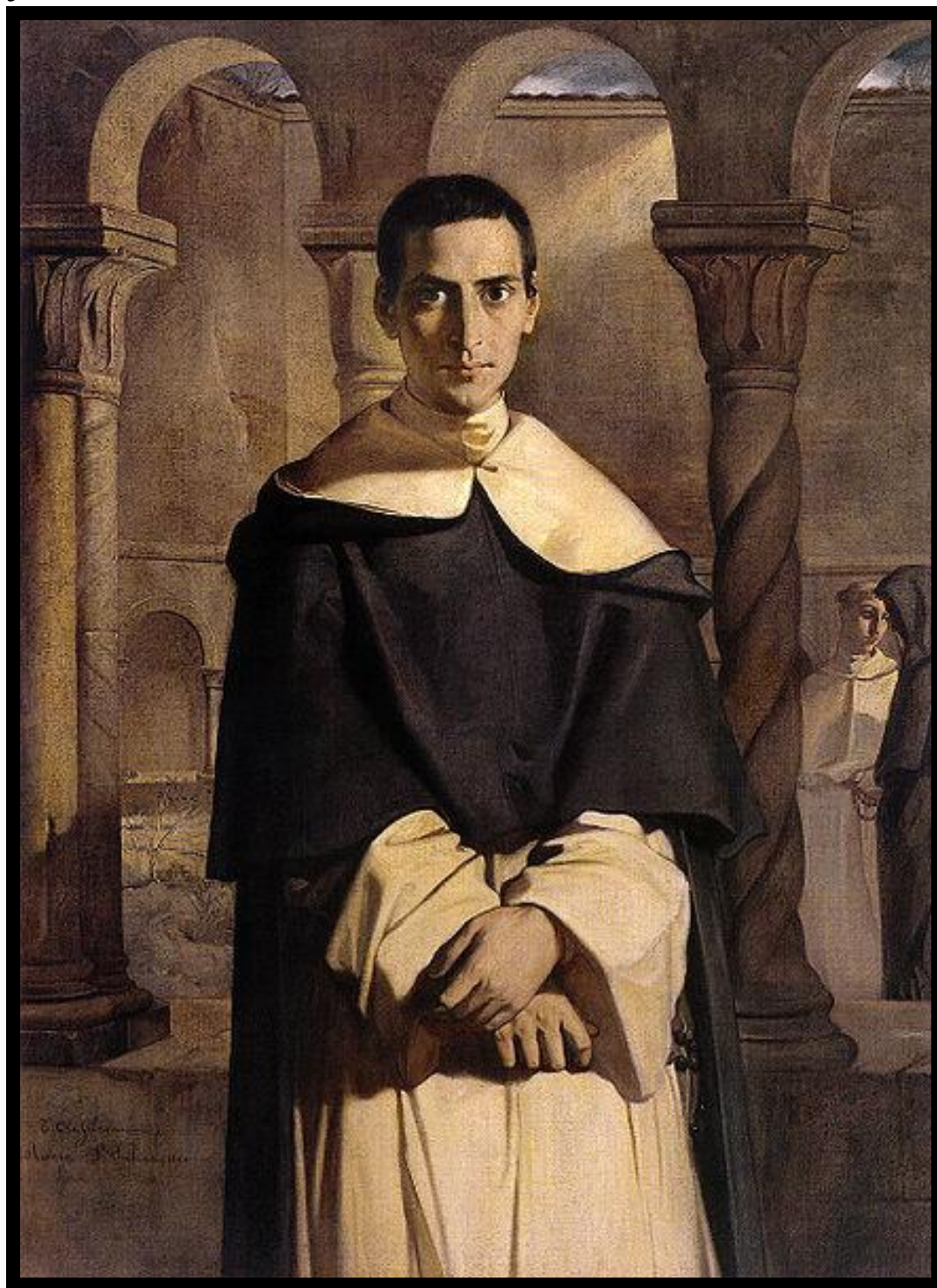


# Lacordaire





# *Lacordaire*

*By*

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**Cover Art:**

*“Le Révérend Père Dominique Lacordaire, de l'ordre des frères Prêcheurs”*  
(Reverend Father Dominique Lacordaire, of the order of the preachers) by Théodore Chassériau (1819–1856). The original oil on canvas painting may be seen at the Louvre Museum, Department of Paintings of the Louvre, Room 943, in Paris, France. This is a faithful reproduction of a two-dimensional work of art. \*

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# Introduction

IT has been said that there was probably no conversion in England during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and amongst the intellectuals especially, which may not be traced in some measure to Newman.

It may be also asserted that during the same period, and amongst the same class, conversions from unbelief, from religious indifference, and from aggressive hostility to the Catholic Church in France are due in no small measure to Lacordaire.

The influence of both men is still felt.

Newman is still a force in the English-speaking world; Lacordaire is more than a memory in France. If it is true, as Montalembert foretold shortly after the death of Lacordaire, that, "Certain parts of his genius will be again disputed. Certain forms of his eloquence will go out of date. The immortal truths of religion which he upheld, sneered at by fresh enemies or endangered by fresh folly, will require new proofs and new champions," it is also true that, as the same illustrious writer says, "what neither time, nor the injustice of man, nor the 'treachery of glory' will ever take from him, is the greatness of his character, the honor of having been the most manly, the most finely tempered, the most naturally heroic soul of our times." \*

Lacordaire was unquestionably a great man. If we could attempt to concentrate his greatness into one virtue and define it by one word, we would choose the term "magnanimity," the virtue that impels to heroism in the practice of other virtues and urges accomplishment of great deeds.

Wherever we follow Lacordaire, we find greatness—in his private life, in his public life—as a layman, a priest, a religious, an apologist. There was nothing small in his character, nothing unworthy, although his sensitiveness, like the sensitiveness of Newman, not infrequently led smaller men to misunderstand the greatness of his soul and to, consequently, minimize it.

## The Times

The Catholic religion, which had been banned by the Revolution in France, had been restored by Napoleon, but it was his objective to make the Church his servant, not to assist the Church. His will must be supreme, and in religion, as in

\* "*Memoirs of the Abbe Lacordaire.*" Authorized translation, 1868; pp. 310-311.



everything else, the State came first. In his eyes, bishops were simply ecclesiastical ministers of the State, subject to the Minister of Public Worship. We may learn how subservient to the State Napoleon intended to make the Church from these few facts:

- No bishop could ordain the students in his seminary to the priesthood until the number to be ordained had been accepted and approved by the Government.
- No bishop was permitted to assemble his clergy in synod.
- No association of men or women could be formed for any religious purpose; i.e., no confraternity or sodality could be established without the express permission of the Government.

