encounter the Church and its prerogatives in the process, and to avoid deciding which role She should have in the new organization. Since the immutable principles of faith would not be presiding as sovereigns at these sizable gatherings, would it be necessary to refuse to make the best of the theories in vogue to create for religion an honored position and a moral influence in the French nation? The Catholics did not think so. They wanted to have some representatives at the National Assembly to defend their beliefs in case of need. So, three bishops and eleven priests appeared in the Chamber, among whom was Lacordaire, the newly elected representative from Marseille.

Lacordaire appeared in the National Assembly in his monastic robe, in the middle of enthusiastic applause from the crowd. The following day, a newspaper could state publicly: “From this day on, the harsh laws which banned the religious habit in France are, in fact, obsolete, by reason of the daring of a monk and the cheers of the people.” But on 15 May, only a few days following its inauguration, the National Assembly was overrun by a crowd blind with rage. Clearly identifiable to the threatening rioters by his white cowl, the fearless monk remained motionless at his desk. Nonetheless, he was aware that the Republic, shamed by the opprobrium of this popular uprising, was henceforward lost and that his duties as a religious and a representative could not be reconciled. Accordingly, on the very day following, he tendered his resignation to the President of the Assembly. Shortly thereafter, and for the same reasons, he left the editorship of *L'Ère nouvelle* whose overly democratic leanings did not suit the restraint of his own ideas.

Long beforehand, he had felt that his career has been mapped out by God, well above the disturbances of the tribunal; experience had made him understand this better. If the hope of offering to the good cause a public witness of his sympathy drew him to stand firm against the stumbling block, a higher level of prudence helped him to stop in time so as not to collide with it.

Having become as a simple man of God, of His Gospel and of His Church, Lacordaire took up with more enthusiasm his apostolic and religious mission. As early as the advent of 1848, with great joy in his heart and as a great blessing for souls, he evangelized Dijon, the city of his adolescence, where a precocious reputation had come so quickly to crown his young countenance. Moreover, this preaching was followed by the foundation of a new Dominican monastery at Flavigny, During the years that followed, 1849-1850, the tireless apostle continued his conferences at Notre-Dame, in the presence of a new archbishop, Msgr. Sibour, successor to the illustrious martyr of the barricades. In his gratitude, the prelate wanted to settle Lacordaire and his students in the very heart of Paris, in the convent of the Carmelites, whose sanctuary was still stained with the blood of the saintly victims sacrificed there by the first Revolution. Consequently, these years, so full of storms for France and for the world, witnessed the growth and the expansion of the Dominican tree. God seemed to be pleased to bless his intrepid servant amid the ruins piled around him. One of its French religious, Father Jandel, had just been chosen by the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX, as Vicar General of the Order of St. Dominic in the whole world. As a result, the four convents of the Friars Preachers settled in our country saw themselves canonically erected into the "Province of France," the first of the olden religious provinces founded by St. Dominic, following that of Spain and of Toulouse. In addition, Lacordaire was appointed Provincial.

However, some sorrow blended in with all the joys of the noted religious; his preaching was suspected of leaning toward certain theological errors, particularly regarding the coercive power of the Church which he was accused of denying. Justly impatient to bring about the disappearance of this suspicion raised against his teaching, he hurried to Rome, where his loyal explanations caused all defiance to collapse. There, he provided spontaneously a sincere and complete adherence to the teachings of the Holy See, concerning the power which the Church has to correct its rebellious children, not only by exhortation and counsels in the internal forum [i.e., confession - Trans.], but also in the

exterior forum by wholesome penalties.

