

ABSTRACT

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ÉMILE SOUVESTRE: BRETON,
CHRISTIAN, AND REPUBLICAN IN
NINETEENTH CENTURY FRANCE

Cara Anne Gadel, Master of Arts, 2007

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While scholars of French history tend to divide nineteenth century French intellectuals into two camps - anti-clerical leftwing Republican Revolutionaries versus rightwing Catholic traditionalists, Emile Souvestre represented a middle ground, and perhaps better represented the average French person as well. Souvestre, a prolific nineteenth century Breton writer, was a devout Christian and a Republican. This thesis explores the forces of regionalism, religion, and politics on Souvestre and his writings.

ÉMILE SOUVESTRE: BRETON, CHRISTIAN, AND REPUBLICAN IN
NINETEENTH CENTURY FRANCE.

By

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Dedication

To my parents, Bev and Barry Ricks, who supported me every step of the way.
Thank you. Love, Cara

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Introduction

Émile Souvestre was a prolific 19th century writer. The Bibliothèque Nationale de la France contains a thirteen page list of his works, including over two dozen books, a host of plays, poems, and magazine articles, many of which were translated into German, English, and French. Yet today, Souvestre is little known outside of his home region of Finistère, where he remains a cultural icon.¹ Indeed, even a 1939 article mentions the paucity of biographical works on the prolific and influential author even in the early twentieth century.² Certainly, he must have been highly regarded by his peers in his day, as well, since he received an award for his famous *Un Philosophe sous les toits* in 1851 from the Academie française at the proposition of none other than Victor Hugo; following his death in 1854, his widow was awarded the Prix Lambert for his life's works.

Influenced by a profound religious piety as well as the Saint-Simonian philosophy of his youth, Souvestre's works have a deep moral undertone, but he does not appear to have been a moral conservative – though one might argue that his works indicate he became increasingly so with age. Souvestre was a passionate advocate for the education of women, and this passion – a Saint-Simonian, not a Catholic, value - finds its way repeatedly into his works as he promotes the education of women, and expresses a deep respect for the opposite sex and their intellectual and educational pursuits. He also is greatly concerned with the plight of the poor, and questioned what responsibility both society and the individual have to alleviate the misery of the

¹Barbel Plötner-Le Lay, "Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien, 1806-1854." Morlaix: Skol Vreizh, 2006, 204.

²Glen Shortliffe, "Populism in the Novel before Naturalism," *PMLA* 54, no. 2 (1939): 589.

lower classes of the nineteenth century. One might argue that some of his writings express what Karl Marx might have called classic bourgeois sentiment – the belief that the poorer classes must be mindful of their station in life and not strive to be better or act as if they are. Souvestre subscribed to the belief that the tools for advancement are hard work and self education, and that it is possible to pull oneself up by one’s bootstraps if one really makes the effort; and he does seem to express that those two routes – hard work and self-education – are the only appropriate means to advancement. In addition to a sharp emphasis on both the value of education, and that of hard work, Souvestre’s writings reflect a strong belief in temperance, a typical nineteenth century bourgeoisie reform movement. Souvestre frequently writes of the dangers and negative influence of drinking; he obviously believes that it is a true scourge for workers. He firmly establishes his belief, in several writings, that drinking leads to the waste of both man and money, and to do away with the vice enables one to focus on his hard work, education, role as a family man, saving money, and, importantly – as a recurring theme throughout Souvestre’s work - advancing one’s station.

Among the French regional authors of the nineteenth century, Émile Souvestre may stand out as an anomaly; while many other authors and intellectuals squarely aligned themselves with either the centralizing, secular left or identified more as regionals, aligned with the political right and strongly supporting the Catholic Church, Souvestre fell in the middle. Souvestre was typically characterized as a Breton cultural icon, a prolific author, whose many tales featured Breton culture and folktales. However, while Souvestre apparently supported Republican France,

the fervent Christianity featured prominently in his writings separates him from anti-clerical, left-wing, centralizing patriots such as Thierry or Gambetta. His Catholicism less obvious, Souvestre did establish in some writings, such as *The World as it Shall it Be*, that he valued the religion in which he was raised as well as the institutional authority of the Catholic Church; in other writings he was more likely to criticize the Catholic hierarchy if not Catholic tradition. Souvestre certainly held dear certain French Republican values – liberté, égalité, and fraternité feature prominently throughout his works – but he does demonstrate that he saw no institution so well-poised to deliver these as the Christian faith, if not specifically the Catholic Church. While in some works he is somewhat ambivalent in his support for the Church, he is uncompromisingly supportive of the institution in *The World as it Shall Be*; however, his references to Christianity in general are not to be confused with references to Catholicism specifically, for he was greatly influenced by Protestant Christianity as well.

Nevertheless, Souvestre does not offer a French Republic whose interests are juxtaposed with that of a Catholic France; quite the contrary. Caroline Ford focuses on the very place of Souvestre's birth, Finistère. Ford predicates her entire thesis on the argument that the people of the area were not so much radical rightwing religious fanatics, as they are often portrayed, as that they were quite adept at using the language of the republic to advance their own rights; she argues that they only agitated against the Republic when the Republic threatened their religious liberties. Much as Souvestre's writings reflect a love of his homeland, his writings include no Breton nationalist sentiments; in contrast, however, one senses a profound French

nationalism – for example, ardent expressions of loyalty to Napoleon and to the idea of France in his early and possibly most famous work *Un philosophe sous les toits*, as well as in other works. Profoundly influenced by his involvement in the Saint-Simonian movement during his youth, Souvestre maintained a lifelong commitment to typical Saint-Simonian projects including women's rights, public education (including the education of women), and concern for the working class; the abolition of slavery, though it did not exist in France, was a concern of the Saint-Simonians and makes a strong appearance in a number of Souvestre's novels. While Saint-Simonian themes would continue to influence his writing throughout his life, however, Souvestre would become acutely disillusioned with the movement, leaving it after only a few brief years.

Souvestre's concerns for the working class, in particular, were not unusual for people living in his home region of Morlaix, Finistère, Brittany. Often typecast as an area of regional hardline Catholicism, a number of scholars – Carolyn Ford, Jean Mayeur, Victor Rogard – demonstrate that the area was strongly in support of republicanism – when Catholicism was not threatened, or when conscription was not an issue. Indeed, Souvestre's involvement in the Saint-Simonian movement may have been influenced by his Catholicism; certainly there was support for the issues he held dear in Catholic circles in Brittany, and he felt comfortable continuing to advocate for those issues once he left the Saint-Simonian movement, as indeed, social Catholicism and Christian democracy also became stronger and more vocal.

Despite his prolific and extensive writings, few biographies about Émile Souvestre are available. There is nineteenth century German language dissertations,

Barbel Plötner's recent article, and the biographical notice about his life written by his son-in-law, Eugène Lesbazeilles, after his death and included in the English version of *Leaves from a Family Journal*.

Biography

Émile Souvestre was born on April 15, 1804, in the town of Morlaix, in the lower Breton department of Finistère. The few pages of the *Notice of the Life and Literary Character of Émile Souvestre* written by his son-in-law, Eugène Lesbazeilles, comprise one of the few biographical sources of information about this prolific nineteenth century author. Souvestre is described as a “romancist from his cradle” who as a boy “delighted[in nothing so much as] gleaning from the peasantry of his native Brittany legends of the past, and recounting them – or, as often, fairy tales of his own invention – to a youthful audience spell-bound for hours by his fascinating tongue.”³ Barbel Plötner writes that Souvestre prided himself on his Celtic roots, going so far as to claim descent from Irish refugees fleeing to Brittany from Cromwell's invasion, perhaps to bolster claims to a Celtic heritage.⁴ At the same time, she refutes this claim, noting that Souvestre's father was indeed a leather merchant and the son of Breton peasants. Plötner argues, however, that Souvestre's first language must certainly have been French even if Souvestre spoke Breton well, because his mother's family was not only not Breton but also were members of the bourgeoisie class.⁵

³ Émile Souvestre, *Leaves from a Family Journal*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1855), i.

⁴ Plötner, “Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien,” 204.

⁵ Ibid.

Regarding the young Souvestre's love of storytelling, however, Lesbazeilles notes that the young Souvestre was not solely concerned with his Celtic roots or with entertaining; the foundation was set early for the development of the writer who would become known as a great moralist, as even at a young age, Souvestre intended his stories to "elevate his fellow creatures."⁶ Later in life he held workshops helping families to select good moral reading material for the whole family.⁷ Souvestre received a typical middle class education evident in many of his stories, highlighting Roman and Greek classics.⁸ Souvestre studied law at Rennes to please his father; upon the death of his father, he was able to study what he had always hoped to – literature – in Paris.⁹ He did complete a tragedy soon after arriving in Paris: *The Siege of Missolonghi*. The play was censored, and he was unwilling to allow changes to it.¹⁰ It was shortly after this time that his older brother, a sailor, died in a shipwreck, leaving behind a widow and young child.¹¹ Here the familial account for Souvestre's response to his brother's death, written in the nineteenth century by Lesbazeilles, differs quite drastically from the academic account available in the early twenty-first century. According to the familial account, Souvestre took immediate responsibility for his brother's family, returning at once to Brittany to support his brother's widow and child:

Émile Souvestre at once decided on the course he ought to pursue; entreating his friends to find him an appointment, no matter how humble, or in what locality, so that he might obtain means to help the bereaved once, he accepted without a moment's delay, a situation which offered as clerk at a bookseller's

⁶ Souvestre, *Leaves*, viii.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, viii.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

at Nantes. The experience gained in this new and tranquil sphere seems greatly to have aided his moral development, by dissipating the dreams of youth, and teaching him to estimate men for their real worth, irrespective of position or intellectual power. But Souvestre, through labouring assiduously in his vocation, was far from neglecting the literary instincts within him. Some poetical and prose productions, published in the local magazines, were the means of introducing him to useful friends; and he soon found an opportunity of establishing himself as principal of a school.”¹²

The “notice” does not mention that by this time, Souvestre was well-ensconced in the Saint-Simonian school, soon to become a religion, or that his “useful” friends were associated with this movement.¹³ It does go on to indicate that Souvestre married very happily but lost his wife at the end of the first year;¹⁴ Plötner adds that the young couple had already lost a newborn child.¹⁵ However, Souvestre would later remarry. Lesbazeilles writes that Souvestre’s marriage was followed by six years of shifting vocations, “by turns barrister, editor, professor at Brest and Mulhouse, but always pursuing his literary objects.”¹⁶ In 1836, Souvestre’s first major work appeared in the “Revue des Deux Mondes,” under the title of *Les Derniers Paysans*.¹⁷ After this six year period, Souvestre returned to Paris to see if he might earn a modest living, fully devoted to literature, where he was focused on achieving “literary purity” as well as being deeply concerned with issues of social justice, deeply concerned with issues pertaining the working class; it was at this point that he was at his most prolific and also during which he produced his most famous works, such as *Un philosophe sous les toits* and *Confessions of a Working Man*.¹⁸

¹² Ibid, ix.

