

Civic and Political Life



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Several Texts of Father de Clorivière

1. "SEE EVERYTHING ACCORDING TO GOD"

Eighth Circular Letter

(Circular Letters, English edition, pp. 170-171)

"It is above all in the judging of human events, whether public or private, that the spiritual man's views appear most strikingly. The human part in these things and the good or bad use that man makes of their liberty do not prevent him from seeing in every event the accomplishment of the will of God, and forming his judgement and conduct thereon.

"In the great events which change the face of the earth, the winning or losing of battles, the rise or fall of empires, private success or failure, the humiliation of some, the elevation of others, most men only see external changes which surprise them, and which they attribute to human causes; to the valour of some, the cowardice of others, the number of troops, the skill of generals, the wisdom of the measures taken, the secret wiles of politicians, the plots of malice or treason. These are indeed the external means which Providence uses or permits.

"But the spiritual man looks higher. He goes to the source, to the first cause of everything and, just as if he had been called to the counsels of the Most High, he sees Eternal God before whom the ages roll as a stream, who holds in His hand the cause of all that happens in the universe, and who raises or abases peoples, gives or breaks scepters as He pleases, who covers the humble with glory, and lays the mighty in the dust from which He drew them; who directs all things according to His divine wisdom for His own glory and the glory of Christ, for the exaltation of His Church and the salvation of mankind."

Letter to Mother de Cicé at Dinan, 1788

(Letters, English edition, p. 13)

"As to business affairs, leave to everyone liberty to think as pleases them; you, without allowing yourself to become involved in personal interests, accustom yourself to see nothing but God and to wish all that He wishes."

Letter to Mother de Cicé at the Retreat in Rennes, February 15, 1789

(Letters, English edition, p. 17)

"After all, although we should lament the miseries of our brothers, and especially of all that which can offend the Lord and cause loss to the neighbor, ought we for that to lose our peace and give way to despondency?

"Let us look at things in Jesus Christ and with the eyes of faith. In Jesus Christ there is no distinction between Greek and Barbarian, between the free and slave. All are Christians, all are our brothers. The soul of one is not less dear to Our Lord, nor did it cost less than the soul of another. Why be on the side of one to the prejudice of another, and not rather embrace without discrimination both the one and the other? If we act thus, then it is not the charity of Jesus Christ which makes us act. We act as men, but not as Christians."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, May 16, 1791

(Letters, English edition, p. 46)

"As for us, Mademoiselle, let us occupy ourselves solely with that great affair which leads to an abode where there will be no revolutions to fear. Let us leave men of the world to handle the affairs of the world. We have no country here below; heaven is our country, our law is the Gospel, our King is He from Whom kings hold their authority. Happy are those who know how to despise the things which pass and who esteem only eternal things. They are above all fears, and all the vicissitudes of this world below cannot trouble them."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, June 15, 1791

(Letters, English edition, p. 50)

"In the ferment in which we now are, I shall not speak to you of leaving. We must await a period of calm. While waiting, you will be able to work usefully for the glory of God where you are, and this is the only thing that you desire. In the midst of vicissitudes and the general upheaval, our souls should enjoy an inalienable peace. The God of truth has promised this peace to His servants, and we shall enjoy the effect of this promise if we do not put any obstacle to it by our own fault. Our nature can experience painful alternations, but the soul should rise above all that it experiences, and rest firmly in God. What can trouble the soul if it rise above everything which is beneath Him? All the changes here below cannot do it. Let us fix our eyes on God alone, God Himself will have His eyes on us, and He will protect us as cherished children of His Providence."

Letter to Madame de Clermont, May 17, 1803

(Letters, English edition, p. 520)

"May human vicissitudes never disturb you. Even if everything around us should change, let us be only more firm in walking in the path that God has pointed out to us."

2. "RELIGION ADAPTS ITSELF....TO ALL FORMS OF GOVERNMENT."¹

Apocalypse (Political Section, Introduction, p. 3)

"We express our views only on the needs of religion; it does not concern our ministry, we feel, to exert an influence on civil and political affairs. In order to help souls, and as far as within us lies to lead them to their salvation, we must in our exterior comportment and in so far as the rules of Christian Providence allow - adapt ourselves to the changes which, in Divine Providence, take place in the countries in which we are living."