Given such a clear declaration, was it any longer possible to hold a doubt? In addition, the very cordial reception and the paternal benevolence that the loyal Dominican received from the Supreme Pontiff made Lacordaire understand that all clouds and all uneasiness had disappeared. From then on, he could take up fruitfully the course of his apostolate. Lent was about to begin; the pulpit of Notre-Dame was reclaiming him. Once again, he ascended there to present from its height and with his usual eloquence the influence of Providence in the supernatural order. That was the crowning of his dogmatic teaching. The ensuing years ought to have been devoted to moral theology; but alas! This would be the last time his powerful voice reverberated under the arches of the venerable basilica. With a sad presentiment of the future, Lacordaire, toward the end of his last conference, opened his heart in a touching farewell to this audience with its ever faithful enthusiasm — in the future, the glory of his life, and his crown in eternity.

A few months after these moving words, when the sadness of separation was somewhat made attractive by the prospect of eternal horizons, the *coup d'état* imposed the Empire on France. The counterweight of the Constitutional laws remained only a mirage, and that of divine authority was banished from them more than ever. Given this authority, hardly Christian and hardly French, Lacordaire believed “that his hour had just disappeared.” Indeed, would he not find himself obliged to utter certain truths so disagreeable to civil power as to risk compromising the still precarious restoration of his Order? Would he not, in fact, in the passion of his spontaneous language, be exposing himself to revealing some opinions opposed to the standards and the supernatural character of the Christian pulpit?

In fact, the only time he raised his voice in the Church of St. Roch, everything he believed he was obliged to say concerning the strength of character, considered as the mark of the Christian, was taken as a daring hint of the corruptness of those who had seized power. He had not forgotten it; and since then, he steadfastly refused all invitations that reminded him of it, whether at Notre-Dame or at other pulpits of Paris.

But if he left Notre-Dame and the fame that surrounded him there, it was not to take refuge in unprofitable rest. With his incredible vigor, he conducted, as Vicar Provincial, the

canonical visit of the Dominican convents of Belgium, Holland, England, and Ireland. Subsequently, he went to Toulouse, where, after an outstanding speech on the occasion of the translation of the skull of St. Thomas, he founded a new convent of his Order.

The following year (1854), in the cathedral of this city, Lacordaire began a series of lectures that was intended to follow upon those of Notre-Dame. He had in mind to display therein the whole Christian morality in a series lasting six or seven years. He was given only enough time to lay the vast and magnificent foundations of his new building. It was once again the captivating eloquence and the incomparable splendor of the high days of Notre-Dame; but his voice began to falter from the exertions of his intense speech. When, in 1855, the young people of Toulouse came to ask him to continue the series of these conferences, he found himself obliged to decline because his health could not sustain his thoughts and his desire for commitment. But if the orator of lofty pulpits had gloriously ended his day, Providence had allotted many more hours to the religious and wanted to entrust him with many tasks. Towards the end of his provincialate, a new work which was linked to the doctrinal mission of his Order required his principal concerns: this was the foundation of the teaching Third Order.

For many long years, his wish to give to society a spiritual good, able to make the future fertile, attracted his attention to the religious education of youth. Having just become a Christian again, Lacordaire felt his forehead flush and regrets fill his heart when he asked himself what that college education, imposed on the whole of French youth by the monopoly of the University, had done to his pious soul, to the pleasing and fresh years of his infancy. The main results had been a faith destroyed, morals in danger, a life of eighteen years cast adrift without guide or restraints against all the storms of liberty and passion! The recent convert had easily concluded that it was necessary at whatever cost, to create, parallel to the masters of the University, other masters, equally friends of human letters but much more connected to the beliefs of the Church and better able to provide their students with the knowledge of God, salvation, and eternity. Cut off from family and its engrossing preoccupations, priests and religious seemed to him more than anyone else capable of filling completely this mission of application: unrewarded, misunderstood, and taking up every hour. Once occupied by these thoughts, the young priest never forgot them. He was only waiting for the hour of God; and finally, he heard it ring. The law of 15 March 1850, which broke the unjust yoke of the University monopoly, had provided all programs

devoted to youth the liberty, in jealous competition, of cultivating the soil of the motherland. And so, the Jesuits hastened to open some colleges.