¹³ Plötner, “Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien,” 209.

¹⁴ Souvestre, *Leaves*, ix.

¹⁵ Plötner, “Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien,” 209.

¹⁶ Souvestre, *Leaves*, ix.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, x.

Lesbazeilles writes that while the author was always welcomed in the salons by a host of “brilliant friends,” Souvestre preferred to stay at home with his family.¹⁹ At no point in the “Notice,” does Lesbazeilles mention Souvestre’s work on *the Revue Encyclopédique* or for *Le Globe*, publications associated with the Saint-Simonian movement with which Souvestre was deeply involved. Lesbazeilles does not mention Souvestre’s early involvement with or conversion to the Saint-Simonian religion. Nor does he address Souvestre’s later break with the movement, and return to Christianity, prior to his embarking on a career as a very prolific author of books meant to shape and influence the moral taste of the nineteenth century reader.

Glenn Shortliffe and Barbel Plötner are far more informative than the son-in-law’s reserved and loyal “notice.” Shortliffe writes that the young Souvestre was disciplined for an incident at the College of Pontivy over which he steadfastly maintained his innocence, which he satirized years later as a comedy in three acts. Shortliffe argues that the incident reveals Souvestre’s life long commitment to right the wrongs of injustice.²⁰ In a recent article from a book about important authors of the Saint-Simonian era, Barbel Plötner gives a far more detailed synopsis of Souvestre’s early life and involvement in, as well as his eventual break from, the Saint-Simonian movement than is included in the brief “notice.” Focusing on copies of letters and other archival material available at the BNF and museum in Morlaix, Plötner describes an extremely important event at the Royal College at Pontivy, involving a school friend, Ange Guépin, with whom Souvestre would be involved for years to come. The two young men were branded troublemakers for writing songs

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Shortliffe, “Populism in the Novel,” 589.

which were anti-religion, anti-government, and which included obscenities.²¹ The ensuing disciplinary action dashed the hopes of Souvestre's father, who had hoped to send the young Souvestre to the Polytechnique and on to pursue a military career. Indeed, Guépin, though accepted to the prestigious Polytechnique, was nevertheless removed from the list because of his family's Republican politics. Souvestre returned to Brittany for a year, where he worked for a printing house, mostly reworking old Breton folk tales and songs. It was only then, and specifically as a result of this incident, that Souvestre then commenced legal studies in Rennes in 1824, and here Plötner's story correlates with the familial account. In Rennes, while studying law Souvestre was able to form a circle of friends with whom he could focus on that which really interested him: literature. He met with these young romantics, and he also had his first poem published in a magazine called the *Lycée armoricain*, put out by a printing house devoted to defending the language and reputation of Brittany.²²

Arriving in Paris in 1827 to further his law studies, Souvestre also completed his first play, which was accepted by a theater.²³ While the familial account simply states that the play was never able to go forward, Plötner's account gives considerably more information and ascribes to Souvestre a much more active role in the final decision than the familial account allows for. The play apparently celebrated the liberation attempts of the Greeks against the Ottoman domination – and was seen by the government as subversive.²⁴ The government, not wishing to promote revolutionary sentiment, censored the piece. Though the piece was edited and a

²¹ Plötner, "Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien," 201.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 203.

revised version was produced for production, Souvestre refused to allow the reworked play to go forward; he did not accept the changes and he did not wish to allow the other scribe to affix his signature to the edited version. Thus, the play was never performed; the play is the very same as the one referred to by Lesbazailles.²⁵

In Paris, Souvestre reunited with Guépin, who introduced Souvestre to the founders and main contributors of the liberal, romantic journal, *Le Globe*, Dubois and Pierre Leroux, through whom he met other globists and the *Amis de l'Armorique*, an exclusive Breton club in Paris.²⁶ It was not long after that he became personally associated with Bazard and Buchez and became deeply involved in the Saint-Simonian movement.

Having become involved in the Saint-Simonian movement, Souvestre decided to return in 1828 to Brittany. His father and brother had died several years before; thus, Plötner does not accept Souvestre's family's version of his return to Brittany (Lesbazeilles suggests Souvestre returned to his home region in order to take care of his brother's family). Rather, Plötner argues, Souvestre's return to his home region does not seem to have stemmed from any trouble similar to the incident at the College of Pontivy. She suggests that he found the atmosphere of Paris simply to weigh on him, that he left Paris and went back to Brittany to recharge himself, "to soak again in his sources,"²⁷ in a place "where his new literary and social ideas would find a less deleterious field of action."²⁸ It may be a persuasive argument, as Souvestre was known even in his later life to be welcome to the salons of famous intellectuals,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 204.

²⁷ Ibid, 206.

²⁸ Ibid.

preferring instead to spend quiet evenings at home with his family.²⁹ Souvestre continued writing during those years, finally officially adopting the Doctrine of the Saint-Simonians in November of 1831 - at the precise moment that there was a split in the movement and the Republican wing, Bazard and his circle of intimates at the *Revue encyclopédique* left the Saint-Simonian movement.³⁰

In 1831, at any rate, Souvestre was to some extent sheltered from the immediate trauma of the schism, as he was tucked away in Brittany, but he did disapprove of Enfantin and aligned himself with Charton, Bazard, the moralizers and Republican wing of the Saint-Simonians.³¹ His support for the Republican wing put him at odds with his old friend, Guépin, but it also facilitated his meeting his second wife, Angélique Anne Papot, or Nanine, who was the sister of one of his associates, “a woman of letters perfectly suited to edit his books and to partake in his views about the emancipation of her sex.”³² At the same time, Souvestre threw himself into efforts to revive the Republican wing’s Saint-Simonian message, recalling the orthodoxy of St. Simon himself and emphasizing the role of the arts in the progress of humanity, the responsibility of the government in the amelioration of the inferior classes, the necessity of passing “industrial and moral actions” mobilizing industry, the sciences, and the arts.³³ From 1832-1833, he became editor-in-chief of *Finistère*, a local newspaper, writing in the name of the “religion of progress and industry.”³⁴ He returned to education in 1833 as professor of rhetoric at the free college of Faure

²⁹ Souvestre, *Leaves*, x.

³⁰ Plötner, “Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien,” 206.

³¹ *Ibid*, 221-222.

³² *Ibid*, 222.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

in Brest.³⁵ He continued to collaborate with *Breton* but as well as devoting his energies to a new magazine, beginning in 1833, called the *Revue de Bretagne*.

In 1833 Guépin arranged a convention among the Saint-Simonian, including the disgruntled who had fallen away, and resumed communication with Souvestre. In 1834, Souvestre wrote an interesting letter to Guépin, discussing what he called “his political Christianity, his “stsimonien [sic]”³⁶, suggesting that his religious beliefs were motivated by a “political mysticism”³⁷ best addressed by the Saint-Simonian religion, which embraced certain Christian ideals.

Nevertheless, in 1836-1837, Souvestre experienced a final rupture with Saint-Simonian thought as a system, after having left the Saint-Simonian scene about three years prior; it is also at this point that he began to focus seriously on his works of fiction, and the point at which we cease to be able to document his activities.³⁸ Plötner credits two specific individuals for helping Souvestre make the break from Saint-Simonian thought, the French historian Jules Michelet and Swiss Protestant theologian Alexandre Vinet.³⁹

A staunch Republican, Souvestre was convinced with the arrival of the Second Republic in 1848 to run for the National Assembly; according to the “notice” he won 46,000 votes.⁴⁰ Still, it was not enough to win the seat, and instead of taking an elected position, he maintained his professorship. With the demise of the Second Republic and the rise of the Second Empire, he moved his family in 1853 to Geneva

³⁵ Ibid, 228.

³⁶ Ibid, 230.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 239.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

for political reasons,⁴¹ where he continued for the last year of his life to lecture on the history of literature.⁴² He died on July 5, 1854, while writing his last work, *Pleasures of Old Age*.⁴³

Saint-Simonianism

The rise of Saint-Simonianism fueled a debate between those who would support what would come to be known as “individualism” versus those who would support what would come to be known as socialism – a term which may have been first introduced by Presbyterian minister Alexander Vinet.⁴⁴

Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de St. Simon, was born in 1760 and died in 1825. His father was an impoverished aristocrat, and St. Simon himself was involved with the radicals during the Revolution. St. Simon experienced serious fluctuations in his financial circumstances throughout his lifetime; he is famous for having had his valet wake him up every day by saying, “Remember, you have great things to accomplish today,”⁴⁵ and he was a significant influence on both Augustin Thierry, and later, Auguste Comte. In particular, Auguste Comte’s positivist philosophy displays a strong link to earlier philosophies expounded upon by St. Simon, though both disciples eventually severed their ties with St. Simon.

St. Simon believed that the Catholic Church as a universally accepted religious institution had ensured the stability of society, but this stability had been shattered with the joint advances of the scientific revolution, the commercial

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Souvestre, *Leaves*, xi.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Cyrus R.K. Patell, “Emersonian Strategies: Negative Liberty, Self-Reliance, and Democratic Individuality.” *Nineteenth Century Literature* 48, no. 4 (1994): 448.

