

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy, *July 12, 1790*

J.H. Robinson, ed.,
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Hanover Historical Texts Project
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Robinson's Note: The reorganization of the Church which followed upon the confiscation of its vast possessions is an excellent illustration of the spirit of the National Assembly. The demand for complete uniformity and simplification is especially pronounced in the reform of this most venerable institution of France, the anomalies and intricacies of which were hallowed not only by age but by religious reverence. The chief articles are given below, and indicate how completely the Assembly desired to bring the Church under rules similar to those which they were drawing up for the state.

The National Assembly, after having heard the report of the ecclesiastical committee, has decreed and do decree the following as constitutional articles:

Title I

ARTICLE I. Each department shall form a single diocese, and each diocese shall have the same extent and the same limits as the department.

II. The seat of the bishoprics of the eighty-three departments of the kingdom shall be established as follows: that of the department of the Lower Seine at Rouen; that of the department of Calvados at Bayeux.

All other bishoprics in the eighty-three departments of the kingdom, which are not included by name in the present article, are, and forever shall be, abolished.

The kingdom shall be divided into ten metropolitan districts of which the sees shall be situated at Rouen, Rheims, Besancon, Rennes, Paris, Bourges, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Aix, and Lyons. These archbishoprics shall have the following denominations : that of Rouen shall be called the Archbishopric of the Coast of the Channel.

IV. No church or parish of France nor any French citizen may acknowledge upon any occasion, or upon any pretext whatsoever, the authority of an ordinary bishop or of an archbishop whose see shall be under the supremacy of a foreign power, nor that of his representatives residing in France or elsewhere; without prejudice, however, to the unity of the faith and the intercourse which shall be maintained with the visible head of the universal Church, as hereafter provided.

VI. A new arrangement and division of all the parishes of the kingdom shall be undertaken immediately in concert with the bishop and the district administration.

XX. All titles and offices other than those mentioned in the present constitution, dignities, canonries, prebends, half prebends, chapels, chaplainships, both in cathedral and col legiate churches, all regular and secular chapters for either sex, abbacies and priorships, both regular and *in commendam*, for either sex, as well as all other benefices and prestimonies in general, of whatever kind or denomination, are from the day of this decree extinguished and abolished and shall never be reestablished in any form.

Title II

ARTICLE I. Beginning with the day of publication of the present decree, there shall be but one mode of choosing bishops and parish priests, namely that of election.

II. All elections shall be by ballot and shall be decided by the absolute majority of the votes.

III. The election of bishops shall take place according to the forms and by the electoral body designated in the decree of December 22, 1789, for the election of members of the departmental assembly.

VI. The election of a bishop can only take place or be undertaken upon Sunday, in the principal church of the chief town of the department, at the close of the parish mass, at which all the electors are required to be present.

VII. In order to be eligible to a bishopric, one must have fulfilled for fifteen years at least the duties of the church ministry in the diocese, as a parish priest, officiating minister, or curate, or as superior, or as directing vicar of the seminary.

XIX. The new bishop may not apply to the pope for any form of confirmation, but shall write to him, as to the visible head of the universal Church, as a testimony to the unity of faith and communion maintained with him.

XXI. Before the ceremony of consecration begins, the bishop elect shall take a solemn oath, in the presence of the municipal officers, of the people, and of the clergy, to guard with care the faithful of his diocese who are confided to him, to be loyal to the nation, the law, and the king, and to support with all his power the constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the king.

XXV. The election of the parish priests shall take place according to the forms and by the electors designated in the decree of December 22, 1789, for the election of members of the administrative assembly of the district.

XI. Bishoprics and cures shall be looked upon as vacant until those elected to fill them shall have taken the oath above mentioned.

Title III

I

ARTICLE I. The ministers of religion, performing as they do the first and most important functions of society and forced to live continuously in the place where they discharge the offices to which they have been called by the confidence of the people, shall be supported by the nation.

II. Every bishop, priest, and officiating clergyman in a chapel of ease shall be furnished with a suitable dwelling, on condition, however, that the occupant shall make all the necessary current repairs. This shall not affect at present, in any way, those parishes where the priest now receives a money equivalent instead of his dwelling. The departments shall, moreover, have cognizance of suits arising in this connection, brought by the parishes and by the priests. Salaries shall be assigned to each, as indicated below.

III. The bishop of Paris shall receive fifty thousand livres; the bishops of the cities having a population of fifty thousand (p. 426) or more, twenty thousand livres ; other bishops, twelve thousand livres.

V. The salaries of the parish priests shall be as follows : in Paris, six thousand livres; in cities having a population of fifty thousand or over, four thousand livres; in those having a population of less than fifty thousand and more than ten thousand, three thousand livres; in cities and towns of which the population is below ten thousand and more than three thousand, twenty-four hundred livres.

In all other cities, towns, and villages where the parish shall have a population between three thousand and twenty-five hundred, two thousand livres; in those between twenty-five hundred and two thousand, eighteen hundred livres; in those having a population of less than two thousand, and more than one thousand, the salary shall be fifteen hundred livres; in those having one thousand inhabitants and under, twelve hundred livres.

VII. The salaries *in money* of the ministers of religion shall be paid every three months, in advance, by the treasurer of the district.

XII. In view of the salary which is assured to them by the present constitution, the bishops, parish priests, and curates shall perform the episcopal and priestly functions *gratis*.

Title IV

ARTICLE I. The law requiring the residence of ecclesiastics in the districts under their charge shall be strictly observed. All vested with an ecclesiastical office or function shall be subject to this, without distinction or exception.

II. No bishop shall absent himself from his diocese more than two weeks consecutively during the year, except in case of real necessity and with the consent of the directory of the department in which his see is situated.

III. In the same manner, the parish priests and the curates may not absent themselves from the place of their duties beyond the term fixed above, except for weighty reasons, and even in such cases the priests must obtain the permission both of their bishop and of the directory of their district, and the curates that of the parish priest.

VI. Bishops, parish priests, and curates may, as active citizens, be present at the primary and electoral assemblies; they may be chosen electors, or as deputies to the legislative body, or as members of the general council of the communes or of the administrative councils of their districts or departments.