The directors of an ecclesiastical institution at Oullins, near Lyons, offered to hand over their apostolate to Lacordaire (1852). This provided him with the opportunity to realize the dream of his life: to form youth into a Christianity which, not content to maintain itself to the very new conditions of civil life, would accustom man to study it and to fulfill its required obligations. He accepted eagerly. But, pragmatically, how to manage this undertaking? The Brothers Preachers whom he had re-established in France could not have taken charge, either because of their small number, or because of the way in which the organization of colleges was generally conceived. This would jeopardize the management of the Brothers' cloistered life, in which perpetual abstinence, fasts, night vigils, and deep contemplative mood, all joined together to prepare the disciple of St. Dominic for his apostolic ministry.

In order to respond to the requirements of this special undertaking, Lacordaire cast his eyes on the Third Order of St. Dominic, also called the *Militia of Jesus Christ*, linked to the First Order by common purpose — which is the salvation of souls — but less burdened with austere observances: he renamed it: the Teaching Third Order. Hardly had he made known his aim, that four devoted young men, among those who intended to struggle against the difficulties of the current situation and to oppose with all their strength the encroachment of evil, offered themselves to him to become the first children of the new family. Their novitiate completed, Lacordaire installed them at the college of Oullins, which quickly flourished under their paternal and wise education. The following year, Lacordaire ended his conferences at the Cathedral of Toulouse when the directors of the school at Sorèze came with the request for him to take over the management of their establishment, at one time the most outstanding in all of Southern France, but now greatly diminished. A few weeks later, acceding to their wishes, Lacordaire established himself in this renowned abbey, surrounded by one hundred twenty children, initially astonished by and before long, enraptured with their new director. From then on, it was there that he would shelter his life. It was for these children that he would devote his pleasant evenings and the always-generous and warmhearted expressions of a commitment that only death could dry up.

The task which Lacordaire took up was immeasurable: he had to restore all at once discipline, application to work, religion, manners and customs, in a large number of these souls who had been crippled by the influences of the period even more than they had been uplifted by the delights of their heaven.

Of these children, he had to do more than simply make them men; he had to make them *Christians*. Lacordaire gave his all for this. At the end of two months, he was the heart of the school. He was seen everywhere, at all the exercises, the study halls, classes, recreations, walks, just like a father for whom there is nothing insignificant when it comes to his children. Skillfully, he seized the opportunity to teach them how to study, to think, to hold a conversation, to live. He endeavored to inspire them with self-respect and respect for others, arising from the respect given God. He displayed for them the respect of honor and human dignity, uplifted in the Christian to its true loftiness, maintained within its appropriate limits. In addition, he trained them, through the practice of a serious and strong life, to serve with affection their century and their homeland. Finally, by imprinting more briskly in them the feeling of duty, he strove to ready them to use conscientiously a freedom which, in the world, was not likely to find its counterweight and its restraint. As for the duties which directly concerned the service of God, Lacordaire wanted to collaborate with the chaplain of the college; to this end, he brought to bear, for the evangelization of these young souls, the unyielding work and the deep respect which he gave formerly to the word of God destined for the massive gatherings of Notre-Dame.

Despite the decrease in his physical strength, Lacordaire exhibited the same eloquence and the same irresistible voice, but now stamped with a charming and spontaneous simplicity; there was also corresponding enthusiasm and emotion within these young, dazzled, and captivated listeners. At the same time, Lacordaire offered them generous service as a confessor, always ready to set aside his occupations to greet them and to give them his advice as a male, whose austerity was tempered by a most maternal tenderness. Could God, Who blesses charity's glass of cold water, leave unproductive such apostolic devotion? At the end of a few years, the school had been transformed. Along with religious principles, there was a revival of the love of study, the taste for beauty, and the regard for duty.