⁴⁵ Felix Markham, *Henri de Saint-Simon, Social Organization and the Science of Man and Other Writings*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), xx.

revolution, the Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightenment; while the old society had completely disintegrated, a new one had not successfully been reorganized and thus, the destructive forces mentioned above culminated in the upheaval of the French Revolution.⁴⁶ St. Simon also thought the solution to restoring order lay in discarding old ideas and placing an emphasis on science. In his view, scientists would replace the old priesthood and the certainties of science would replace religious dogma.⁴⁷ “For St. Simon, the essential feature of religion is that it is a coherent body of ideas, explaining every aspect of the world and of human experience,”⁴⁸ writes Markham. These ideas would become intellectually grasped scientific truths for the educated elite, but would take the form of religious mysteries for the ignorant masses; a conflict between science and religion was seen as a contradiction, indicative of a broken system.⁴⁹ Indeed, “a complete scientific explanation of experience [would] constitute a new religion.... with priests [of the new, scientific religion] fulfilling the function performed by priests in the medieval civilization.”⁵⁰ For St. Simon, the human experience was simultaneously religious, political, economic, and philosophical.⁵¹ His early, original focus on science included both a political and social aim, while his later *Nouveau Christianisme* dealt as much with social and economic issues as with the religious structure of his imagined society.⁵² Clearly, St. Simon’s emphasis was on creating an elite society, a technocracy, where power lay in the hands of those who had scientific knowledge. Both Karl Marx and John Stuart

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, xxi.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, xxii.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, xxiii.

⁵² Ibid, xxiv.

Mill would credit St. Simon as an influence on their thinking,⁵³ with his ideas that history passed through stages, for example, from polytheism to monotheism to physicism, as well as from the conjectural to the positive stage.⁵⁴

St. Simon, however, was not a socialist in the Marxist sense; he supported private enterprise and private property. He was, in fact, an elitist who condemned the idea of equality,⁵⁵ separating society into two groups (idlers versus producers) and approaching the economic system from the point of view of the producer.⁵⁶ Importantly, he saw production as a means of promoting social well-being rather than as a mere ends in itself. In this respect, because he did not promote equality but did promote elitism, he can be said to have envisioned the ideal industrial system as a planned economy. Further, he was deeply concerned with the need to “improve the lot of the poorest class, and to found the industrial system on the Christian principle of brotherly love.”⁵⁷ It is because St. Simon’s philosophy involved a planned economy that it is said to have been socialistic. This philosophy is evident in Souvestre’s own writings, but it is arguable that the moralist was influenced by social Catholic paternalist trends, increasingly popular in his home region and placing significant emphasis on elitism just as St. Simon did.

St. Simon’s writings were clumsy and ambiguous, but Thierry and Comte, and later, after they abandoned him, Bazard and Enfantin synthesized, clarified, and expounded on his ideas. It was Bazard and Enfantin who developed the ideas of the *New Christianity*, first into the Saint-Simonian philosophical school of thought, and

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, xxvi.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, xxvii.

later into the Saint-Simonian religion in the years 1825-35.⁵⁸ The Saint-Simonians who clustered around St. Simon in the early years called themselves a school; it was only later they founded a religion. They used *The Globe* publication as their mouthpiece and sent missions throughout France as well as to Belgium, Germany, and England.⁵⁹

Enfantin developed “certain implications in St. Simon’s thought to such an extent that it amount[ed] to a new theory, in its own right,”⁶⁰ including attacking the laws of inheritance. He argued that capital should go to the State, which would allocate centralized funds to those best able to use it; Enfantin condemned “the anarchy of free competition, and compare[d] the ‘exploitation of man by man’ with the slavery of the ancient world,”⁶¹ supporting instead the principle of associations.”⁶² Because of the centralized focus of St. Simonianism, many scholars argue that the roots of a completely mature socialist doctrine are present in St. Simon’s writings, later adopted by the Saint-Simonian school.⁶³ Scholars do sometimes refer Saint-Simonianism as a socialist movement. Both St. Simon and his followers believed they should try to promote the “speediest amelioration of the moral, physical, and intellectual lot of the poorest and most numerous class.”⁶⁴ But neither St. Simon nor the Saint-Simonian movement can be said to have in any way been an egalitarian, proletarian movement. The Saint-Simonians did intend to destroy arbitrary social and economic stratifications based on birth, and to replace the aristocracy of wealth with a

⁵⁸ Ibid, xxiv.

⁵⁹ Ibid, xxxvi.

⁶⁰ Ibid, xxxv.

⁶¹ Ibid, xxxvi.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, xxvi .

⁶⁴ Ibid.

natural aristocracy of talents.⁶⁵ However, St. Simon and the St. Simonians would not have considered class struggle to achieve that ends; they considered the masses to be politically incompetent and looked, rather, for the social revolution to come from above, through the leadership of superior men.⁶⁶ The Saint-Simonians believed that naturally superior men could better understand the needs of the masses than the masses themselves, and that since equality of opportunity would exist, positions in the hierarchy were open to talent.⁶⁷

Of the Saint-Simonian movement, Theodore Zeldin in his classic *France, 1848-1945. vol. 1, Ambition, Love, Politics* argues that St. Simon was not interested in increasing the participation of people in government; he sought progress through public works and practical achievements which aimed for the “moral, intellectual and physical amelioration of the most numerous and poorest class.”⁶⁸ But St. Simon was not a democrat, nor did he oppose private ownership. He believed in a meritocracy and favored free trade and laissez faire economics.⁶⁹ He believed no society could exist without common moral ideas.⁷⁰

Enfantin turned St. Simon’s philosophy into a religion, “almost a monastic order,” according to Zeldin,⁷¹ but not without causing a schism among St. Simon’s followers. Insisting his disciples refer to him as Le Père and exhorting them to undertake a search for the ideal woman, La Mère, as well as having them wear

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Georg C. Iggers, *The Doctrine of Saint-Simon: An Exposition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), xxxviii.

⁶⁸ Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945: vol. 1, Ambition, Love, Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 434.

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid, 435.

⁷¹ Ibid, 436.

strange uniforms that buttoned at the back in order to remind individuals of their interdependence,⁷² Enfantin kept a closed society, discouraging his followers from too much interaction with the rest of the world. However, by 1848, the movement had fallen apart.⁷³ Enfantin's wing clustered together at his family estate, concentrating their efforts on finding the Female Messiah, until the association, heavily in debt, was closed down and declared illegal by the police in March 1832; Enfantin was sentenced to one year in prison for offenses against public order and morality.⁷⁴ Souvestre had left long before this, but he was in good company in both his dabbling with the movement during his youth and his departure from it later. "The importance of Saint-Simonianism in the future was to lie in the way of thinking it had imprinted in their youth on many subsequently important individuals."⁷⁵ Souvestre was only one of many nineteenth century European intellectuals who were deeply influenced by the Saint-Simonian movement during his youth.

The Saint-Simonians believed that history was divided into critical and organic eras; this enabled them to better accept the idea of a future society dominated by a theocratic society.⁷⁶ Many of the young men who flocked to the movement believed themselves to be members of a society which was passing through a time of "ideological and social crisis" following the 1789 Revolution, which symbolized the end of both the old regime and of the Christian feudal world view, while at the same time, entering a new era for which modern philosophers had provided no guide to the

⁷² Ibid, 437.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, xxxix.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jack S. Bakunin, "Pierre Leroux on Democracy, Socialism, and the Enlightenment," Journal of the History of Ideas, 37, no 3 (1976): 456.

future.⁷⁷ “The sense that an old world had been destroyed combined with the feeling that nothing was at hand with which to begin building a new [world] created a sense of desperation of or “isolation” in which many idealistic youth who sought to find their bearings in a world which seemed grounded on shifting sand.”⁷⁸ However, it was Enfantin’s deviation from St. Simon and advocacy for free love, which caused a schism within the movement. Bazard and his supporters seceded; Bazard himself died a year later of a stroke.⁷⁹ Enfantin’s very flexible attitude toward marriage, influenced by Fourier, incorporated the belief that “while some people develop deep attachments lasting their entire lives, others have very mobile affections and are in constant need of change.”⁸⁰ Thus, in Enfantin’s view:

A lifelong marriage suited the former; the latter could be happy only by moving from partner to partner. Enfantin permeated his new ethics with the theocratic concept of the Saint-Simonian priesthood. A priest was an all-powerful personage who used all his means to influence and direct his followers. Enfantin felt that it was permissible for priests to have sexual relations with their inferiors in order to control them more easily.⁸¹

Enfantin view of sexuality as a means to solidify hierarchical control, as well as his openness toward multiple sexual partners, hastened the split between supporters of Bazard, including Souvestre, and himself.

A series of debates followed during the summer and fall of 1831, particularly between Enfantin and Bazard.⁸² Ultimately, Bazard chose to withdraw from the new religion, but the stormy meetings were not over; indeed, on November 19, 1831,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid .

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 457.

⁸¹ Ibid, 458.

⁸² Ibid.

Enfantin brought the issue of rehabilitation of the flesh and other issues directly before all the members; many of whom explicitly expressed their doubts as to whether or not they could remain in a movement whose leader sponsored such an unconventional doctrine. Enfantin challenged any who could not accept his teachings and authority to leave, and many did.⁸³ Souvestre was among them.⁸⁴

Feminism within the Saint-Simonian Movement

While Souvestre's emphasis on social justice and concern for the working poor reflect a social Catholicism and paternalism native to his area, the concern with feminist issues, emphasis on equality, and education for women does not echo any major movement of activist Catholic circles of that era. In contrast, his passionate emphasis on these issues echoes the central focus of the Saint-Simonian movement. Further, Souvestre's "feminism" is a Saint-Simonian feminism, emphasizing what followers of the movement believed to be the natural differences and abilities of the sexes.

St. Simon did not personally address the issue of women's equality to any great extent. He did suggest that the rule of "brute force" must be overcome by relying on spiritual powers, and further suggested that sexual equality would be a natural result in the utopia he sought to create.⁸⁵ Fourier was far more influential on the Saint-Simonians regarding the equality of women, and the religious movement was very vocal, unlike their founder, in advocating for the equality of women and

⁸³ Ibid, 459.

