

**CONVERSATION  
BETWEEN M. GOBET  
AND THE BROTHER  
WHO WAS AN IGNORAMUS**

**M.Gobet.** I hear that you and your fellow Brothers refuse to recognise me as the Bishop of Paris, and that you do not wish to bring your children to the parish, so as not to communicate, as you say, with a parish priest who is unqualified. You forget who you are: you ought to know that your work is to teach children to read, and that it is not for you to make decisions concerning State or Church matters. When authority speaks, you have no alternative but to obey.

**The Brother.** Yes, My Lord, I know it is not for me to make statements about matters of religion. I am only a simple believer, and I could never mistrust my poor intelligence enough, and I am determined to submit myself to authority.

**MG** I am delighted to see you adopt this attitude. I had heard you spoken of as a worthy person, and I was surprised to find you insubordinate.

**B** My Lord, I shall always be submissive to legitimate authority.

**MG** My dear Brother, I invite you to dine with the President of your Section, and I shall add your name to the list of those taking the oath.

**B** Make sure you do not do so, My Lord. I shall not take the oath.

**MG** You won't take the oath?

**B** No, My Lord.

**MG** What! You have just told me that you would always submit to legitimate authority, and you disobey the law!

**B** But it is legitimate authority that forbids me to obey the law regarding the oath.

**MG** My dear Brother, you speak like a fanatic and what you say is seditious. I have told you already, it's not your place to question the law: your role is to obey. There is no other legitimate authority apart from the law.

**B** Let me say this to you, My Lord. In matters of religion, a human law has no authority if it is clearly at odds with divine law.

**MG** Ah! I was waiting for that; that's what all fanatics say.

**B** It's the language of the Apostles, My Lord.

**MG** You're being argumentative and I should send you back to your Section, but I want to hear you out. I'm inter-

ested to hear an ignoramus who claims to know more than the National Assembly.

**B** I won't indulge in false modesty, and I will admit, My Lord, that with regard to the question of the oath I believe I know more than the National Assembly, because I know and believe what the Church teaches.

**MG** What the Church teaches! The Church teaches that we have to obey laws, and give to Caesar what is Caesar's. Do you understand, Brother?

**B** Yes, My Lord, but it says also we have to give to God what is God's. If Caesar wants to take what is God's, I cannot agree to it. If he wants to tell my conscience what to believe, I am not obliged to obey him. Religion is not subject to civil laws, otherwise I'd have to be a Calvinist in Geneva and a Mohammedan in Constantinople.

**MG** But, Brother, you have lost the thread of the argument. No one wants to make you change your religion: whatever the National Assembly does serves only to purify the Catholic religion and bring it back to the fine days of the primitive Church. One can already see the happy results of this beneficial reform.

**B** They are noticeable, and we are aware of them even in our schools.

**MG** Ah! things will be quite different when you've taught them the catechism of the Constitution and the Rights of Man. It's a small book that I want to introduce into my diocese. But, let's return to what we were saying: I want you to agree with me that in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy it's simply a question of discipline. I am not insisting yet that you recognise me as your bishop: we have to take one step at a time. For the moment, just think of me as the bishop of Lydda who has taken the oath. Well, I am a Catholic apparently. Well, answer me.

**B** My Lord...

**MG** What! Speak...I want to see how far...Answer...Am I a Catholic?

**B** My Lord, if you are, then I am not.

**MG** Leave my presence! You are insolent!...No, come back, I want to prove you wrong.

**B** Allow me to leave your presence. I would be most upset if I failed to show you the respect that I owe you. And then, I don't know anything, and I am not capable of sustaining an argument with you.

**MG** That makes you all the more guilty. Stay! I order you.

**B** My Lord, I obey, but I beg you to cut short this conversation which displeases you and which I find tiring.

**MG** You have the insolence to say to me that I am not a Catholic!

**B** You wanted me to, My Lord.

**MG** I'm not really interested in your opinion. However, tell me please why I am not a Catholic. Do I not believe in all the articles of faith taught by the Church?

**B** That is not what I am saying, My Lord.

**MG** Do I not accept all the sacraments of the Church, all its practices, all its ceremonies?

**B** That is not what I am saying, My Lord.

**MG** What are you saying, then?

**B** I am saying that all that is not enough in order to be a Catholic. Shall I go on?

**MG** Yes, continue.

**B** In the catechism that I make the children learn, they are asked the following question: What is the Church? The answer is: The Church is the society of the faithful united by the profession of the same faith, the participation in the same sacraments, and submission to legitimate pastors, especially to the Sovereign Pontiff. And so, in order to belong to the Church, or to be a Catholic, it is not enough to believe all the articles of faith and accept all the sacraments, you have also to obey your legitimate pastors and live in communion with the Holy See. Whoever denies an article of faith or rejects a sacrament is a heretic. Whoever does not recognise the true pastors is a schismatic, and as a consequence ceases to belong to the Church.