In a letter to Cardinal Fesch, in January 1806, Napoleon said the Pope was nothing more than the Bishop of Rome. However, in his letter to the Pope on February 22, he reminded his Holiness that he, Napoleon, was Emperor of Rome! We can understand how Napoleon's arrogance and his brutal treatment of Pius VII affected the clergy and people. Numbers of the bishops and clergy were sycophants, who bowed to the Emperor's will in all things. Catholicism had been re-established as the State religion by the State and was detested by the people as a result.

As Foisset says, "Christ entered the churches in 1802, but He did not enter into the souls of the people." The people were de-Christianized by the State or because of the State, and this de-Christianization was further caused by the cheap publication of the atheistic writings of Voltaire and Rousseau. Diderot, Dupuis, and Volney rose from their tombs, where they had been buried and forgotten, and the Church found herself surrounded by enemies who were not the product of secret societies only, or the disciples of Voltaire only. They were ordinary people who hated her with a blind hatred, because in their eyes a State-established Church was the phantom of the ancient regime.

Lacordaire was born into this society on May 12, 1802. If the face of that society was changed (as it assuredly was changed within half a century), the transformation was due in very large measure to Lacordaire and to his friend (whom he loved and who loved him as David loved Jonathan), Charles Forbes René, Count de Montalembert.

To a far greater degree than most persons imagine, Catholic France today owes her loyalty to the Faith, her religious activities, and her possession of her soul to these two men.

Let it not be forgotten, France is a Catholic nation in spite of the Grand Orient. If we are surprised sometimes at what appears to be indifference or apathy in the French people where the Church is concerned, we receive a still greater surprise at



the extraordinary manifestations of their Catholic faith in the teeth of the sneers and scoffs of her irreligious teachers and the miserable chicanery of her politicians. Hatred of everything divine and supernatural is there. Therefore, no one will deny they see in France, hatred of the Catholic faith, hatred of the Catholic Church (which is the guardian of that faith), and hatred of the historic as well as of the mystical Christ. However, this hatred is not more deadly in France than in Germany or England or America. It is not even as deadly though it may be more apparent. The real source of antagonism to the Church in France is not intellectual but political. It is the same source from which the so-called Reformation arose in Germany and England, a jealousy of the power of the Church, a jealousy fostered and intensified by avarice.

“By a singular coincidence,” says d’Haussonville, “Burgundy has had the honor of giving to France her three greatest Christian orators, Saints Bernard, Bossuet, and Lacordaire. Saint Bernard was born at Fontaine, near Dijon; Bossuet in Dijon itself; Lacordaire, a few miles from Dijon, at Recy-sur-Ource.”

Although Lacordaire’s father was somewhat liberal in his religious opinions, he was a sincere Christian and hid the parish priest of Recy in his house during the Revolution. This priest baptized Jean Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, on May 13, 1802.

Lacordaire’s father died when Lacordaire was four years old. His mother, “a strong, courageous Christian,” was left with four young boys to provide for and educate. We are told that, as a child, Henri liked nothing better than to preach with his three brothers and his nurse as his audience and sometimes he became so excited that his nurse used to protest—but in vain.

“No! No! People commit too many sins,” he would cry, “I must keep on preaching,” and off he went again in his denunciations against the loss of faith and the decay of morals.

When he was ten, he entered the Imperial Lyceum at Dijon, where he became the butt of petty persecution from the older boys. Because of a complete absence of religious teaching, he lost his faith. He made his First Communion when he was twelve years old, but in his own words said, “The shadows soon gathered round me; cold night enveloped me, and I no longer received from God in my conscience any sign of life.”

At seventeen, he left the lyceum and entered the Faculty at Dijon as a law student. He soon attracted attention as a brilliant and eloquent speaker. Leaving Dijon at age twenty, he went to Paris. Here again he was remarkable for his eloquence. There, Berryer, the greatest barrister of the day, before whom Lacordaire defended a case, said to him, “You can win the first place at the Bar, but beware of the dangers ahead. One of these dangers is your too great facility of speech.”



His success was assured. He had genius, was extraordinarily eloquent, and his appearance was all in his favor. Above medium height, well proportioned, but slight, with a pale, ascetic face, large black eyes, fringed with very long eyelashes, and a wonderfully winning personality, Lacordaire was certainly good to look at. However, he was lonely beyond words. He did not realize why he was so alone, why nothing gave him more than a momentary satisfaction, and why success, applause, and growing fame left him unmoved. The truth was that God was laying siege to his heart and wanted this young barrister of twenty to work for Him.

Although he had ceased to believe, Lacordaire was not irreligious. Quite the contrary. As he wrote in a letter at the time, "My soul is extremely religious, my mind is very skeptical; but as it is the nature of the mind to let itself be subdued by the soul, it is probable that I shall be a Christian some day."

That day came at last, although he tells us in his, "Memoir," that he did not know what led to it, what reasons influenced him, or what arguments convinced him, But God, Who had not spoken in his conscience for ten years, spoke again, and Lacordaire heard Him and believed. He recovered his faith. Here, we are in the presence of a remarkable phenomenon; the very moment he went on his knees and said the Credo once more, he determined to consecrate himself to God as a priest; there were no half measures for him. He threw away an unquestionably brilliant career at the Bar. He sacrificed what those who knew him best had predicted could be an exceptionally distinguished future to become a priest when priests were both shunned and despised. All his dreams of glory had vanished and he desired, in what he called that "sublime moment" of his conversion, to serve God, Jesus Christ, and souls until death.

Lacordaire entered the Seminary of Saint Sulpice on his twenty-second birthday, May 12, 1824. Strange though it appears now, he was not favorably regarded by his superiors. His vivacity, horror of anything that had even the semblance of affectation, and very definite opinions (which he did not hesitate to express in equally definite terms) disturbed the authorities and made them doubt whether he was really called to the priesthood or not. However, when the superiors learned that Lacordaire had asked permission to enter the Jesuit Novitiate at Montrouge, they changed their opinions. He was ordained a priest by the Archbishop of Paris, Monsignor de Quelen, on September 25, 1827. After his ordination, Lacordaire was appointed Chaplain to the Convent of the Visitation, where his duties consisted of celebrating Mass every morning and giving instructions to the boarders, whose ages ranged from twelve to eighteen years.

When Lacordaire became a priest he did not give up his opinions. They were not ephemeral and he was an exceptionally strong character. We have seen that the



Church was not in favor with the people because, having been re-established by the State, they regarded it as a tool of the State, which curtailed its liberties. Many of the clergy were quite satisfied with the existing state of things, with the result that they were not in touch with the people and were shunned by them. Lacordaire was not favorable to the existing relations between the Church and the State, but, as he was unknown, he was powerless to change it. The opportunity came to protest against the enslavement of the Church and Lacordaire seized it.