⁸⁴ Plötner, "Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien," 239.

⁸⁵ Goldstein, Leslie. "Early Feminist Themes in French Utopian Socialism: The St. Simonians and Fourier." Journal of the History of Ideas, 43, no. 1 (1982): 92.

their education rights.⁸⁶ “Fourier, in fact, is credited by modern scholars with having originated the word ‘féministe.’ But even before Fourier’s ideas attracted widespread attention in France, those of his rivals, the Saint-Simonians, enjoyed quite a vogue. The Saint-Simonians, *unlike* their supposed mentor, Comte Claude de Saint-Simon, openly espoused the cause of complete social and political equality for women.”⁸⁷

Claire G. Moses argues that the Saint-Simonian school reorganized itself into a religion on a Catholic, hierarchical model during the years 1828-1829. At that point, they became increasingly preoccupied with the issue of women’s equality and status, and the woman question became increasingly important to them, until by 1831 this ‘became the central problem for Saint-Simonism and the collective obsession of its followers.’⁸⁸ Indeed, it would influence Souvestre all his life, abundantly evidenced throughout all of his writings. Moses argues that what precisely the Saint-Simonians meant by sexual equality was never entirely plain; they had “lengthy ideological debates to define the exact meaning of sexual equality”⁸⁹ from 1829 right up to the schism in 1831, and “each issue that was debated caused some Saint-Simonians to defect while leaving Prosper Enfantin more completely in charge of the remaining “faithful.”⁹⁰ Souvestre, in fact, is known to have written a letter of protest which was presented at the November 19 meeting in which Enfantin invited those

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 92-3.

⁸⁸ Claire G. Moses, “Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women: The Transformation of Feminist Thought in 1930s France,” The Journal of Modern History, 54, no 2 (1982): 243.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

who disagreed with whose views to leave. It was shortly after that meeting that Souvestre did leave the movement, following Bazard and Bazard's other supporters.⁹¹

The Saint-Simonian view of feminism did both presume and emphasize what it perceived as natural differences between women and men. Men were believed to represent "reflection" while women were seen to represent "sentiment."⁹² Men were perceived as being rational, intellectual creatures who created theories, but who at the same time were dismal, heavy, cold, and harsh.⁹³ In contrast, women were believed to have been provided by nature with a "soul that is tender, sensitive, exalted" and to have "emotions that are gentle and poetic, a warm imagination, and fire in their hearts; they announce the reign of peace and love."⁹⁴

Claire Goldberg Moses and Leslie Wahl Rabine further argue that this vision of social equality for women, on the one hand took women's equality much farther than Cabet and Mill but on the other hand, seemed to relegate women to permanently unequal status.⁹⁵ Moses and Rabine also note that the Saint-Simonians specifically criticized the modern marriage institution which they believed to perpetuate a double standard of sexual morality in addition to abominably inequitable property relations;⁹⁶ they also objected to its rule that the wife be obedient and do the housework; even insisting that "in the Saint-Simonian future, wives, as equal to their husbands, would no longer change their names."⁹⁷ Leslie Goldstein notes that at Enfantin's family

⁹¹ Plötner, "Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien," 239.

⁹² Moses, "Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women," 243.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Claire Goldberg Moses and Leslie Wahl Rabine, *Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 94.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Moses and Rabine, *Feminism, Socialism and French Romanticism*, 67.

⁹⁷ Goldstein, "Early Feminist Themes in French Utopian Socialism," 94.

estate at Ménilmontant, men and women shared equally in performing common household tasks, and that women held prominent leadership roles.⁹⁸

However, Goldberg also cautions that there is much regarding Saint-Simonian doctrine which would give today's feminists serious pause. Couples, rather than individuals, were to be rewarded by the state in accordance with their works in the Saint-Simonian utopia. Women themselves were to be granted little individual freedom; the Saint-Simonians even believed that women should not have a role in the public sphere because their perfection could be tainted.⁹⁹ Souvestre's writings reflect this Saint-Simonian type of feminism, where women are believed to differ from men and be best suited to private, sentimental, supportive roles.

Alternative Views Regarding Jesus within Socialistic Communities

During the mid-nineteenth century, a variety of views regarding the human, social, and spiritual nature of Jesus propounded. Many of the emerging socialistic groups claimed their inspiration from Christ, citing the Gospels and Paul's descriptions of the earliest Christian communities as models for how their ideal communities would live. The Catholic Church (Vatican) and Protestant churches increasingly eschewed the socialist communities. Indeed, at the end of the century Pope Leo XIII would issue several encyclicals and documents distancing Catholic teaching from socialism and calling on Catholics to repudiate association with socialist movements. It was necessary for Leo, and for other Christian leaders, to do so, because despite the practice of free love and some other unorthodox practices

⁹⁸Ibid, 95

⁹⁹ Ibid.

among the socialists which some were beginning to argue contradicted Christian teaching, the socialists' recasting of Jesus as a revolutionary who had been crucified by the establishment on behalf of the people – poor, working people – was taken up among Catholics and Protestants themselves.

Most early socialists and communists, in contrast to their late nineteenth and early twentieth century successors, separated Jesus from the established churches, particularly from the Catholic Church, and held him up as a kind of model, if not to be worshipped – and many did think he was to be worshipped – then certainly to be emulated.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, many thought they would replicate Paul's description of the earliest Christian communities, described in Acts of the Apostles Chapter 2: 44-46:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart¹⁰¹

Pamela Pilbeam writes, “they were inclined to describe their own organizations as sects, their ideas as a faith, their leaders almost to divine status, and to enroll Jesus as an acolyte.”¹⁰² One of the earliest such movements, paralleling the Saint-Simonian religious movement (which emerged from, but should not be confused with the philosophical school, and though St. Simon himself had written a generation before), was Cabet's Icarian community, with the claim “Le christianisme c'est la fraternité,

¹⁰⁰ Pilbeam, Pamela: “Dream Worlds? Religion and the Early Socialists in France.” The Historical Journal, 43, no. 2 (2000): 499.

¹⁰¹ New American Bible, Acts of the Apostles 2: 44-46.

¹⁰² Pilbeam, “Dream Worlds,” 500.

c'est le communisme," and Christ was 'le prince des communistes.'"¹⁰³ Pilbeam argues that Cabet did not believe, however, that Icarian communism was merely a *new* Christianity, as Saint-Simon's vision might be described, but in reality was the *true* Christianity.¹⁰⁴

Pilbeam and Frank Paul Bowman both argue that references to the teachings of Christ are a recurring theme among the teachings of most early socialists, most of whom held a deep, if unorthodox, reverence for Jesus; indeed, everyone wanted to appropriate Jesus for the socialist cause. It is therefore important to clarify that the intellectuals with whom Souvestre associated did not despise Jesus; they despised the authority of the established churches and most specifically, of the Catholic Church. However, at the same time, the Saint-Simonians, deeply admired and wished to emulate that authority. Though Souvestre withdrew from the Catholic Church during his youth, he always identified as a Christian and would ultimately reassert the Catholic faith of his youth.

Frank Paul Bowman, in his seminal work *Le Christ des Barricades*, points out that many socialists embraced Jesus as the figurehead of their cause. He argues, in fact, that the 1789 Revolution marked a change in the discourse regarding the nature of Jesus and his relationship with the people; prior to the Revolution, Jesus served as a role model; the Catholic Church taught that the people should accept their abject poverty and other suffering as the lamb of God had accepted his own suffering.¹⁰⁵ However, the Revolution of 1789 evoked a new image of Jesus - the sans-culotte, friend of the poor, advocate of charity and brotherly love, enemy of aristocrats, victim

¹⁰³ Pilbeam, 501

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Frank Paul Bowman, *Le Christ des barricades, 1789-1848*, (Paris, Cerf: 1987), 12).

of an unjust power.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the clergy themselves were divided, Bowman argues, in the years following the revolution. Those priests who had refused the oath of fidelity to France and recognition of official dechristianization with the National Assembly's passage of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (refractory priests), who upheld the idea of Christian obedience and hierarchy, saw the Revolution as a "diabolic event," a punishment imposed on a guilty France.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, priests (constitutional priests) who had taken the oath saw in Jesus a patriot, and in the Revolution an opportunity to return to early Christianity.¹⁰⁸ These divergent views among the clergy were also present among people, and in the emerging "social Christian" response.

Motivated by an emerging "social Christian" movement, the clergy originally supported the 1848 revolution, presenting Christ as a "prophet of the Republic, who had preached liberty, equality, fraternity,"¹⁰⁹ the sacrifice of the revolutionaries paralleling Jesus's sacrifice.¹¹⁰ The attitude of the clergy would change, however, between February and June. Middle class Catholics and their clergy were appalled at the violence, many of whom distanced themselves from the concept of a "Christ of the barricades" in the aftermath of that violent year.¹¹¹

St. Simon and Fourier laid a strong emphasis on promoting the brotherly love that Christ had so encouraged, but it was their disciples, who developed the concept of Jesus as socialist.¹¹² It is likely that Souvestre believed his conversion to Saint-Simonianism was in keeping with Christian principles. As discussed above, he

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 21.

¹¹⁰ Ibid 22.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Bowman, *Le Christ des Barricades*, 167.

described his very involvement with the movement as a political Christianity in a letter to his close friend Guépin.¹¹³ Souvestre was known, however, to have strong feelings regarding the misuse of power and arrogance among the Catholic hierarchy,¹¹⁴ a sentiment prevalent in Souvestre's home region of Finistère.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless (as addressed in subsequent sections in this paper), Souvestre would ultimately leave the Saint Simonian movement, strongly assert his Christianity – a major theme in all of his writings – and he would never convert to Protestantism even though the very influential and famous Protestant minister, Alexandre Vinet, would be a major mentor to Souvestre until Vinet's death. Souvestre expresses discontent with the Catholic hierarchy in many of his writings. In only one major work does he strongly assert the legitimacy of the Catholic Church, but he does make it very evident in *The World As It Shall Be* that he feels that the Catholic Church has his continued loyalty (see below).

