

# **SUPPRESSION OF THE BUDGET OF THE CLERGY**

## **Article II**

(30 October 1830)

Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, OP

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We have just read a proclamation from the Prefect of Jura<sup>1</sup> to the Catholic priests of his department wherein, after having informed them of the law and the political divinity of peoples, that his power extended everywhere and on everything, he expressed his astonishment that many of them had refused their prayers for the new government. Nonetheless, he allowed them to refrain provided they remembered that one cannot seek benefits from the State when one opposes it. Hear this, Catholic priests of the Jura! We, in turn, address a proclamation to you and to all our brothers, to all who pray to God with a human heart, and this is what we say to them:

Pray for the king, pray for his family, for the quiet of his kingdom and the peace of the world, not because of your prefect, but because God commands you, because your early ancestors prayed in this way. Besides, be profoundly aware of the indignity of the language directed to you and see what the millions from the State are costing you.

The State does not require any civil servant to pray for it because the religions are free. The time has passed when it was a crime of lèse-majesté to forget a sacrifice to Caesar on the day he killed his mother. But you, Catholics, if Nero had sent you a pretorian guard to ask you for a *Te Deum*, you would be bound to sing it. If he asked for your blessing before he struck the abdomen of his mother and you had the audacity to refuse him this, all the prefects of the empire would address a proclamation to you, in the name of honor and of the nation, to remind you that you were living from the benefits of the State. Indeed, hear them: they expect prayers

from you — without allowing your conscience to be their judge — and they demand this by invoking another reason: you are being subsidized. They do not have to be just, you are being paid. They do not need to give you an accounting: you are being paid.

In vain will you affirm that the title of civil servant cannot deprive you of religious freedom, since it does not deprive anyone, because, even in purely civil matters, salaries, electors of the State retain an independent and conscientious vote. Catholics! This is true, but the difference between you and them is that they have won their freedom and you have not yet thought about yours. They have suffered outrages similar to yours; prefects addressed insolent proclamations to them in which they were told: Men of State, men of our money, we are letting you know that on such and such a day, at such an hour, at such a place, you will dishonor yourselves before your conscience and before us. They were even given the honor already completed, just as you are ordered to sing hymns composed ahead of time by David.

Catholics! This is what the millions from the State are costing you: the freedom of your conscience.

They cost you even more because if the State compels you to pray for it, it can compel you to pray for all its subjects, without exception. You are no longer masters able to separate even one Frenchman from your communion unless you have obtained the consent of the Minister of Cults. Every Frenchman has the right to request prayers from you during his life and psalms on his casket, his receipt of contribution at hand. And that is not all: the sacraments being no more sacred than prayer, they will approach you for the nuptial blessing as a right acquired by their status as citizen; they will tear your God from His tabernacles, following the example of parliaments; have they not paid the price?

Catholics! This is what the millions from the State cost you: the undermining of the Church.

The State does not hide itself, proclaiming the message aloud: you will have no part in its benefits except at that price. God allows this for us to learn just how far

a Church has fallen when it owes its existence to the Treasury. Henceforth, there is no need to say this since our enemies have been careful to broadcast it, because to all our requests they reply with disdain: Are you not our bondsmen? But that is false, Catholics! We are not claiming any benefits but the enforcement of a treaty, retribution for plunder. The Church has never been in the pay of the State, even in her greatest trials. Accordingly, when we attack the budget of the clergy, we are far from laying a finger on the work of a great pontiff who signed the Concordat in 1801. We are attacking an act of notorious bad faith by which every year a debt is converted into a gift, a change of which we will be the victims, until such time as all our rights have been sacrificed. After all, what can you do? Between God and the Treasury, one has to make the choice. There will come other times, you say, another justice. Catholics! Yes, there will be kings and peoples. Nonetheless, conscience presses you; conscience belongs to today, not to tomorrow.

Catholic priests! It is a question of your blood which we are not despising. We are poor, just as you are; our evenings have no other salary than their independence. We know only one thing about tomorrow: that Providence will be up before the sun. Why would we despise the blood of our brothers. Their people are our people, their God is our God, their life is ours and more than ours. Indeed, we feel your bondage acutely and we believe that poverty is worth a hundred times more than the abuses of a prefect, than the ruin of the Church. Have men ever been treated with more disdain? They mock your prayers yet they order you to sing them. If you do not obey, you are rebels to whom the Treasury will be closed; if you obey, you become so base that there are no words in any language to express what they think of you. And yet, the only claim they have on the Church is as its buyer.

Catholic priests! For our part, we protest against these indignities, against this martyrdom by disgrace. While we have a breath left, we will take heaven and earth as witnesses that we are uncontaminated by that blood which is drawn from your veins drop by drop. Some among you will hate us, if they wish; they will accuse us of calling trouble on their heads. Perhaps one day we will be wandering the world with their curse, a foreign land will cover our despised ashes. But, at the hour of awakening, we hope that God will find in our bones the love for you that will never be extinguished.

Catholic priests! They addressed their proclamation to you with these words as title: Honor and Country.

We address our proclamation to you with these more powerful two words: God and freedom!

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