## *The "Avenir"*

Towards the end of the year, the Archbishop had appointed Lacordaire Chaplain of the College of Henri IV in the university. In 1830, Lacordaire drew up a Memoir that was signed by the chaplains of the other colleges of the university. The evils of the educational system were pointed out in strong language. There was practically no real religious instruction because the atmosphere of the colleges was against it and the chaplains were unable to make headway. Therefore, when the students left the colleges, one, and only one, might be counted upon each year who would continue to practice his religion. The Memoir insisted that, "the most efficacious remedy for this lay in the emancipation of education from State interference." This was the first step.

The second was the emancipation of the clergy, of religion, and of the Church from the State. Lacordaire was determined to do what he could to effect this. Before his death, he declared that he died as he had lived, "an impenitent liberal," and this he was. He refused to be tied (as most of the French clergy were tied) to the House of Bourbon. The Church must be free. The spiritual society and the material or civil society should exist side by side independently, each assisting, but assuredly not hampering each other. As the spiritual was superior to the material, the Church should not be hindered by the State in its efforts for the good of society.

These were the opinions of two other men, Felicité Robert de Lamennais and Charles, Count de Montalembert. Lacordaire had almost made up his mind to go to America when, after the Revolution of July 1830, he was asked by Lamennais to assist him in the publication of a newspaper, "The Avenir." He consented, and began to expound his views on religion and the Church and its liberties in a series of articles that aroused the greatest enthusiasm but also aroused great bitterness. He was a fearless writer—brilliant, witty, and caustic—and he spared no one when he pleaded for freedom for the Church and freedom for the school.



The Government summoned him because of an article on the appointment of certain bishops. Lacordaire, wearing his barrister's gown, defended his own case so well that the court applauded him. With the courage of their convictions, Montalembert and Lacordaire opened a Free School. Both were summoned, but as Montalembert was a Peer of France, he demanded that the case should be tried by the Court of Peers. Both were heard in their defense and their eloquence carried their hearers away. They were fined a nominal sum, but as Lacordaire said, they won their case at a higher bar, that of Public Opinion. It was the first victory for freedom of the schools.

However, the tone of the "Avenir" caused increasing uneasiness and vexation. After thirteen months of continual conflict, Lamennais, Montalembert, and Lacordaire resolved to go to Rome and lay their case before Gregory XVI. The Holy See did not approve of the principles of the paper or of the action of its chief collaborators, which was regarded as imprudent. The "Avenir" was censured. Lacordaire submitted immediately; Montalembert submitted after a time and because of Lacordaire's pleading; but Lamennais, who at first said they must submit, grew stubborn, refused to give way, and left the Church. Lacordaire returned to Paris, and the Archbishop who welcomed him with real fatherly affection, gave him his old post at the Convent of Visitation. Here he lived quietly, a life of prayer and study, preparing for the work that he felt was before him, although he had no clear idea what it would be. At this time, cholera broke out and Lacordaire gave himself completely to the sick, winning back to God many a soul that had abandoned Him. Like Newman, he was convinced that a definite work was to be accomplished by him, and he waited patiently until God's hour struck.

When Lacordaire had broken with Lamennais he wrote to his friend Lorain, "I do not quite know yet what I shall do; perhaps I shall devote myself to Catholic youth, and prepare conferences for them." \*

In May 1883, he wrote to the same friend, "I have preached in a college chapel without success and in a parish church in a manner which made me thoroughly dissatisfied."

The college was the College Stanislas; the church was Saint Roch, which, curiously enough, was the church in which he preached his last sermon in Paris nineteen years later. His sermon was such a failure that those who heard him said, "He will never be a preacher!"

*\*Foisset, "Vie du Peré Lacordaire." Vol. I., p. 181. Paris, 1878.*



Strangely enough, Lacordaire felt instinctively that preaching was his vocation, not the ordinary kind but an exposition of Catholic doctrine suited to the requirements of the day. Jouffroy and other rationalists were playing havoc amongst the students at the Sorbonne by their lectures. Ozanam (who had founded the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul a month previously and was anxious that the faith of the university students should be safeguarded and strengthened) waited on the Archbishop in June and asked him to appoint a priest to deliver a series of conferences that would deal with the danger. The Archbishop promised to do so but delayed.

The Prefect of Studies in the College Stanislas, the Abbé Buquet, immediately requested Lacordaire to give such a series in the college chapel. Lacordaire consented, and gave the first conference on January 19, 1834. Only the students and a few friends of the college were present. The following Sunday the chapel was filled and at the third conference most of the students had to give their places to outsiders. Then the numbers increased so greatly that tribunes were erected. The elite of the Parisian intellectual world attended and people were astonished to see men like Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Berryer, Victor Hugo, struggling for a seat.

God's hour had struck. The subjects were the same truths that had been preached thousands of times. "What, then," asks Foisset, "brought the crowds to hear those truths there? They went to hear the living word—the word that was the man himself—spontaneous, ardent, impetuous, the word which stirred its hearers beyond all conception, a voice that was piercing and heart subduing, which played upon every cord of the human heart and made it respond in a manner that cannot be described."

As was to be expected, Lacordaire did not please everyone. He did not write his discourses; they were carefully prepared, well planned, but he left the filling in to the inspiration of the moment. Lacordaire improvised as a skilled musician will improvise and improvisation has its dangers. Those dangers were emphasized and magnified by interested persons, and Lacordaire was denounced to the police, the Archbishop, and to Rome! The Archbishop stood by him at first and Rome replied that as long as the Archbishop was satisfied there was no need for alarm. The Government was not disturbed. Then, as the opposition grew, the Archbishop suggested to Lacordaire that it would be advisable to bring the conferences to a close and the last of the series was given on April 13, 1834.

The cessation of the conferences caused a sensation. The university students, Ozanam, and, it must be said, the majority of those who attended them were greatly distressed. Lacordaire's detractors, however, those who scented what Foisset calls "Lamennaisism" in everything Lacordaire did, even to the end of his life, rejoiced exceedingly, yet the cessation of the conferences in the college was providential.



Before they had been given, Ozanam and two other gentlemen, M. Lallier and M. Lamache, had asked the Archbishop to have a series given in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. The Archbishop agreed, appointed six or seven priests to give the conferences, and delivered the first himself. They were a complete failure. They were simply ordinary sermons, did not touch the questions that troubled so many minds, and were not actual in any sense. The contrast between them and those given by Lacordaire at the college was very marked and caused much comment.