Saint-Simonianism was focused on the “divine morality” which when summed up is to love your brother; while that is the “sum of the law” for all major Christian religions, the logical conclusion follows that if everyone is loving his brother, everyone must be focused on improving the lot of the lowest classes.¹¹⁶ For all that, St. Simon himself was in many respects deeply anti-clerical, writing, for example, in *the New Christianity*:

Never have there been so many good Christians, but today they are to be found almost entirely among the laity. The Christian religion, since the fifteenth century, has lost its unity of action. Since that time there has no longer been a Christian clergy. All the clergy who today try to graft their own

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Markham, *Henri de Saint-Simon*, 85.

opinions, ethic, forms of worship and dogma on to the principle of morality which mankind has received from God are heretics, because their opinions, ethics, dogmas and forms of worship are to a greater or less degree in opposition to the divine morality. The most powerful Church of all is also the one which is most heretical.¹¹⁷

While on the one hand, St. Simon envisioned a new Christianity with a hierarchy modeling that of the Catholic church, he nevertheless was suspicious of the institutional Catholic clergy.

Iggers writes that the Catholic Restoration traditionalists, such as Chateaubriand, were also deeply influenced by the Saint-Simonians, in that both the Catholic Restoration traditionalists and the Saint-Simonians viewed society as part of an organic whole and placed an emphasis on the value of authority and hierarchy.¹¹⁸ In this respect, influence was probably a two-way relationship, as the Saint-Simonians based their model on the Catholic Church as well. Nevertheless, Iggers argues, the Saint-Simonian idea went much further. “The organic authoritarian idea was merged with modern rationalism: unlike the *philosophes*, the Saint-Simonians did not see in reason an epistemological tool open to every rational individual for the attainment of truth, but rather an instrument of total and systematic planning.”¹¹⁹ Iggers argues that as a result of Saint-Simonianism’s complete identification of religion with society, Saint-Simonianism was nothing really but a secular Catholicism, with religion playing a mere “social link” in a society in which the church, constituting the government, would function politically.¹²⁰ He writes, “The marks of the French-Catholic religious tradition, and of the centralistic bureaucratic

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Iggers, *The Doctrine of Saint-Simone*, xxxviii.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Markham, *Henri de Saint-Simon*, 85.

political tradition, are evident on almost every page of the *Doctrine*. The analysis of types of religious institutions in the literature of modern sociology of religion may throw some light on the social implications of the Saint-Simonian conception of the church.”¹²¹ Additionally, Iggers sees the church, whether Saint-Simonian or Catholic, as a non-voluntary association. Members of both must attend rituals without questioning meaning; the church claims possession of an objective truth which can be explicitly understood only by the select,¹²² and therefore distinguishes between professional religious and laity, establishing hierarchical, centralized control.¹²³ The Saint-Simonians saw the Catholic Church as a role model, but intended to go much further in the application of autocracy; Iggers argues that the thorough application of Saint-Simonian ideals would have led to the establishment of nothing short of totalitarianism.

Souvestre's Departure from Saint-Simonianism: the Influence of Jules Michelet and Alexandre Vinet

Souvestre's departure from Saint-Simonianism to Republicanism is not unique. Jack S. Bakunin argues that a substantial number of prominent Saint-Simonians would go on to build careers as republicans and democratic socialists. “The Saint-Simonians developed a following after the July Revolution only by attracting large numbers of the republican youth who could not, however, long remain

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Iggers, *The Doctrine of Saint-Simone*, xxxviii.

¹²³ Markham, *Henri de Saint-Simon*, 85.

comfortable with an ideology that preached the value of theocratic hierarchy.”¹²⁴

What is unique about Souvestre is that he carved out a career as a republican yet a devoted Christian. His exit from the movement was influenced greatly by the French historian, Jules Michelet, and the Swiss Protestant theologian, Alexandre Vinet.¹²⁵

Neither Vinet nor Michelet was a strong supporter of the Catholic Church. Michelet was a very strong supporter of the Enlightenment, and of the French Revolution as manifestation of the Enlightenment. Michelet, concerned with the nature of justice, seemed to place “the Revolution squarely in opposition to the Christian ideal of arbitrary grace.”¹²⁶ Indeed, in *History of the French*, written just a month after his own father’s death, Michelet credited Voltaire and Rousseau as the “fathers” of his own post-revolutionary generation as well as for having shaped his father’s generation’s very worldview.¹²⁷ Bakunin argues that Michelet’s *History* criticizes the “party of liberty” for what Michelet perceives to be compromises with the Church and which he further believes amounted to a denial of the Republic’s “father.” Michelet’s argument seems to reflect guilt over his own earlier celebration of medieval Catholicism, of which his own father had disapproved. Michelet tended to focus on the “purely abstract character of the revolutionary ideal of justice”¹²⁸ juxtaposed against his perception of the “carnal, material, corrupt and unjust values of the Church and State of the Old Regime (exemplified in the doctrine of original sin).”¹²⁹ Whereas humanity, damned through original sin, were connected through a

¹²⁴ Bakunin, “Pierre Leroux,” 457.

¹²⁵ Plötner, “Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien,” 239

¹²⁶ Bakunin, “Pierre Leroux,” 457.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

false fraternity of slavery, the Revolution offered a fraternity based on the “love of human beings, on mutual duty, on Right and Justice,”¹³⁰ and this last was an Enlightenment ideal that was purely spiritual: the body has nothing to do with it.”¹³¹

Michelet’s affirmation of the Enlightenment certainly represented a departure from Saint-Simonian thought. “At the beginning of the nineteenth century, socialist thinkers were part of the contemporary reaction against eighteenth-century liberal and egalitarian ideas. These ideas, it then appeared, had brought on a revolution in which men had tried to remake European society, but had succeeded only in bringing on unending upheavals and wars: the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers had led to revolutionary chaos but could not...bring society out of that chaos.”¹³² In fact, during the period of the 1840s, Michelet became a father figure to many radical intellectual youth.¹³³ Michelet would later become more radical, but “in Michelet’s political vision of the 1840s, his celebration of the people had been of a piece with the revolutionary Republicanism that was prominent among the bourgeois intellectuals before 1848.”¹³⁴ This probably appealed to Souvestre, who celebrated the Breton folk, “.....and it occurred within a social-romantic context that made his hosannas compatible with more general principles of harmony between man and woman and between the human and natural worlds.”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Arthur Mitzman, “Michelet, Danton, and the Corruption of Revolutionary Virtue,” Journal of the History of Ideas, 48, no. 3 (1987): 457.

¹³² Bakunin, “Pierre Leroux,” 455.

¹³³ Mitzman, Arthur. “Michelet and Social Romanticism: Religion, Revolution, Nature.” Journal of the History of Ideas, 57, no. 4 (1996): 659-682.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Arthur Mitzman, “Michelet and the Republican Vision, 1868-70: The Policing of Eros,” Journal of the History of Sexuality, 3, no. 1 (1992): 29.

Significantly, “Michelet viewed history as the eternal struggle of human freedom against material and social ‘fatality’ [in which] the victory of French liberalism in 1830 was....a high point in that struggle.”¹³⁶ This would put him fundamentally at odds with the historical view of the Saint-Simonians, and influence Souvestre.

Souvestre was also deeply influenced by Alexandre Vinet, with whom he became acquainted in 1836, and who influenced Souvestre’s departure from the Saint-Simonian movement.¹³⁷ As a professor of rhetoric at Mulhouse, Souvestre sought Vinet out at Bale, where he taught French literature. Vinet was a well-known liberal Christian theologian whose writings on freedom of religion were popular in the Saint-Simonian circle, including with Carnot and Charton, and Vinet had been a theologian at the university of Lausanne and the founder of an independent church.¹³⁸ He was also a moralist, but it was his liberal Christianity, a rarity in France, which attracted Souvestre. Vinet supported Souvestre through a period of difficulty when his book, *Riche et Pauvre*, was banned, and the two maintained a correspondence and close friendship until Vinet’s death in 1847.¹³⁹

Vinet was a Protestant minister and theologian from Lausanne, Switzerland. Vinet would have appealed to the moralist in Souvestre because, like Souvestre, the minister also emphasized matters of conscience and morality. Vinet spoke strongly in support of the separation of church and state, which, as a legally enshrined structure, would make possible something else he held dear – the freedom of religion. His

¹³⁶ Arthur Mitzman, “Michelet and Social Romanticism: Religion, Revolution, Nature.” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57, no. 4 (1996): 661.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Plötner “Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien,” 239.

¹³⁹ Plötner, “Émile Souvestre, Écrivain Breton et Saint-Simonien,” 239.

position made him popular and widely read in both France and in England, as well as in his native Switzerland. Vinet and his works were at the center of French Protestants' attempts to reconcile the contrasting strains of 18th century rationalism and 19th century romanticism, culminating in the period between the July Monarchy and the 1848 revolution.¹⁴⁰ Osen argues that the French Reformed Church, though originally started by Calvin, had during the Enlightenment negated many traditional Calvinist tenets, strongly emphasizing human progress, which contradicted the traditional Calvinist assertion of sanctification – the belief that improvement was only possible with God's help – and rejecting such traditional Calvinist tenets as total depravity and predestination.¹⁴¹ Liberal Calvinist thinkers of the early nineteenth century attempted to “reconcile their faith with the ideas of the age”¹⁴² but they “were careful to pursue a reconciliation and not an abandonment of Christianity.”¹⁴³ They preferred instead to emphasize that mankind – made in God's image and with Christ as a model of perfection – could indeed strive for improvement, with God's help.¹⁴⁴ They favored freedom of conscience and rejected rigid confessions of faith.¹⁴⁵ These theologians heavily emphasized morality, which could be taught with proper instruction, and which they believed people truly wanted because the people would understand that morality, rather than dogma, would bring true happiness.¹⁴⁶ Other Calvinists were influenced and motivated by anti-rationalist trends, particularly romanticism, which J. Lynn Osen argues helped prepare “the way for the growth of