Apocalypse (Moral Section, Chapter 3, p. 117)

"I am not insisting on its monarchical form (of government) because religion adapts itself indifferently to all forms of civil government, once that government has been established and is well regulated."

Apocalypse (Political Section, Part I, p. 15)

"It (religion) is, in general, of indifferent concern for the various types of government. Although it is Possible that there be some governments whose form adapts more easily with religion, there exists no government with which religion cannot become compatible. Tie shall not at all try to foresee the inscrutable judgments of the Divine Master, and we refer here in the abstract to the form of government He wills to give us."

Ibidem (pp. 31-32)

"Even if there should be a drastic change in the old government, no matter how just the attachment of an ecclesiastic might be to that older form, we would not believe that this consideration must and even could prevent that ecclesiastic from responding to the demands of the new general government, no matter what it might be. The reason is that his first duty is to work for the salvation of the souls entrusted to him by Jesus Christ. Also, all types of government are in

¹ Here Father de Clorivière envisages the different political structures which are possible, which vary according to epoch and country; he is not referring to ideologies, some of which may be attacked.

themselves indifferent as regards the Church, and they have nothing in their nature incompatible with the Christian religion."

Summary (Rule 43)

"In the Society let there not be, nor seem to be, any inclination of mind towards either side of any faction which may chance to exist between Christian princes and lords, but rather let there be a universal charity, embracing in the Lord all parties, though at variance among themselves."

Reflections: "This rule is very closely connected with the preceding one, and both rules aim chiefly at the Preservation of charity. Generally speaking they concern the Society of Jesus, for since the object of the Society is wholly spiritual, we must not take any part in those worldly interests which divide princes and kingdoms one from the other.

"This rule also concerns all the members of our Society. They must not in future belong to the world, but must cleave to Christ our Lord, in Whom 'there is no Greek or Jew here, circumcised or uncircumcised, foreigner, Scythian, slave, or freeman' (Colossians 3:11)."

Ninth Circular Letter

(Circular Letters, English edition, pp. 194-195)

"Submission to the government under which we live is one of our chief duties. The Apostle recommends it to all Christians without exception. 'Let everyone obey the authorities there are over him' (Romans 13:1). However hard these laws may seem they must, unless evidently contrary to the divine law, be obeyed; not by constraint but in conscience, in view of God. We must carefully pay taxes, tolls, charges and contributions of every kind that the government may exact."

Letter to Mother de Ciché, September 30, 1792

(Letters, English edition, p. 72)

"Let us offer good wishes for our Republic; it is strong enough to defend itself from exterior and visible enemies. What I fear for it is interior and invisible enemies, which devastate it and cause disorder and trouble among us. God is very powerful; He has helped us up to the present time, and He can continue to do it; we must lean on Him alone."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, Marseille, 1802

(Letters, English edition, pp. 120-121)

"I do not go back on my sermons; I have weighed well all the expressions, I have even read them to my colleague, and I do not see how they can find fault on one side or the other. You know that my manner of thinking is not contrary nor unfavorable to civil authority."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, August, 1804

(Letters, English edition, p. 141)

"Let us prepare ourselves to celebrate well, but only in the depths of our hearts, the great feast so near at hand, and let us not forget to pray, according to the precept of the Apostle, for him who holds the reins of the new Empire. This is to do something agreeable to God, useful to the Church and to the State and meritorious for ourselves."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, December 1804

(Letters, English edition, p. 161)

"Let us also pray much and continually for the Sovereign Pontiff; and let us not forget the person of our Emperor, since it has pleased God to give him to us for master, and our fate is in His hands."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, December 26, 1806

(Letters, English edition, p. 316)

...you will tell her on my part as well as on your own, that the times are very bad and that the Lord alone can make them cease when it pleases Him; but meantime it is necessary to submit with humility, that we must not fight in vain against the torrent, but take as coming from God all that legitimate authority commands which is not contrary to His law;...