Lacordaire asked permission to resume his conferences at the college and was refused. When this became known, many persons accused the Archbishop of jealousy. Lacordaire naturally was hurt by the refusal and wrote a rather forcible letter to the Archbishop, who took offense and things came to a deadlock. Then, a couple of priests urged Lacordaire to go and see the Archbishop.

He did so, and after a few minutes of silence Mgr. de Quelen quite suddenly said, "I am thinking of confiding to you the pulpit of Notre Dame. Will you accept it?"

Lacordaire asked for twenty-four hours to consider the matter, then accepted, and on the first Sunday of Lent in 1835, inaugurated the "Conferences de Notre Dame," which shall ever be inseparably connected with his name.

The effect of these conferences cannot be described or measured. We can only ask ourselves what the impression must have been upon those who heard them, when the *printed* words still have power to stir readers after all these years. We must also remember that Lacordaire was only thirty-three at the time and that the overwhelming majority of the audience that filled the Cathedral (and numbered at times some ten thousand men) was skeptical, unbelieving, rationalistic, and one might say hostile to Catholic doctrine. Remember too, the audience was composed of scholars, literary men, artists, lawyers, politicians, ministers of state, and officers in the Armies of France and the French intellectuals are probably the keenest minded in the world, those who seem more than others to have inherited the quick intelligence of the Greeks.

We shall let Lacordaire's successor in the French Academy speak. The Prince de Broglie stated, "The effect was astonishing. His words seemed to leave the precincts of the sacred building and, as in the days of Christ, find the toll-gatherers amidst the noise of their business or their amusements. Christian truth, which this generation thought so far away, appeared in its midst. The impression made upon youth was particularly profound.

"What won youth was not only the novel style of the discourse, so full of hope that did not condemn youth as others did, to seek a chimerical return to a past for which it had no regrets. There was also the satisfaction of finding in him a sympathy for all the generous sentiments for which this age feels the need. We were all divided



by different preoccupations and outlook. Some were brought to the church by a faith that was hereditary; some came to it because of a curiosity of doubt; some had read the deeds of the Crusaders; others were taken with the reports of the Empire and the Republic. . . . The Abbé Lacordaire had a message for each one and, in gathering us round a common centre, he gave us a moment's hope or the illusion of being unanimous."

But, who can describe the orator, for Lacordaire was an orator in the true meaning of a much-abused term. He had all the qualities of an orator in the highest degree.

"Who can describe or make live again," asks Foisset, "what is passed away forever? Those fine and noble features which no portrait could really produce; that profound yet piercing glance, that transfigured countenance, inspired gesture, and that penetrating voice which at one moment flashed its message like a flame to the farthest parts of the sacred edifice, and at the next moment, took on an accent which came from his very soul and which troubled the orator himself and surprised him."

"Such accents might well indeed surprise him," continues Montalembert, "no one of us had ever heard the like and of those who that day heard them, none will ever forget them. I confidently call around this great and cherished memory all those whom I once saw swelling those serried ranks, quivering with emotion around the pulpit of Notre Dame....Where is the man from among his former hearers who could today enter, sad and solitary, the silent precincts of Notre Dame, stop before the pulpit, forever widowed of its most illustrious occupant, without hearing within him the echo of that peerless voice, without seeing with the eyes of his youth those spacious aisles again filled with that moved and quivering crowd, eagerly slaking their thirst at the swelling fountains of enthusiasm and faith?

"He knew the way to our hearts; he carried and captivated them; not by that ephemeral and commonplace admiration evoked by talent, but by that mysterious empire given to human speech when it draws its power from on high, and becomes that sacerdotal eloquence that Lacordaire carried to perfection, the secret of which he fully possessed. Much of Lacordaire's success was undoubtedly due to improvisation for he was, what is a very rare thing, a real extempore speaker! There was doubtless in his accent that piercing and inimitable something that reality and depth of the orator's emotion carries away and captivates the hearer. I still remember, with an inward shudder, the despairing ring of his voice, when, in the picture drawn by him of the frailty of human love, he uttered the words, 'It is gone, forever gone.' There were imperfections, of course, in his discourses and in



their delivery. He did not always escape the emphatic; he did not avoid with sufficient care declamation, and he is responsible for the propagation of these faults among his far too numerous imitators.” \*

These defects can easily be excused when we remember Lacordaire’s youth and the peculiar circumstances in which he inaugurated the conferences. The general opinion of Lacordaire’s eloquence was that only Bossuet surpassed him, yet in some ways he was even superior to Bossuet. As Montalembert says again, he “literally carried away his audience and left it prey to an emotion which only one word can portray—the word rapture—of which so vulgar an abuse is made, but which, in Christian language, reminds us of the miraculous visions of Saint Paul: *Quoniain raptus est in Paradisum*.”

“He has had many eminent successors in the pulpit of Notre Dame,” Foisset tells us, “but none of them, not even one, created the audience that Lacordaire brought forth in 1835. This glory, no matter what may be said, belongs to him exclusively. He alone could show the way to the Church to so many men who had either completely lost it or had never known it.”

The conferences of 1836 were even more successful, the enthusiasm greater, and the attendance ever on the increase. What then, was the surprise of his hearers at the close of the conferences that year to hear him announce that he would not continue them, for he “wished to be alone for awhile, with his weakness and with God!”

Rumors of all kinds were afloat; none of them true and the truth came to be known later. Lacordaire knew that he needed a deeper and firmer grasp of theology. This was one reason why he determined to go to Rome. However, there was another and a graver reason. We have seen that Lacordaire had thought of entering the Jesuit Novitiate at Montrouge while he was still a student at Saint Sulpice. This desire had become stronger, and he now determined to weigh the matter carefully and learn what was God’s will. So, he went to Rome, began to study the life of the different religious orders and of their founders, and placed himself under the direction of Père de Villefort, a French Jesuit. He had already written his “Considerations upon the Philosophical System of M. de Lamennais,” which had been well received, although the book had almost lost him the friendship of Montalembert. Montalembert, however, saw that Lacordaire was correct in his estimate of their former master and friend and when Lamennais announced his intention to publish another volume on “Roman Affairs,” he tried by every means to prevent him, and told him quite plainly that if he did publish it, it would mean

\*Montalembert, *op. cit.*, pp 147-157.



the complete severance of all communication between them. Lamennais persisted, however, and brought out his volume Lacordaire replied to it immediately. The "Reply" was examined by the Roman authorities, who were thoroughly pleased with it, but owing to the inexplicable attitude of Mgr. de Quelen, publication was withheld for some time. It was published at last, and so great was the satisfaction of Pope Gregory XVI., that he asked Lacordaire to sign his own copy of the work. It is a magnificent defense of the Holy See, as factual today as when it was written.