¹⁴⁰ J. Lynn Osen, “The Theological Revival in the French Reformed Church 1830-1852,” *Church History*, 37, no. 1 (1968): 36.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

an emotional type of Christianity among both French Catholics and Calvinists.”¹⁴⁷ British and Swiss Methodists and other pietists endorsed this approach and they “sent evangelists, armed with Bibles, New Testaments, and religious tracts, who taught that man was sinful by nature, but could achieve salvation by means of a personal and emotional conversion experience.”¹⁴⁸ This latter group was influenced by more orthodox Calvinist tenets, which shunned personal belief and reason, and called for the critical interpretation of the Bible in favor of a more literal interpretation and confessions of faith.¹⁴⁹

Alexandre Vinet embraced a moderate orthodoxy and had a strong influence on French orthodoxy.¹⁵⁰ A professor of practical theology at the University of Lausanne, Vinet was concerned with maintaining and enforcing a confession of faith. When the civil authorities in his province, the Vaud, abolished the Helvetic Confession, Vinet resigned from the ministry in protest, started his own church, L’Eglise Libre, and became committed to advocating on behalf of total separation between church and state.¹⁵¹ He argued that state protection would eventually lead to persecution and in some ways was already a means of persecution in that recognition of one church meant exclusion of others; he also argued that only an individual in an independent church was free to discover the essential truths of religion.¹⁵² When Vinet resigned as professor, he persuaded one hundred and sixty others to do the same.¹⁵³ Vinet believed that individualism and individuality were “sworn

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 40.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

enemies,”¹⁵⁴ equating individualism with anarchy and thus seeing it as a destructive force, whereas individuality represented a “principle to which society owes all its savor, life, and reality.”¹⁵⁵ While Souvestre never became a Presbyterian, the radical Christianity which formed the centerpiece of Vinet’s life also suffused Souvestre’s writings.

Catholicism in Finistère and How it May Have Influenced Souvestre’s Writings

While Souvestre’s youthful dalliances may have provided some inspiration for the ideals behind his works, he rebuked these in later life and embraced Catholicism. Souvestre’s experimentation with a socialistic movement could have been reflective of a community-based unease with Catholic hierarchy and common good values. Caroline Ford argues that Breton identity was heavily influenced by a social Catholicism which did not fit easily into “standard interpretations of French political alignments.”¹⁵⁶ Rather, this social Catholicism that fit so naturally into the Finistère psyche shared elements of both left and right wing nineteenth century French political ideology, and at the same time, “played a vital role in creating a national consciousness at the periphery even as it defended local attachments and allegiances.”¹⁵⁷ Ford focuses in particular on the area of Finistère, which includes Morlaix, where Souvestre was born and raised, so it would make sense that her theory regarding the views of residents of Finistère would apply to Souvestre as well. Ford suggests that in the Lower Breton peninsula, where everyone, including the men

¹⁵⁴ Steven Lukes, “The Meanings of ‘Individualism,’” Journal of the History of Ideas, 32, no. 1 (1971): 49.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation State in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 7.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

(unlike in the rest of France, where male participation in religious service became increasingly infrequent), faithfully participated on a regular basis in religious service and the parish priest enjoyed greater prestige than in other parts of France.¹⁵⁸ Ford also points out that while relationships between clergy and nobility were strained in other parts of France by the end of the nineteenth century, often as a result of personal rivalries, that relationship remained closer both ideologically and financially in the lower Breton region, an idea which has been discussed and treated in depth by other scholars.¹⁵⁹ Yet in some areas of Brittany, including the department of Finistère on which Ford concentrates and from which Souvestre originated, Ford argues that the “lower clergy . . . severed their ties with the nobility by repudiating their royalist convictions and espousing social Catholic republican ideals.”¹⁶⁰ This would go far to explain the writings of Souvestre, which deeply espouse a strong loyalty toward both the Republic, but also a deep Christian faith which, in *The World as it Shall Be*, is clarified as not just Christian, but Catholic.

While religious devotion permeated and shaped the very structure of Breton life well into the 1950s, the official religion of Catholicism was very much grafted onto popular religious practices and beliefs, in particular, ancient, pre-Christian, Celtic beliefs.¹⁶¹ Indeed, Souvestre's stories are deeply imbued with Celtic folklore staples such as kourigans, washerwomen, and seasonal practices, echoing the work of another famous Breton writer, Pierre Hélias.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 67.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 68.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

It is useful to consider the relationship the lower clergy had with the constituents of Finistère, for several scholars assert that as early as the Revolution, they represented dissent against the old regime, as well as a means of mediation between the community and France at large. In this view, the lower clergy did not represent a hierarchical alliance with the nobility or upper clergy; in fact, the clergy would be seen as vocally acting against the interests of the upper clergy and nobility, very much in solidarity with the third estate. Souvestre, then, was born and raised in an area in which the parish priest mediated on behalf of the lower classes with the upper classes and the outside world, and at the same time voiced his own dissent – which may have echoed the parishioners’ dissent - against the upper classes and the outside world.¹⁶² So from an early age, Catholic practice would on the one hand have suffused his every day experience, while on the other, dissent against the hierarchical practices may also have been the norm.

Ford asserts, based on Souvestre’s writings from *Les Derniers Paysans*,¹⁶³ that the role of the priest went far beyond the spiritual. Indeed, the fact that he spoke French automatically placed him in the role of mediator with the outside world, functioning not only as a source of information - and perhaps of welfare – the priest’s ability to speak French and mediate with the outside world also made him a natural representative of the interests of the parish to the outside worlds.¹⁶⁴ This fact alone greatly increased his *secular* authority within the community, of which he was a deeply ingrained member, often coming from the peasant background himself. The fact that the parish priest generally originated from among the peasantry - local folk

¹⁶² Ford, *Creating the Nation State in Provincial France*, 67.

¹⁶³ Souvestre, *Les Derniers Paysans*, 191.

¹⁶⁴ Ford, *Creating the Nation State in Provincial France*, 67.

remembered seeing “only lately having left the plow” (Souvestre’s words) - reinforced his role as mediator, and also made it difficult for the new, foreign “state” of France, interloper that it was, to challenge the authority of the priest on his own ground.¹⁶⁵ Thus, Finistère and indeed, Brittany, were marked by a distinctive brand of rural clericalism.¹⁶⁶ The role of the parish priest in Finistère is important because in later years, the lower clergy would be very vocal in propelling the social Catholic movement and values that Souvestre himself advocated for in his own works.

Timothy Tackett argues that clerical structures within rural areas of lower Brittany, differed from those in other parts of France in terms of density, wealth, and clerical recruitment.¹⁶⁷ Parish priests in Lower Brittany may well have been more respected due to the manner in which tithes were collected and distributed, and because more than fifty percent of priests served in rural dioceses in which they had grown up.¹⁶⁸ Ralph Gibson argues that not only were parish priests in lower Brittany generally recruited from among the lower Breton peasantry, and felt very little loyalty to the aristocracy, they embraced the Republic with open arms. “If the clergy’s allegiance lay anywhere, it was with neither the nobility nor the ecclesiastical hierarchy, with which the lower Breton parish clergy was in continual conflict, but with Rome, which often adjudicated these conflicts.”¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, lower clergy in other areas – lacking the financial independence enjoyed by parish clergy in Brittany, and fearing to alienate their noble benefactors, who after all, supported their charities,

¹⁶⁵ Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 227.

¹⁶⁶ Ford, *Creating the Nation State in France*, 79.

¹⁶⁷ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 227.

¹⁶⁸ Timothy Tackett, “The West in France in 1789: The Religious Factor in the Origins of the Counterrevolution,” *Journal of Modern History* 54, no 4 (1982): 720-21.

¹⁶⁹ Ford, *Creating the Nation State in France*, 98.

did not rise to the Ralliement to the extent that priests from lower Brittany did. Because of this, historians have adopted a view of Breton social Catholicism or “clerical republicanism.”¹⁷⁰ Gibson, Tackett and Ford are all arguing that parishioners throughout Brittany mirrored their parish priests in their level of support for “France.” In many parts of Brittany, the clergy, who typically believe their interests were aligned with those of the nobility and the old regime, saw themselves in grave conflict with “France” and they did not particularly identify with “France,” much less support the Republic. In the lower Breton region, however, the clergy did not see their interests as remotely aligned with those of the second estate; they saw no conflict in identifying with “France” or in supporting the republic, to which they did indeed give their allegiance. Their parishioners’ comfort with the Republic reflected the lower clergy’s own sentiment.

Parish priests were poor in other parts of France, but not as poor in Finistère because, in addition to the pittance of a salary they received from the government, the priest derived a substantial income from fees performed for various sacraments and special masses as well as donations and gifts.¹⁷¹ These practices afforded the lower clergy “a degree of independence from the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the diocese and from the local chatelaine that was unknown in most other regions of France.”¹⁷² Thus, the lower clergy, largely made up of local peasantry from Finistère, sometimes voiced opposition with their ecclesiastical superiors of more noble birth and had the voice and the power to do so.¹⁷³ It was the lower clergy rather than the bishops who

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 99.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 86.

¹⁷² Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 229.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

had the direct relationship with and influence on the people of Finistère. It seems then that it was these priests, who increasingly in Finistère leaned toward social Catholicism, who may have influenced Souvestre's own social Catholic republicanism, so visible in his own writings. The full voice of the social Catholic movement was not necessarily heard in Souvestre's lifetime. However, by the late nineteenth century, "the lower clergy began to repudiate royalism and to reexamine their historic alliance with the nobility. In Finistère, the parish clergy went so far as to embrace the Republic, supporting social Catholic political candidates in opposition to royalist incumbents."¹⁷⁴ The lower clergy in the lower Breton region were able to thumb their noses at the hierarchy, in large part, because of their relative financial independence in comparison to parish priests in other regions.

Significantly, the tide of public opinion toward the revolution and the new "France" in Brittany did not turn against the revolution until the revolution turned against the clergy; in fact, in at least one parish, one of the priests was assigned president of the municipal assembly while a second was assigned to draw up the cahiers de doléances,¹⁷⁵ illustrating a grass roots level support for the basic, fundamental goals of the revolution in the area from which Souvestre originated. Also, supporting Souvestre's and Ford's points – the parish priest was the one who mediated with the outside world because he was the one who had the knowledge and know-how and language to do so, it would make sense to appoint the parish priest as head of the municipal assembly or to draw up the community's list of grievances; these were the leaders, after all. It was only with the enforcement of the Oath of the

¹⁷⁴ Ford, *Creating the Nation State in France*, 96 .