**MG** But I am the legitimate pastor of the Diocese of Paris because I am the only one recognised by the law. M de Juigné is unqualified and a schismatic because he is no longer in communion with the National Assembly and the municipality. Don't you read the Decrees?

**B** The Decrees can create Justices of the Peace or District judges, town councillors, National Guards, but they can't make bishops, because the power of bishops does not have its source in the National Assembly.

**MG** But, Brother, you don't understand. It's not the National Assembly that made me Bishop of Paris, but the electors. And it was the Bishop of Autun, certainly a good Catholic who, in virtue of a decision made by the tribunal of Ste Geneviève, installed me canonically, something that, for some reason unknown to me, the Catholic bishops of Sens and Orléans refused to do. Read the indictment of the King's Commissioner: everything is explained there much better than I ever could. See also the canon of the Council of Chalcedon, if you can find it, because it has become very rare, the proposals of Mr Camus, the secular sermons of Mr Lamourette, formerly Mirabeau's theological advisor and now the successor of St Irenaeus, the learned letter of Mr Charier de la Roche, Bishop of Rouen. You would do well also to take out subscriptions to the broadsheets of Carat, Marat, Noel, Céruti, Fr. Duchesne... You people don't read anything, and I'm not blaming you because you're not obliged to be learned. But why do you involve yourselves in discussions without knowing the facts?

**B** It is true, My Lord, that I haven't read anything of what you have mentioned. I have already told you that I rely on the Church and, sheltered by its authority, I feel I know as much as all the great theologians you have just mentioned.

**MG** But these great theologians have their reasons: you should hear them before condemning them.

**B** But Calvin and Luther also had their reasons; and who is there nowadays, when everybody is reasoning, who hasn't got his own reasons? As for me, My Lord, I don't want to hear anybody's reasons. I abide by the reasons of the Church: there are no others for simple and ignorant people like

myself. My religion will not be that of Mr Lamourette, nor that of Mr Marat, nor that of Fr Duchesne, but that of the Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church. This religion was the only good one before the Revolution, and I can't see why it shouldn't remain so any longer. The Catholic Church speaks through the mouth of the bishops in union with the Pope. That also is one of the articles of my catechism, because my theology is limited to that book. The Pope and the bishops are in agreement about condemning the oath you ask of me. All the most learned, good and brave ecclesiastics refuse to take it. The Sorbonne, according to what a priest who knows our parish has said to me, has made a clear and unanimous statement. That is what in my eyes, My Lord, constitutes the teaching Church, and not three or four bishops, and a crowd of obscure or too well-known ecclesiastics, whom the fear of starving to death and the desire for promotion by taking the place of people who are worth much more than they, have decided them to take the oath against the dictates of their conscience. If ever I become an active citizen of Lydda, I shall go down on my knees before you to ask for your blessing. But in Paris, My Lord, I recognise M de Juigné as my bishop and no one else, and I don't want any parish priest that has not been appointed by him.

**MG** I am angry that you are not more educated. It would be easy for me to convince you if you could follow the reasoning and the authorities that prove that I am the Bishop of Paris and not M de Juigné. They're working on my pastoral letter at present. It will soon be out, and you'll see things written there that will be conclusive. It is even stronger than that of Mgr Marolles, the constitutional bishop of the département of the Aisne.

**B** I shan't read it.

**MG** But what kind of stubbornness is this! Up to this point, Brother, I pitied and excused your error, but I see now that you are in bad faith and you fear the light.

**B** No, My Lord, I assure you, as Heaven is my witness, my intentions are pure. No material interests cause me to think the way I do. If I recognised you I would soon become the Superior of my Congregation. If I refuse to recognise you, I will be insulted and I'll be thrown out of my school. But God be praised, I have no ambitions, and I feel I have the courage to put up with persecution and misery. I think now what I thought last June, and even if I were given five hundred thousand livres income, I would not change my mind.

**MG** The insolent creature!... The rogue!...he's left...Hey, there, someone...Here are six louis coins. Have them taken to those Ladies and Gentlemen of the Nation and recommend to them the Brothers of the Christian Schools. ●

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N.B. This text, published "In Paris, at the printing works of a Catholic, 1791" was discovered in 1960 by Br. Clément Marcel in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris among the "Catalogues de l'Histoire de France". Anonymous 162. Vol. II. p.400. Cote L d 7676. The archives of the Generalate have a photocopy which was sent at the time of the discovery.