## *Becoming a Dominican*

The chief question for Lacordaire, however, was whether he should or should not become a religious. We have no hesitation in saying that, in the circumstances, the decision was of the gravest import not only for himself, but also for the Church in France. It might make or break him; and it might bring glory or discredit upon the Church. Dom Gueranger was trying to restore the Benedictines at Solesmes, and the Society of Jesus had some houses in France, but Lacordaire did not feel any vocation to the life of a monk. Though the desire to become a Jesuit was still there, it was not so strong as it had been. Dom Gueranger gave him the Constitution of the Order of Preachers. Lacordaire examined them thoroughly. The name, Order of Preachers, appealed to him and, as he studied the history of the Order and learned its object and ideal, he felt drawn to it with increasing attraction.

"After the general question, "Should I become a religious?" there was a secondary one," he tells us. "What Order should I enter? The choice lay between the Society of Jesus and the Order of Preachers. Some persons said the day of the religious orders was past; others said that the Society of Jesus was sufficient for all purposes. Others saw in the Order of Preachers only an out-of-date institution that bore all the marks and ideas of medievalism upon it, and which was unpopular because of its association with the Inquisition."

He prayed, sought advice, and made a retreat at Sant' Eusebio under Père de Villefort, who advised him to become a Dominican. Another retreat at Solesmes, under Dom Gueranger, settled the matter and on April 9, 1839, Lacordaire and two young Frenchmen, who had just joined him, received the Dominican habit from the Father-General of the Order in the Minerva at Rome. The next day they left for Viterbo to begin their novitiate in the Priory of La Quercia, Our Lady of the Oak. During his novitiate, Lacordaire declined to accept any exemptions. He scrubbed floors, drew water, trimmed the lamps as cheerfully as the youngest novice, and, in his spare time, wrote his "Life of Saint Dominic," a book that is remarkable for its



imagery and literary style. It was praised by Chateaubriand because of its exquisite beauty, but which is not sufficiently documented to suit the critical taste of writers today. On April 12, 1840, he pronounced his Solemn Vows, and the Countess Albert de la Ferronays, the heroine of Madame Craven's book, "A Sister's Story," was amongst those present at the ceremony.

Before he went to France, Lacordaire published "Memoir on the Re-establishment of the Order of Preachers in France," to prepare the way. France, as we have said, had expelled the religious orders at the Revolution. To bring back these orders was a daring act and possibly a dangerous move.

Lacordaire set himself to write an apology for all religious orders by writing in favor of the order he had entered. "When we, passionate lovers of our age," he wrote, "asked for liberty to believe nothing, it was granted us. When we asked for liberty to aspire to every position and every honor, it was granted to us. When we asked our country to permit us, young as we were, to treat the most difficult questions which had influence upon its own destiny, permission was granted. . . Now, when moved by that divine impulse which is felt even by this age, we ask permission to follow the inspiration of our faith, to seek no honors, and to live in poverty with a few friends who have the same desire as ourselves, we are forbidden. We are placed under the ban of any number of laws and all Europe, if necessary, is ready to crush us when called upon."

Lacordaire went to France to look for men who would enter the order and assist reestablishing it in France. Mgr. de Quelen was dead. Now, Mgr. Affre, a friend of Lacordaire, was Archbishop of Paris. Therefore, when Lacordaire asked his permission to preach in Notre Dame as a Dominican, it was readily given. It was a bold experiment. There was no knowing what would happen and when he appeared in the pulpit of the Cathedral on February 12, 1841, in his Dominican habit, everyone realized it was a challenge to the prejudices of France and to its Government. Never did a man win so complete a victory. He preached on behalf of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and chose for his subject "The Vocation of the French Nation." It is not one of his best discourses, but it was a marvelous success.

Those who had thrilled at his voice five years previously, thrilled again. They realized that this man was extraordinary. His power had not lessened; his eloquence was as wonderful as it had ever been. The sermon lasted longer than the usual time and, as Lacordaire perceived signs of fatigue amongst some of the audience, he exclaimed, "I am long, gentlemen, but it is your fault! It is your



history I am telling; you will forgive me if I have made you drink your cup of glory to the full.” There was no tumult, no protest. Lacordaire had won the victory not only for the Order of Preachers in France but also for all the religious orders.

“If the religious orders are now so closely connected with the religious life and, by their educational establishments, with the social life of France today,” writes Le Comte d’Haussonville, “if not only the Dominicans, but the Capuchins, Premonstratentians Oblates, Eudists, and many others whose names could be mentioned, are free today in France, live in the open, and give proof of a vigor that is indestructible, they owe it to Lacordaire. He communicated something of his own calm audacity and fearless constancy to them and he first taught them how to vindicate the liberty of the monk in the name of the rights of the citizen.” \*

Lacordaire in France in the nineteenth century had done what his brother Dominican, Saint Thomas of Aquinas, had done in the fourteenth century, fought and won the battle for the religious orders. The Order of Preachers took fresh root in French soil and grew and prospered, for God blessed the restoration of the order by Lacordaire. We cannot speak now of the labors of the French Dominicans, but it will not be out of place to say that when Lacordaire entered the Order in 1839, the old orange tree, which tradition tells us was planted by Saint Dominic in the garden of Santa Sabina, on the Aventine in Rome, six hundred years previously, sent out a new off-shoot. The old tree and its off-shoot are both fresh and vigorous and fruitful today and persons regarded the phenomenon as a sign that the future would be as glorious for the Order as its past had been. To use Lacordaire’s own expression, “The Order has nothing ancient about it but its history,” and as he has said and experience proves, “Oaks and monks are immortal.”

Lacordaire returned to Rome immediately after his sermon and hoped to obtain authorization of the Holy See for erection of a novitiate for France in the old Convent of San Clemente, which belonged to the Irish Dominicans. However, he had to face disappointment. Those who had been opposed to him in France had not changed their attitude and all sorts of accusations were made against him because he had been associated with Lamennais. Possibly as a result of representations made to the authorities at Rome or possibly to test him and learn what spirit quickened him, permission to establish a novitiate for France was refused, and the Frenchmen who had joined Lacordaire were dispersed. Some were sent to the Quercia and the others went to Bosco in Piedmont.

\* *Lacordaire, par “Le Comte d’Haussonville, p. 124. Paris, 1895.*



It was a severe blow, but Lacordaire did not fail. If the authorities really wished to learn if he was a man of obedience or not, they learned beyond all possibility of doubt that he was. Later, he said once that when a Frenchman became a religious, he became one “up to the neck,” and Lacordaire set the example.