Letter to Mother de Cicé, July 23, 1805

(Letters, English edition, pp. 222-223)

"However, as I told you, the occasion is not favorable, and if the minister had spoken of me, he could have felt sure that the Emperor would soon have closed his mouth. One is not led to do anything favorable when one receives news that is not very favorable, and when one is on the point of carrying out great projects the success of which is uncertain. We are in a time of crisis and great events. Let us pray much, and as we are ignorant of the will of God, let us pray for

what can contribute most to His glory, the good of religion and the salvation of the world. It is allowable for us to implore the great mercy of God for our unhappy country, and for him whom He has pleased to give us for our sovereign."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, January 16, 1807
(Letters, English edition, pp. 319-320)

"He spoke to me very favorably of the good work, of my letter to the Holy Father. I seconded what he said, that I had never had anything in view save the good of religion and of the State; but that, unfortunately, the thing had not had the results that I had hoped for. I finished by speaking of 'my devotedness to the person of our Emperor', to whom I have always been singularly (unreadable word), even before he was First Consul, because of the honor of our arms, and even more since then, because of the services rendered to religion; of 'my submission to the Government, of my sincere adherence to the Concordat', of which I have given proofs. He saw very well that what I said I said from the depths of my heart, and showed his satisfaction with it."

3. "CONSCIENCE AND THE GOSPEL MUST BE FOLLOWED IN LIFE AND TO DEATH"

"Submission to the government" presented as a duty by Father de Clorivière applies only to "laws which in no wise, obviously, are contrary to divine law." (Ninth Circular Letter, pp. 194-195, English edition.)

In establishing two religious Societies at the very time when the civil authority was prohibiting vows and religious orders in France, Father de Clorivière was giving a significant witness of the attitude to be taken with regard to laws that were attacking the rights of God and of the Church. His directives were equally clear concerning the loyalty oath.²

Letter to Mother de Cicé, December 7, 1790
(Letters, English edition, pp. 30-31)

"This is a decisive moment. There is no more time to deliberate on the part we must take. It does not appear to me that we can take the oath that they demand without openly betraying the cause of the Church

² An official decree, end of 1790, obliged all ecclesiastics to take a loyalty oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Subsequently other oaths were demanded of them. (Cf. Founded on the Rock, pp.17-19)

and Religion. Woe to those who are attached to this earth; they will still find some pretexts and interpretations to cover their cowardly desertion of true principles. But all that they can do will only aggravate their fault before God. Up to the present time the Bishops seem firm, and appear to have but one sentiment, and that is to reject the oath that is proposed to them. The signal for persecution is given;..."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, 1789 (no specific month and day given)
(Letters, English edition, p. 20)

"If you can without danger see Mme. Regis for me, it will give me pleasure. ...I do not know if the letter is from her niece; not knowing this, I shall not answer. I only say that the 'equality and liberty' to which they are made to swear have evidently been newly introduced; how then swear to maintain them? Everything is reversed; principles of morality and Christianity. I know nothing of the authorities whom they allege. It is conscience and the Word of God they must follow in life and in death."

Apocalypse (Political Section, Introductory Chapter, p. 7)

"Those who are not bound by true principles...they have made oaths against which the cry of their conscious was rebelling, oaths conceived in vague and indefinite terms and thereby illicit and therefore condemned, oaths invented to destroy religion, oaths whose perverse ends they could not fail to know."

Letter to Mother de Cicé, September 24, 1790
(Letters, English edition, p. 24)

(In another circumstance, we see how Father Cormeau, in presenting his resignation to the President of the District of Saint-Brieuc, refused to collaborate with public officials whose activity aimed at the destruction of religion.)

"His (Father Cormeau's) motives were that his religion and his character would not permit him to cooperate with plans destructive to religion."