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 80.

Civil Constitution that the residents of Brittany turned against the revolution, as priests who refused to take the oath were then in the position that when they continued to perform their functions – vital functions in the everyday lives of the people – they were doing so illegally. “During the periods when the central government embarked on a campaign to dechristianize France and substitute the Catholic faith with the worship of the Supreme Being, local opposition to the state became particularly apparent.”¹⁷⁶ At the same time, the “foreign” state of France was seen to intrude in its efforts at conscription, sparking guerilla violence and counterrevolutionary violence.¹⁷⁷ Thus, the perception grew among the Bretons that it was they who supported liberty, against the foreign French intruders, who did not; such is precisely the language Souvestre’s characters use to describe the battles between the Blues and the Whites in *Les Derniers Paysans*.

“In lower Brittany the Revolution introduced, as it did elsewhere, national political issues and a new **political vocabulary** to a peasant population.”¹⁷⁸ However, at the same time, while official new departments were created and old regions disappeared, the authority of the parish priest was not at all diminished and the population did not slip into religious indifference.¹⁷⁹ Though during Souvestre’s lifetime, the clergy in Brittany were perceived to align themselves typically with the nobility, Ford argues that by the 1890s, “the lower clergy throughout western France began to repudiate royalism and to reexamine their historic alliance with the nobility. In Finistère, the parish clergy went so far as to embrace the Republic, supporting

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 81.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

social Catholic political candidates in opposition to royalist incumbents.”¹⁸⁰ It took time for this shift to occur. Souvestre’s writings exemplify the process that was already occurring in the hearts and minds of the people from Finistère.

There was strong support in Brittany for the Revolution – until the full scale campaign to remove the Church’s influence from French society was underway. Nevertheless, several scholars argue that in France in general, no one really called for the end to the church that the extreme revolutionaries ended up pursuing. Ralph Gibson argues that based on the *cahiers de doléances*, the Third Estate did want some fairly radical reforms in the Church, which included an end to the fiscal exemptions for the clergy and a more equitable distribution of the tithe – notably, with more of it going to lower clergy, who were drawn from the Third Estate, and less to the upper clergy and great monastic houses, who were drawn from and more closely aligned with the Second Estate.¹⁸¹ While some of the cahiers spoke of radical changes, very few suggested using even part of the Church’s wealth to pay the national debt; the cahiers revealed tremendous hostility to religious orders and to the wealthy upper clergy, but generally revealed great favor for the parish priest and spoke of the need for better conditions and remuneration of the lower clergy.¹⁸² Gibson makes explicitly plain that in the earliest days, the cahiers made no concerted effort to attack Catholicism or even to question its central role in the activities of the State.¹⁸³ Gibson also suggests that, according to the cahiers, many of the First Estate

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 97.

¹⁸¹ Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 31.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

were in agreement on some level with the complaints of the Third Estate cahiers; denouncing some of the same practices and suggesting some of the same reforms.¹⁸⁴

The body elected to represent the clergy – the First Estate – at Versailles – was dominated by parish priests, out of which came the “crucial majority which voted on 19 June to join with the Third Estate – crucial, because without it the Revolution might well have been stillborn. The vote was in fact a very near-run thing, and it has been argued that the narrow majority was not one for merging with the Third Estate, but merely for verification of powers in common.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, the parish priests had a lot of common views and goals with the third estate; the first and third estates shared a fundamental unity that was critical to the success of the initial revolution, but that completely shattered later.

Slightly over 50 percent of the parish clergy took the oath of loyalty to the Civil Constitution, suggesting that a large number of French Catholic priests, at least, “did not immediately reject the Revolution and all its works.”¹⁸⁶ Indeed, Gibson argues, “The blue areas would remain Catholic and favourable to the legacy of the Revolution well into the nineteenth century; it would take all the aggressively reactionary politics of the established Church to begin to weaken their Catholicism.”¹⁸⁷ With the rise of Napoleon, bishops gained more authority over parish priests than they enjoyed prior to the revolution: “Napoleon had intended that the bishops of France should be his ‘prefects in purple’, whose spiritual authority

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 34.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid 54.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

would back up that of the lay administration.”¹⁸⁸ As a result, the bishops under Napoleon enjoyed far greater control over the lower clergy than they ever had during the ancien regime. Also as a result, the lower clergy’s loyalty to Rome, as well as their sense of solidarity with the third estate, were greatly strengthened. However, as Gibson notes, “The new Episcopal absolutism did not of course go uncontested. From the 1830s onwards, the lower clergy looked increasingly to Rome as a counterweight to Rome as a counterweight to the otherwise untrammled authority of the bishops, and this was one of the major sources of the ‘ultramontane’ ideology that came to dominate the lower clergy.”¹⁸⁹ At the same time, while the 18th century nobility were not particularly religious, the opposite was true of the 19th century aristocrats, who tended to attend and graduate from Jesuit colleges. French nobles thus became increasingly sincere and active Catholics throughout the course of the 19th century, very involved with charitable and parish activities:

At the heart of the strengthened relationship between *chateau* and *presbytère*, however, was an unpleasant ambiguity: the religion so favoured by the nobility was served by priests from a very different social class. *Curés* and nobles usually did not get on together personally; the social abyss between them was too wide. The former often felt themselves slighted in aristocratic circles, and resented the not infrequent practice of treating them as glorified domestics. ...Class differences between *curés* and nobles in the Breton diocese were magnified by ethnic/cultural ones: the clergy sprang from the Breton peasantry, whereas the nobility was primarily francophone and locked into French national culture. Hostility simmered from the Restoration onwards.¹⁹⁰

Divisions between the lower and upper clergy grew during the nineteenth century and mirrored divisions between the peasants, from whom many of the lower clergy originated, and the nobility, who provided more of the members of the upper clergy.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 60 .

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 60-61.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 194-195

In *La Question Laïque*, Jean Mayeur reinforces this idea, arguing that the frequent association of the republican, anticlericalism, and laicity, didn't necessarily always go together. Anticlericalism had its roots in the old regime, well before the advent of the republic, in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. "De la Deuxième à la Troisième République, la France passe d'une République qui ignore la laïcité, et qui se veut d'esprit religieux, à une République laïque et marquée pendant des décennies par l'anticléricisme. La Deuxième République, en 1848, ne fut pour l'essentiel nullement anticléricale, et elle ne fut en rien laïque..... Les débuts de la République paraissent illustrer le rêve de Tocqueville d'une réconciliation du christianisme et de la démocratie, forte du concours des forces spirituelles."¹⁹¹

What Bretons opposed about the Revolution was not so much the ideals of the Revolution itself but the point at which it began to step on the Church's toes.¹⁹² For example, one rector of a church in Finistère expressed that he could not take the Oath because it diverted apostolic authority, passing it through the hands of the state rather than through bishops, which was unacceptable.¹⁹³ For those who did not take the Oath – a majority of priests in Brittany – "there was much more involved than a jurisdictional struggle between Church and state. In the eyes of these clergymen, the real issue was nothing less than an attack by the forces of philosophy against both the clergy and religion itself."¹⁹⁴ According to these scholars, had the state not undertaken to control or attack Catholicism, it is highly permissible that the lower

¹⁹¹ Jean-Marie Mayeur, "Démocratie chrétienne et régionalisme," in *Regions et Régionalisme en France du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours*, ed. Christian Gras and Georges Livet, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977), 29-30.

¹⁹² Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 62-63.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 63.

clergy if not the higher echelons of clerical authority would have been very supportive of revolutionary efforts.

Nevertheless, a growing “social Catholicism” which began to develop in the mid-nineteenth century may have had fertile grounds in France, and particularly in Brittany, because of a general dechristianization which took place during the 18th century and was completed, in many ways, because of the Revolution. As Gibson points out, even after the Revolution, indeed to this day, large segments of the French population never totally abandoned Catholicism. What they abandoned, Gibson argues, was a particular model of Catholicism – Tridentine Catholicism.¹⁹⁵ Yet even though post-Trent Catholicism maintained a stronghold in Brittany, it competed and fused with the older traditions of pre-Christian Brittany, as well.

The stridently anticlerical radicals preached a morality that in reality was not very different from that of the Catholics.¹⁹⁶ Thus, Zeldin says, “French politics cannot be seen simply as the clash of two ideologies, or even a number of them.”¹⁹⁷ Zeldin argues that the Church was not comprised solely of intransigents who rallied to the Monarchy. Many were progressives, who in fact appeared too radical for some middle class republicans. Among them were Jesuits who had anticipated Rousseau’s idea of the natural goodness of man, arguing that human nature should be cultivated rather than denied, that man was not irretrievably fallen, that rational, as opposed to saintly, living was a commendable, ideal.¹⁹⁸ In many ways, Zeldin suggests, the battle became driven more by anger than by real differences, obscuring the many

¹⁹⁵ Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism*, 29.

¹⁹⁶ Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945*, 386.

¹⁹⁷ Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945*, 391.