The separation was not long and Lacordaire plunged into the study of Saint Thomas and prepared his future conferences. In 1843, the Archbishop of Paris asked him to renew the Conferences of Notre Dame. From that year until 1851, except during one Lent, Lacordaire preached the conferences. The enthusiasm was the same everywhere. At Lyons the people waited from five o’clock in the morning to listen to a conference that began at eleven. More than once, not only in the Cathedrals of other cities, but also in Paris, the audience, unable to restrain its feelings, broke into applause. The conferences given in 1835 and 1836 were remarkable and made deep and lasting impressions. Lacordaire has said that he only prepared the way and sowed the seed, while others were to reap the harvest. But the number who returned to God after years of sin and forgetfulness of Him; the number whose minds were set at rest and whose doubts were solved by Lacordaire, and the number whose feet were put onto the straight path by him will never be known until God’s Day reveals the secrets of all lives.

When Lacordaire resumed his conferences, every one noticed the change in his preaching. He was older, of course, had greater experience, and had suffered, and suffering deepens and strengthens a man’s character and outlook. But there was another reason for the change; the life that Lacordaire had chosen had left its mark upon him. The spirit of Saint Dominic quickened him, and that spirit was the spirit of the Apostles.



Lacordaire would have been a marvelous preacher if he had remained a secular priest; but it is neither fanciful nor exaggerated to say that he would not have become the apostolic preacher he did become if he had not been a Dominican.

Lacordaire preaching his Lenten Conferences from the elevated pulpit at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.



Each religious order has its peculiar ethos, its special spirit, its own ideal, its particular objective. These derive from the founder of the order, while the legislation and traditions of the order serve to keep its objective and ideal before its members and to imbue them with its spirit. The Order of Preachers was established for the salvation of souls by preaching. While the term “preaching” is accepted in Dominican legislation in a wide sense that includes teaching of Scripture, philosophy, and theology, the history of the Order during the past seven centuries shows that “preaching” in the strict meaning of the term has always been regarded by the Order as its principal means of saving souls. Saint Dominic’s object in founding his Order was to form apostolic men. He sought, to multiply himself, as it were, and Dominican legislation has the same object. Hence, we say that, in becoming a Dominican, Lacordaire’s style and character of preaching were strengthened and deepened. The study of Saint Thomas had its part in molding him. Dominican spirituality left its impress upon him in a very marked manner, especially in his passionate love of Our Divine Lord and the Cross. This is evident in his conferences.

All critics agree that Lacordaire’s finest conferences are those on Jesus Christ. The Divinity of Our Lord was being bitterly assailed at the time and when Lacordaire delivered the conferences of 1846, he aimed at proving the Divinity of Christ, and at preserving and strengthening belief in that Divinity in the souls of young men especially. He was the orator, but above all, he was the apostle who spoke from a full heart about his Lord and Master Whom he loved even to folly. To read those conferences after all these years moves one beyond description. To have heard them delivered by this whole-souled lover of Our Lord, Christ Crucified, was an experience never to be forgotten.

Montalembert has told us that he remembered with a shudder the despairing tone of Lacordaire’s voice when he uttered the words, “It is over—and forever; and such is the history of human love.” He referred to the XXXIXth Conference, on “The Establishment of the Reign of Jesus Christ,” in which the expression occurs. Then Lacordaire burst forth into one of his most wonderful flights of eloquence, in the following passage:

“I am wrong. There is a Man over Whose tomb love still keeps guard; there is a Man Whose sepulcher is not only glorious, as was predicted by the prophet, but beloved. There is a Man Whose ashes, after eighteen centuries, have not yet grown cold; Who is every day born anew in the memory of countless multitudes; Who is visited in His tomb by shepherds and by kings, who vie one with another in offering Him their homage. There is a Man Whose steps are continually being tracked and Who, withdrawn as He is from our bodily eyes, is still discerned by those who unwearily haunt the spots where He once sojourned and who seek Him



on His Mother's knees, by the borders of the lake, on the mountain top, in the secret paths among the valleys, under the shadow of the olive trees, or in the silence of the desert. There is a Man Who has died and been buried, but Whose sleeping and waking is still watched by us. There is a Man Whose every word still vibrates in our hearts, producing there something more than love, for it gives life to those virtues of which love is the mother. There is a Man Who, long ages ago, was fastened to a gibbet, and that Man is every day taken down from the throne of His Passion by thousands of adorers, who prostrate on the earth before Him, and kiss His Bleeding Feet, with unspeakable emotion. There is a Man Who was once scourged, slain, and crucified, but Whom an ineffable Passion has raised from death and infamy, and made the object of an unfailing love, which finds all in Him— peace, honor, joy—nay, ecstasy. There is a Man Who pursued to death in His own time, with inextinguishable hate, has demanded apostles and martyrs from each successive generation and has never failed to find them. There is One Man, and One alone, Who has established His love on earth, and it is Thou, O my Jesus! Thou Who hast been pleased to baptize, to anoint, to consecrate me in Thy love, and Whose very Name at this moment suffices to move my whole being, and to tear from me these words in spite of myself.” \*

No man could possibly have uttered words like these with sincerity and conviction (which not only convinced his hearers but also roused them to a chivalrous love of Jesus Christ) if he himself had not been a passionate lover of Christ Crucified. Lacordaire was this even to heroism. His deep, personal love of Our Lord was the secret of Lacordaire's greatness, and influence for it made him an apostle. First and last, and in every fiber of his being, he was an apostle. Those who seek any other motives in his life, even when it led him into the Assembly, do not understand him. He loved souls, and he had learned this love from the Divine Crucified Lover of souls.

Skeptical, frivolous, pleasure-loving Paris gasped when the veils were partially drawn and Lacordaire's inner life was revealed to men. His intimate friends guessed at his love for Christ Crucified, but they never dreamt that in the nineteenth century, this incomparable orator and uncompromising defender of the liberties of the Church and the Faith, renewed the asceticism of medieval times and practiced austerities similar to those of the saints. Those who sat enthralled by the eloquence of Lacordaire did not think that he entered the pulpit of Notre Dame with his flesh bruised and bleeding from the scourge. They did not know until he was dead, that in his desire to prove his love of Our Lord, he made his fellow religious tie him to a huge cross on Good Friday and that he hung there from

\**“The Inner Life of Pere Lacordaire.” By Père Chocarne, O.P. English translation. pp. 841-342.*



twelve o'clock until three.. There was no austerity practiced by the heroic lovers of the Cross that was not practiced by Henry Dominic Lacordaire. Again, it was this consuming love for Christ Crucified that sought and found an outlet in self-sacrifice that gives us the key to the character of Lacordaire, and explains his zeal, his love of souls, and his friendships.

## *Friendships*

Lacordaire had a genius for making friends, especially with young men: it was a form of his apostolate. Many of these friendships were born at the foot of the pulpit, and many a skeptical, frivolous man was subdued there, to be won to God when he went to lay his doubts and difficulties before Lacordaire, and found him "tender as a mother, stronger than a diamond."