4. OBEDIENCE TO THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH. The matter of the Concordat³

³ Cf. *Founded on the Rock*, pp. 71-75

Letter to Mother de Cicé, April 7, 1802

(Letters, English edition, p. 100)

"I have just read the Concordat, my dear daughter, and my heart is rent with grief. However, Catholic dogma is secure; religion will be practiced publicly; many persons can be helped thereby; but the Church and its ministers will be oppressed, exposed to all sorts of annoyances on the part of the wicked; the Head of the Church, in Whom I revere the authority of Jesus Christ, has believed it possible to tolerate all these things for the salvation of the people and even for the good of the Church and of religion. I submit, and I do not wish to examine anything. God knows how to draw good from evil. This first step can lead us to something better. Everything works together for the good of those who love God. Let us limit all our ideas and desires to this, and nothing that men do can injure us."

Memorandum to Pope Pius VII, 1804

(Constitutive Documents, p.419)

"With regard to the Concordat accepted by Your Holiness, I really deplored, together with all the Catholics, the various ornaments of religion reluctantly taken from us as if by force and abandoned for a greater good, i.e. for the salvation of a greater number of souls. Nevertheless as a son of obedience, I adhered to the Concordat from the very first moment, firmly and with sincere heart. What is more, I vigorously defended it against its opponents - even from the pulpit. This happened especially at Poitiers, where this religious agreement had numerous outstanding adversaries, who with their Partisans, were becoming separated from the elected....bishop, and were attempting to start a criminal schism."

Letter to Madame de Carcado (undated)

(Letters, English edition, p. 138)

(This letter was written after the arrest of Father de Clorivière, and in error was inserted in the books among the letters addressed to Mother de Cicé.)

"More than once they asked me if I accepted the Concordat; and each time they appeared astonished when I replied with assurance that I accepted it with all my heart. At the end of the last questioning, M. Bertrand told me that he washed his hands of the matter, that the order for my arrest had come from higher up and not from the Prefecture."

Letter to Foucher, Minister of Police (1804)

(Letters, English edition, pp. 677-678)

"My whole conduct speaks in my favor. All those who have known me can bear witness that, entirely occupied with the care of my ministry, I have never meddled with the affairs of the Government; that I was sincerely submissive to it, as well as to its Head, especially since he has shown his intentions for the welfare of Religion; and that, after the Concordat appeared, I submitted myself fully through conscientious principles, the same as to all authorities, ecclesiastical or civil, and that on extraordinary occasions, I showed signal zeal in that respect."

Adherence to the Concordat involved obedience to the constitutional bishops.⁴

Letter to Father Bacoffe, April 29, 1809

(Letters, English edition, p. 629)

"We were born before the Constitutionlists existed, and we do not know more of them since the Holy Father admitted them to his communion."

Letter to a Confrere, April 17, 1802

(Letters, English edition, p. 651)

"They have just assured me that the constitutional Bishops have made their retraction, that they had been careful to motivate it well. They would not, unless they had that, have had their canonical institution. It is not perhaps such a great good for them, for they have resisted it as long as they could. But at least the appearance of the constitutional cult will disappear and France will be Catholic and governed by Pastors legitimately appointed."

5. "EDIFICATION OF THE NEIGHBOR" "DEVOTION TO THE GOVERNMENT"

Letter to Madame de Clermont, May 5, 1807

(Letters, English edition, p. 535)

"The profession of a Daughter of the Heart of Mary does not dispense her from any of the common duties of religion and charity which

⁴ Even without the approval of Rome, these bishops had taken the oath of loyalty to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. As an appeasement measure, after the signing of the Concordat, Rome ratified the nomination of those Bishops after having demanded their retraction of the oath.

regard in general all the faithful; on the contrary, she is obliged to fulfill them with more exactitude and perfection. This is even an essential point which distinguishes them from most religious Societies, and which, especially during these later times, should render them more useful to civil society and more fitted to extend and sustain in it the reign of God."