For seven years, Lacordaire wrapped himself inside that unfathomable commitment

and the worries of every day; only death tore him away from them. He barely took respite from work to celebrate the memory of his venerable and saintly friend, Mrs. Swetchine, who had just died, and that of his brothers-in-arms, Father de Ravignan and Frédéric Ozanam, fallen ahead of him, worn out by the battles in favor of the Lord.

However consoling were the results obtained at Sorèze, Lacordaire remained uneasy. These young men who had brought him happiness left him, one after the other, to return to the world; he wanted to follow them there, so as to protect their faith. For that, he undertook to explain the entire Christian moral teaching in a series of letters addressed to a young man. The latter was to study Jesus Christ as founder of the Christian life in the Scriptures and in the Church; in the worship of Jesus Christ in priests, bishops, and the pope; next, in the virtues, the sacraments and the mysteries of the liturgy. He had already published three of these letters, but other weighty tasks interrupted a labor so cheerfully begun. In 1858, he was for a second time elected Superior of the Dominican Province of France. This honor was again a commitment: nonetheless, he accepted it with his usual generosity, and postponed taking up the new task until the completion of his current one. Alas! The moment for completing it would never come!

Around the same time, momentous political and religious events shook Europe.

With the help of France, Italy had attacked Austria, ruler of many of its provinces. The scope of the struggle and the importance of its results held Europe's attention. As long as he saw in this war only the cause of Italian independence, Lacordaire believed that he could extend his understanding. But when atheism wanted to appropriate the fruits of victory, misleading the people with inane words and, little by little, preparing public opinion to accept unjust facts, and ending by setting foot on the States of the Church, Lacordaire wrote his brochure *De la liberté de l'Église et d'Italie* [The liberty of the Church and of Italy] in order to constrict the sacrilegious invasion.

In this work, Lacordaire proclaims, in his outstanding language, the legitimacy of temporal power, its need as a guarantee of the spiritual independence of the Church and of the freedom of the world. Then he addressed to the plunderers this prophetic threat: "Italians, by your sacrilegious usurpations, you have raised between yourselves and two hundred million Catholics a fence which expands by the day. You have pitted against your

legitimate hopes for independence and freedom more than only men: you have placed there Christianity, that is to say, the most magnificent work of God on earth. Do realize that it was God Who made Rome for His Church. You are competing with the eternal will of God; you will meet your match, have no doubt.”

Notwithstanding all these momentous events, the religious did not forget his Dominican work. While he was founding another convent of his order at Dijon, his adopted homeland, he brought his brothers back to the ancient and celebrated convent of *Saint-Maximin* and to *La Sainte-Baume* in Provence. For five hundred years the Friars Preachers had been the guardians of the relics and tomb of St. Mary Magdalen, there, in the most magnificent basilica of Southern France; it had taken the revolutionary storm of the previous century to tear them away from that sacred soil. Lacordaire granted them this holy site; moreover, he deposited at the feet of this illustrious and holy penitent a short book written in her honor in kind, gentle, and comforting words, as the final perfumed breath of her soul. This book topped his reputation as a writer. The French Academy reached him in the depth of his solitude to offer him a place in its midst. The humble religious was loath to yield to these advances. And yet, was this not a tribute bestowed to religion in his person, a supreme triumph over the prejudiced followers of Voltaire, and a solemn acceptance of the monastic Orders on the soil of France? At the Academy, would he not be the symbol of liberty accepted and strengthened by religion? These thoughts moved him to take his seat there; indeed, it was there, on 24 January 1861, that he raised his resounding voice in public for one last time.