There was nothing weak or sentimental in his friendship, and his direction was robust. He did not shrink from the use of knife and cautery in his effort to win a wavering soul, since in his own words, "If a young man will not feel the sting of pleasure, he must feel the sting of pain."

Hence, amazing though it appears, corporal penances were advised by him, and youths were taught to strengthen themselves against the allurements of the world and the seductions of vice by the use of haircloth and discipline. Montalembert, Ozanam, the Abbé Peryve, to mention but three of Lacordaire's intimate friends, have told us of his influence upon the University students. They trusted him, for he had sympathy with them and his own experiences had taught him something of the difficulties they had to face. In his desire to help them he founded a Guild for Doctors and another for Artists as a means, first for the personal sanctification of the members, and secondly, as a lay apostolate. Ozanam had founded the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Lacordaire encouraged and supported him, if indeed, the suggestion to establish the Society had not come from him. However, Lacordaire was anxious to form a body of lay defenders of the Catholic Church, a body of Catholic professional men, who would work, each in his own sphere, for the regeneration of society. This was the origin of the Guilds, and this was their object.



# *Political Opinions*

We have seen that, from the beginning of his priestly life, Lacordaire had definite views in regard to the relations of the Church and the State. The Church must be free from all State interference, particularly with reference to the schools. His political opinions became stronger with time and he was not the man to hide them. Those opinions were not acceptable to everyone, and Lacordaire's former association with Lamennais made him a suspect, as was to be expected. It is part of the price an uncompromising character must pay for his independent opinions and his influence. He had said he was an "impenitent liberal," and the expression was criticized as savoring of too much independence.

However, Lacordaire's "liberalism" was the same as Newman's liberalism. If I am not mistaken, the great Cardinal acknowledged that in these matters he thought as the famous Dominican. Lacordaire was neither a democrat nor a republican, as men understand these terms. Passionately devoted to liberty, he denounced every attempt to curtail it whether the attempt was made by a monarch, a government, or a demagogue. An agitator can enslave a people as effectively as a tyrant. Politicians are not always disinterested persons; often, many of them scheme for their own advantage on the pretense of striving for the common good. Also, there are Catholics in most Parliaments, who sacrifice the welfare of their fellow Catholics and betray their Catholic principles to the policy of their party. It was men of this stamp who were branded by Lacordaire as "liberates," a term impossible to translate, but which is somewhat similar to traitor. He had been elected to the Assembly in 1848, but he speedily realized that he was out of place there and resigned. He loved liberty too well to see it trampled upon by those who boasted of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, while they were bitter opponents of all three.

On February 10, 1853, at the request of Monsigneur Sibour, Lacordaire preached in the Church of Saint Roch, before the Archbishops of Paris and Bordeaux. The subject of his sermon was "Character." Fearless as ever, certain persons took offense at what they considered was an attack upon the Government. It was the old story of chicanery and petty spite, and Lacordaire resolved to discontinue his conferences in Notre Dame, and to preach no more in Paris. However, the following year he delivered the remarkable conferences on "Life," in the Cathedral at Toulouse, and with the exception of those on Jesus Christ, most persons consider them to be the best conferences Lacordaire ever preached. He was only able to



preach the first series; the complete series was to have taken six or seven years, but they created extraordinary enthusiasm, and were a fitting crown upon his glorious apostolate amongst the intellectuals of France for twenty years.

## *The Teaching Order: Soreze*

The Order of Preachers had been re-established in France solidly and firmly, and the man whom God had chosen for this work was growing old and worn, but he had another work to do before he died.

“The liberty of liberties for Catholics,” he had said once, “is the liberty of the schools, the freedom to teach. Everything that is most sacred and precious depends upon this liberty.”

He loved youth. He had personal experience in the unchristian atmosphere of the State schools and, as has been already said, Montalembert and he had defied the Government and attempted to remedy the existing state of things forty years previously. He now made another attempt by founding a branch of the Order for the Instruction of Youth. The Dominican was not intended to teach a class of boys in a schoolroom. The Order has given Professors of Scripture, Theology, Philosophy, and Canon Law by the thousand, and still gives them, but it did not come within its province to teach school, yet the need was urgent, and Lacordaire set himself to supply it. He adapted the Rule of the Third Order to provide teachers for secondary schools, and his success was great. All the teachers were priests, members of the Order, who, in addition to the usual studies, were specially trained for the work. There were many difficulties to be overcome, but the work was blessed by God, blessed so unmistakably that three of the first members of the teaching Order now await canonization as martyrs.

In 1852, the college at Oullins was handed over to Lacordaire by the secular priests who had charge of it, and four of the younger priests entered the teaching Order. Then, in 1854, the old Benedictine School at Soréze, which had been founded in 758 by Pepin le Bref, was offered to him by the Vicar-General of Toulouse. Lacordaire accepted the offer, and the remaining seven years of his life were passed amongst the boys at Soréze, in seclusion preparing for the end.

Lacordaire's manner with the boys was characterized by affection, broadness of mind, appreciation of, and sympathy with their ideals, and great loyalty to them. He was their confident and friend, who never failed them and was always accessible. He inspired them with a love of what was noble and honorable for he was the embodiment of honor, and, hence, the boys placed absolute trust in him,



particularly when they, saw that he permitted neither spying nor tale-bearing; the two unforgivable sins in a boy's character. He was the priest always, full of deep, strong faith, intense love of God, Our Lord, the Mother of God, and the Church. With the example of such a man before them, a man whose position in France was unique, the Sorèzians were certain to be influenced greatly. That they were is shown by the generations of manly, upright Catholics who were formed in the School of Sorèze, as well as in those other schools which had received the spirit of Sorèze, Oullins, Arcachon, Arcueil, and Paris.

Duty had ever come first with Lacordaire, and now that he was in charge of a school he inculcated devotion to duty more by his example than by preaching it. Preach he did, however, Sunday after Sunday, and it is worthy of remark that he prepared these sermons as carefully as he had prepared his conferences. It is also worthy of notice, that during the Lent of 1860, he preached on duty to the school. These were his last sermons.

On January 2, 1861, Lacordaire was elected a Member of the French Academy, and was welcomed among the "Immortals" by the renowned Protestant historian, Guizot, who said that France "applauded the joy and pride of the spectacle offered that day by the Academy," while Lacordaire claimed that he entered this temple of literary glory as "the Symbol of Liberty, accepted and supported by Religion." The illness from which he died had seized upon him, and his weakness increased to such an extent that he sent his resignation as Provincial to the Father General on August 27. His friends came to see him and Montalembert persuaded him to dictate his Memoirs. From his deathbed, Lacordaire dictated, "The Memoir on the Restoration of the Order of Preachers in France." It is incomplete, for it was interrupted by the death of Lacordaire, but we are grateful to Montalembert for having urged and encouraged him to write it. He asked and received the Last Sacraments on November 6. Then it seemed as if God was withdrawing from him one by one the marvelous gifts He had bestowed upon him.