Plan of the Society of the Heart of Jesus; also Memorandum to Pius VII
(Constitutive Documents; p. 98 and p. 274 respectively)

"And if Divine Goodness permits the admission of citizens of all Orders into this Society, the government will have this resulting precious benefit, viz., it (the government) will have the glory of having everywhere excellent citizens, men truly devoted to their Fatherland, upright magistrates, skillful physicians, most honest merchants, serious artisans, - in a word, men of all conditions who, basing their conduct on the laws of the most exact equity, may perhaps by their own example lead a great number of others to do the same."

Letter to Cardinal Caprara
(Constitutive Documents, p. 370)

"It can only be very advantageous for a government of law and order to have a multitude of virtuous citizens, friends of justice, peace, good order and decency, who, spread out through all classes of civil life, will - because of their duty towards Religion - be devoted to the interests of the government, and unceasingly concerned with contributing to the well-being of their fellow-citizens."

Ninth Circular Letter
(Circular Letters, English edition, p. 188)

"But I think it necessary to insist particularly on the edification that we owe to everyone. The fact that we profess to tend to perfection makes this duty, common as it is to all, more urgent for us. We are obliged to fulfil it with special care. Religious who lived in community, withdrawn in the cloister and separated from the world, had not the same obligations in this matter. It was usually enough for them to edify the people with whom they lived; they had little intercourse with others. We, on the other hand, are not outwardly separated from the world of which we are a part. We mingle with other classes of citizens; we have the same responsibilities, the same duties, and the holy promises that we make to God, though they hardly count for the world, require us to fulfil these duties with all the Perfection of which

we are capable. It is chiefly thus that we can edify our neighbour."

Ninth Circular Letter

(Circular Letters, English edition, p. 194)

"It is not enough to deserve the benevolence of our Chief pastors by our zeal; we must strive by prudence and submission to gain the good will of the government and civil authority. The government must be convinced of our submission to its laws. It must know that our views are not contrary to its own, and that all we do is useful to the public. This is a second necessary means of edifying our neighbour."

Ninth Circular Letter

(Circular Letters, English edition, p. 195)

"We are mingled with other citizens and subjected to the same burdens; we profess to aim at perfection, therefore we must set an example to the rest in these duties, as in all others of the Christian Life. We must not merely refrain from murmuring, but must do them joyfully, so as to convince the government that it has no more faithful and submissive subjects than those who are most strongly attached to the laws of God."

Ninth Circular Letter

(Circular Letters, English edition, p. 201)

"There may also be a great variety of professions in our Societies but, whatever they may be, those who have consecrated themselves thus to the service of God should chiefly think of how to conciliate the duties of their profession with their sacred promises, and make all serve for the glory of God, their own salvation, the good of the Church, and general usefulness."

Ninth Circular Letter

(Circular Letters, English edition, pp. 202-203)

"I will not stop to enumerate other professions; but these details will not be useless. I invite all of either Society who are engaged in professions to study their duties, virtues, and dangers, and to communicate their knowledge to me. I content myself with adding to what I have said that each one should look upon himself as God's man, whose duty it is to act in the Lord's name and for His glory, the good of the Church, and the advantage of every class of civil society.

"That is for us the only means of doing 'good not only in the sight of

God but also in the sight of men.' What would not be the advantage for all citizens in general, and for each one in particular! As I said before we should everywhere be sure of finding excellent citizens, men who truly love their country; upright magistrates learned in the law; skillful doctors; honest tradesmen, sober workmen, in short men in every class who would follow the rules of strict equity and, by their example, induce others to do the same.

"Young people would know where to seek for light; the weak would find support, the poor resources, the afflicted comfort.

All who wished to follow the path of virtue would find safe guides. They would have help and example, true counsel, and a generous and sympathetic friendship.

"How happy the towns would be that contained many such citizens! Their presence would banish disorder and idleness. Social virtues would flourish, families be united, order would reign everywhere, and no magistrate need fear to see peace disturbed by the seditious.

"I have not said too much. What may we not hope from men who, in every station, in every profession, join to consecrate themselves to the public good for the sublime motives suggested by religion. No cloud of passion will darken their reason or turn them from their aim. Their heart will enjoy the calm that fits them for every work; and God will bless the labours that tend to His glory and the good of His children."