Weakened by an unknown and unrelenting illness, Lacordaire received perhaps, in this final effort of eloquence, the blow that would account for his death. Nonetheless, he wanted to go down fighting. Despite his crushing state, every week of Lent 1861, he was determined to dedicate to his dear students of Sorèze the final exertions of a life in decline, and of an enthusiasm that did not want to die peacefully. These presentations used up the last of his strength; soon, he took to his bed, never to get up. From this mournful bed, suffering excruciating pains which shattered his body without overtaking his courage, in complete mastery of himself and of his memories, Lacordaire dictated [sic] his account of the re-establishment in France of the Order of Friars Preachers. Then, the pen fell from his icy hand [sic], like a glorious sword, broken by dint of combats; the illustrious patient entered into a silence which no earthly noise could ever again disturb. Every day, he had

read to him from *Préparation à la mort* [Preparation for death], or *L'Acte d'abandon à Dieu* [The act of abandonment to God] by Bossuet. The remainder of the day was spent in contemplating Jesus crucified: he no longer had the strength to pray to Him, but he gazed at Him. Finally, sustained by the final sacraments of the Church, and consoled by the apostolic blessing of the Sovereign Pontiff — after having hugged and blessed, one after the other, his religious and the school students — he raised his weakened arms toward heaven and uttered a final cry: “My God, my God, open for me, open for me!” On 21 November, he breathed his last.

Now, his life is in God — but his works remain with us. Whether one meditates on what he wrote, whether one weighs what he did, little by little, amid all those diverse matters, one can reconstitute his image, like a statue that distance appears to make larger and to complete. The overly sharp angles and the inevitable gaps, that a more or less justified critique called attention to in this block of granite, disappear while the major lines stand out and the countenance especially becomes more beautiful.

Faith spread on his brow an unchangeable serenity, because he had been a Catholic and the son of the Church, before everything, and despite everything. In his gaze, where power blends with tenderness, one can measure the depth of his thoughts as well as the goodness of his heart. His features are strong without clashing, severe without conceit; on his closed lips the tone of his eloquence appears as if still being heard. To these gifts, the joys of monastic life and the secrecy of penance add their reflections coming from above, and the man appears to us just as he was: an outstanding servant of God.

But what lifts him up even higher is the consideration of the environment in which he had to live: when one takes into account the years that preceded him, those that followed him, those that knew him; when one analyzes the shifting sands on which he fought; when one assesses the totality and the variety of the dangers that he must have faced; when one realizes the insidious character of the false principles with which the atmosphere was invisibly filled; when one sees anterior to him, after him, and next to him, so many attractive minds that fall; and that in the midst of this unpredictability, he educates himself without a teacher; in the midst of these breakdowns, he remains standing; in the midst of these failed works, he pursues his program of teaching, and leaves to France, to his Order, to his Church, a body of religious work whose influence will only increase. Instead of

checking with an envious eye to see if there is a lack of harmony in the hem of his garment, if some imperfect gesture has decreased the ardor of his combats, if he had been overconfident in the nobility of the human heart, and if, in his desire to save his age at any cost, he was too understanding of its errors, one can only express admiration and gratitude. Everyone admires the hero; everyone thanks God who made him and Who knows very well how to adapt men to fit the century to which they are destined!

This admiration will be the judgment of history: this gratitude is already marked deeply in all Christian hearts.

ENDNOTES

1. *Notice sur le Rétablissement des Frères Prêcheurs.*

[Notice concerning the Re-establishment of the Friars Preachers]

2. *Idem.*

3. Lorain, *Étude sur le P. Lacordaire.* [Study on Father Lacordaire]

4. Patru, Olivier (1604-1681), lawyer-writer in Paris. [Trans.]

Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne (1677-1704); bishop, greatest orator of France

5. *Mémoires du P. Lacordaire.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. Correspondence.

10. *Notice sur Ozanam.*

11. *Mémoires.*

12. See: L'Abbé Perreyve: *Étude sur les Conférences du P. Lacordaire* [Study on the Conferences of Father Lacordaire].

13. Letter to Mrs. Swetchine.

14. *Mémoires.*

15. Denis Auguste Affre (1793-25 June 1848), shot at the barricades during the revolution of 1848).

16. *Mémoires.*