"Those eloquent lips which had in old time stirred the listening throngs . . . were now stammering feebly, like the lips of a little child. We experienced a sort of humiliation, mingled with fear, as we listened to those inarticulate sounds escaping from such lips. But, as for him, calm in the midst of the shadows of death, like one who is always a king, even amid the bonds of slavery, when he could not make himself understood by words or signs, thanked the good will of those who surrounded him with a look, then sank back into his former state of repose."

On November 21, the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple, Lacordaire died. He was buried at Sorèze on the following Thursday, the funeral being delivered by the Bishop of Carcassone; Monsignor de la Bouillerie.



We may rightly ask: What has been the verdict of later years upon Lacordaire? We think that the best answer is to be had in the words of the woman at Soréze on the day of Lacordaire's funeral: "*Abion un rey, l'aben perdut.*" ("We had a king, and we have lost him.")

"This cry of artless admiration mingled with grief," wrote Montalembert, two years later, "faithfully depicts the emotion now uppermost in every heart which has either directly or indirectly felt the influence of Lacordaire." Montalembert wrote when the death of his friend was still fresh, but his words are accurate in this respect, the years that have passed have not robbed Lacordaire of his royalty; men still look up to him as a king, regal in his thought, his eloquence, his character, his, life. With the exception of Bossuet, France has produced no orator who can compare with Lacordaire, and in some ways he is greater than Bossuet. He began his mission in France when France was in sore need of an apostle who could meet the forces of infidelity face to face and overthrow them. He was that apostle. He roused France from her lethargy. He made the educated classes proud of their Catholic Faith and their Catholic inheritance. He appealed to the intellectuals of his day as no other man appealed; and, as an Apologist for Catholic belief, he not only taught those who contradicted it that flippancy and sneers are no reply to its claims, but he established a new method of Apologetics. Hitherto it had been the rule to begin with the existence of God, then proceed to show the possibility and fact of Revelation, then the fact of the Fall, the Incarnation, and then the truth of the Catholic Church. Lacordaire inverted this order. He began with the fact that cannot be denied—the Catholic Church and he worked upwards from this fact to the existence of God.

He was extremely sensitive yet his character was strong, so strong that it would not permit him to bow to the idol of the hour even when others, whose position should have made them mindful of their dignity, did so. "We must stand upright when so many crawl," he wrote once to a friend, "and I thank God for having given me a soul that is strong enough to remain steadfast at a time when deceit is crowned with success."

It is scarcely necessary to say that many of his opinions did not find favor with those in authority, but while Lacordaire had deep respect for authority, he also had too much reverence for human reason to change his opinions easily when no such change was demanded by the teaching or the policy of the Church. Time has shown how just and true most of his opinions were even if some of them were premature, for Catholic France has adopted the teaching of Lacordaire in our day, and in doing so has saved her soul.



He was blessed with friends who stood by him in the hour of trouble and helped him in his difficulties, but they would be the first to acknowledge that they received more than they gave. Foremost amongst these friends is Madame Swethcino. She was rather a mother to him than friend, always loyal, always a support to him, yet never blind to his imperfections. Others were equally loyal, the Abbé Peryve, Ozanam, Foisset, Cartier, and Montalembert, and as he lay upon his deathbed and spoke of his friends, weaving the names of the living with those who had gone, we think of the closing lines of Newman's "Apologia," in which the Cardinal names the friends who had been so loyal to him in days of doubt and loneliness, whom God had given to him in the place of others he had taken away, and we realize in some way what friendship that is friendship, can do for souls.

No man is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes although not everyone is sufficiently humble to acknowledge them. Lacordaire made mistakes, but he acknowledged that he made them, and thus showed his true greatness and nobility of soul. If it be true, "That nothing walks with aimless feet," surely the purpose of lives and the influence of men like Lacordaire must be great indeed. This influence does not cease when they have passed; it continues and is effective in succeeding ages. Hence, we say that, if France today is quickened by a new spirit, more robust, more daring, one might almost say more aggressive in the ways of God, as France assuredly is, she is indebted for this renewal of the old faith of the Franks in an exceedingly large measure to the genius, the eloquence, and the teaching of Lacordaire.

**Nihil obstat:**  
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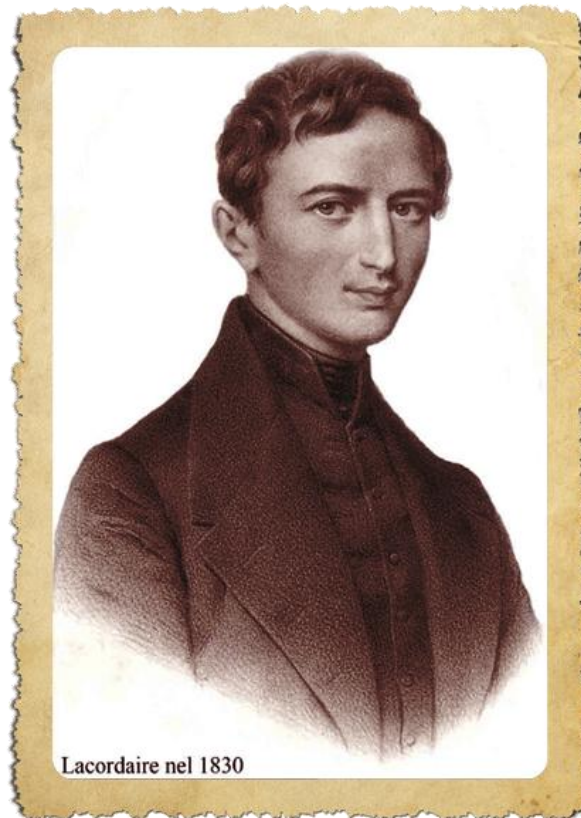
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## *A Priest by Lacordaire*

*To live in the midst of the world without wishing its pleasures;  
To be a member of each family, yet belonging to none;  
To share all suffering; to penetrate all secrets;  
To heal all wounds; to go from men to God and offer Him their prayers;  
To return from God to men to bring pardon and hope;  
To have a heart of fire for Charity, and a heart of bronze for Chastity  
To teach and to pardon, console and bless always.  
My God, what a life;  
and it is yours, O priest of Jesus Christ.*



Lacordaire nel 1830





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