¹⁹⁸ Theodore Zeldin, *Conflicts in French Society: Anticlericalism, Education, and Morals in the Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Allen & Unwin, 1970), 36.

considerable similarities between the anticlerical radicals and the Church, particularly regarding both camps' very bourgeois approach to morality. He asks, "Did the republicans, who were so firmly determined to found an independent state lay system of moral education, in fact wish to give the individual greater freedom in his personal conduct? How puritan or how liberal were the republicans?"¹⁹⁹ In fact, Zeldin continues, the republicans were far more fragmented than the Catholics and thus cannot be said to have followed any single moral code; nor were they, however, interested in producing new rules of conduct when those of the Church served just fine.²⁰⁰ Zeldin quotes Jules Ferry to make his point: the lay schools had the duty "to teach only one morality, that is the good old morality of our fathers."²⁰¹ In other words, Catholic morality remained the standard even among the anti-clerical leftists.²⁰²

As for the Catholic reformers of the 1830s and 1840s, in many ways they were more concerned with social than political change. In other words, they were more concerned with what was quickly emerging as the new, "social Catholicism."²⁰³ Oscar Leon Arnal looks at newspaper subscriptions to make the case that Brittany was a stronghold for the emerging social Catholicism in Souvestre's lower Brittany, and that it remained so over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Focusing specifically on the daily newspaper, *L'Ouest-Éclair*, Arnal

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Les Débuts du Catholicisme Social en France 1822 – 1870*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), 59.

argues that the fact that *L'Ouest Éclair* carried a constituency of over 100,000 readers by the First World War indicated that its “unique mélange of Catholicism and republicanism was found to be more appealing to Breton readers than the ultra rightist views of its competitors L'Action Française, Le Journal de Rennes, and Le Nouvelliste de Bretagne.”²⁰⁴

He continues, pointing out:

It was in Brittany and western France that massive rallies and demonstrations were organized against the anti-Catholic efforts of both the Combes government and Edouard Herriot's Cartel des Gauches. Indeed, in the Third Republic, Brittany became the paradigm of political reaction and religious defense. Nevertheless, it is here that Christian Democracy has been most tenacious and most successful. In this most conservative sector of France, Catholic democrats were able to organize, survive, and even thrive, and this in spite of hefty opposition of lay Catholic ultra conservatism and the Breton hierarchy.”²⁰⁵

Ford mentions that “although social Catholicism as a social and political ideology had been an integral part of the French political and social landscape since the 1840s” –it was also a major force during Souvestre's lifetime but points out that “it did not gain widespread political support as a **political movement** until the end of the 19th century.” Different types of social Catholicism emerged during the 1830s and 1840s. Some who were drawn to social Catholicism emphasized social duties, specifically those of the rich toward the poor, but others “advocated social justice and a democratic republic based on universal manhood suffrage in the 1830s and 1840s.”²⁰⁶

Additionally, Ford argues that while these groups “shared a common rejection of a

²⁰⁴ Oscar Leon Arnal, “The Nature and Success of Breton Christian Democracy: Example of l'Ouest Éclair,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 68 (1982): 229.

²⁰⁵ Oscar Leon Arnal, “French Catholics Left and Right,” Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1978, 327.

²⁰⁶ Ford, *Creating the Nation State in France*, 100.

social and economic order predicated on liberal principles that advocated Christian, corporatists solutions to the ills afflicting industrial society, they can be divided into two distinct camps: First, the aristocratic and paternalistic emphasized Christian charity, social reconciliation, and the duties of the rich to the poor. Second, the democratic accepted the political fact of the Revolution of 1789 and stressed principles of social justice rather than charity.”²⁰⁷ It seems that Émile Souvestre must fall into this second camp.

Certainly, top-down, paternalistic, aristocratic sponsorship of Catholic charities such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul acted on behalf of the poor and destitute in Brittany and throughout France. However, another movement dating from the early nineteenth century took a different approach to helping the poor – one which has overtaken the earlier charitable view in Vatican teaching and plays a prominent role, in fact, in Catholic social teaching worldwide today: that of social justice and the pursuit of that which emphasizes societies’ and individuals’ obligations to strive after that which promotes both individual dignity and the common good. This sense of dual obligation to individual dignity and the common good, outlined in papal encyclicals repeatedly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is echoed in Souvestre’s teachings. However, the early years of the rise of social Catholic movement were controversial, in opposition to the more paternalistic approach.

In France, it was started by Breton patriarchs Felicité de Lamennais, Père Lacordaire, and Comte Charles Forbes de Montalembert, all founding the journal *L’Avenir* in 1830 with the motto “God and Liberty” and encouraging French

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Catholics to question the historic relationship between the monarchy and the Church in France, especially as it had existed since the Revolution.²⁰⁸ Montalembert believed separation of church and state would afford the church greater autonomy; he also advocated universal manhood suffrage, freedom of the press, and freedom of association.²⁰⁹ Not surprisingly, the magazine was condemned by the papacy, the writers forced to make a declaration of doctrinal submission; Lamennais refused and became quite embittered toward the Church, spending much of the remainder of his life expressing his resentment and disappointment. Lacordaire distanced himself from Lamennais and remade himself, poised himself for a comeback and founded *L'Ere Nouvelle*, in the spring of 1848. Though the journal can be seen as an attack on liberalism, some argue that it “inaugurated the first popular movement in France that could be characterized as Christian Democratic.” The movement never won the support of the church hierarchy, and in fact further exacerbated tension between the republican Left and the Church.²¹⁰

According to Ford, “The origin of the democratic variety of social Catholicism of the 1890s also dates from the early attempts to reconcile the church with modern French society during the Restoration and July Monarchy.”²¹¹ The social Catholic movement associated with *l'Avenir*, discussed above, as well as *L'Ere Nouvelle*, became discredited with the collapse of the democratic republic because it became associated with the social upheaval and chaos that the solidly middle class

²⁰⁸ Ibid,101.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

Catholic masses, whether traditional or liberal, deeply feared.²¹² This led to a focus on essentially paternalistic social initiatives among social Catholics during the Second Empire and early Third Republic.²¹³ Ford also notes that, “Four features distinguished Christian Democracy from the paternalistic tradition of social Catholicism: 1) the role it granted to the state in intervening in social and economic affairs, 2) its explicit commitment to republican political institutions in the spirit of the Ralliement, 3) the greater emphasis it placed on social justice and Christian duty as opposed to charity, and 4) its emphasis on regionalism.”²¹⁴ Social Catholicism and Christian Democracy evolved into a successful political movement which form one of the most successful political parties in that region today.

The Works of Souvestre

A number of common themes run through Souvestre’s work. These include the status of women, education as a means to personal advancement as well as a more specific concern with the needs and rights of women to education, the question of liberty, Christianity, labor issues, charity and social justice, poverty, and social status and advancement. Less frequent, but still common threads, are issues of temperance, slavery, and historical analysis. Souvestre was fundamentally concerned with preserving the ancient lore of Brittany and Breton folklore and culture, of course, form the backdrop of many of Souvestre’s stories, though not all of his works deal

²¹² Ibid, 102.

²¹³ Ibid, 103.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 106.

with Breton culture and character and it would be a mistake to typecast Souvestre as exclusively a regional Breton author.

The only English language article or book analyzing Souvestre's life or works in any detail was written in 1939, *Populism in the Novel*, by Glenn Shortliffe. In this article, Shortliffe argues that Souvestre deeply influenced the development of a literary genre, "Naturalist proletarianism" and the working class novel.²¹⁵

While Souvestre is sometimes seen as a socialistic writer, concerned with the fate of his working class heroes who featured prominently at the center of so many of his works, Souvestre's death predated the rise of Marxism as a significant force in European politics and his writings cannot be said to foreshadow Marxist socialist thought. There are some remnants of Saint-Simonian thought in his works, which as discussed above, was socialistic in that Souvestre did emphasize the idea of planned economy and concern for amelioration for the lot of the poorest classes. Souvestre appears to have been deeply influenced by his devout Christian beliefs, and perhaps a sense of social Catholicism ingrained in him in the area due to his having grown up in lower Brittany, where social Catholicism had a strong hold. Shortliffe suggests Souvestre "distrusts all ready-made systems" and that his works never reflect any attempt to "formulate a political ideal for humanity," arguing that Souvestre reached his ideas slowly and never became a "militant revolutionist."²¹⁶ Yet Souvestre's works, particularly *Confession of a Worker* do reflect a sense of solidarity between the author and his working class heroes. Nevertheless, Shortliffe astutely points out that Souvestre, particularly after 1848, "frightened by a view of the mob in action,

²¹⁵ Shortliffe, "Populism in the Novel," 589.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 592.

tended more and more to view the problem of the underprivileged worker with a benevolent paternalism.”²¹⁷ Nevertheless, Shortliffe sees in Souvestre one of the first novelists to champion the cause of the working class and thus, as a precursor, if not to Marx, then certainly to Zola.²¹⁸

None of Souvestre’s works better illustrates the persistence of residual Saint-Simonian ideals than *The Lakeshore (The Slave, The Serf, and The Apprentice)*. In the first story, *The Slave*, Souvestre relates the fictional account of an Armorican slave boy (from his present-day Brittany) in Rome. Arvins, separated from his mother by sale, works hard, saving his own money to one day buy his own freedom. By chance, after years of separation, he happens to see his mother one day in passing. After visiting each other during their free time in the evening, Arvins returns with his mother to the home of her mistress, where she is intercepted as a fugitive and sentenced to be branded. Arvins resolves to buy her with the money he has been saving up for his own freedom, but upon his return to his master, his money has been taken by debt collectors come to punish the Patrician, who has just fled his home to avoid them. After his mother dies from the wounds received from the branding, Arvins participates in a slave’s rebellion which is crushed, and he is thrown in to prison, awaiting his fate – to be thrown to animals in a gladiator’s arena. It is at the end of the story that Souvestre makes his point – for there is always a moral point, usually a Christian point, in Souvestre’s stories. In prison, awaiting his gory death, Arvins rails against the gods in whom he has always put his faith and who, have either ignored his people’s pleas or, simply never existed. Arvins’s rantings are

²¹⁷ Ibid, 595.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 596.

calmed by the words of another slave, Nafel, with whom Arvins served, whose Christianity has been discovered. “The reign of peace and liberty approaches,” Nafel begins gently. Souvestre assigns to his character’s concern for those keywords which would catch the attention of any nineteenth century Frenchman, including Bretons. But for the character of Souvestre’s book, as for the Breton author, peace and liberty are ensured through one vehicle – faith in Jesus Christ. Nafel’s words are important, because they illustrate not only what Souvestre believed to reflect the virtue of Christianity – but also represented, in many ways, all the things that many Bretons believed the Republic was not; asked what God’s law requires, he states:

“Liberty and brotherhood among men, the happiness of all, and the self-sacrifice of each. The holiest, in his eyes, are not those who are the happiest, but those who suffer most. His law teaches us to overcome violence and break the fetters, not by resistance, but by meekness and submission. The day will come, and it is perhaps not far distant, when the equality of men will be proclaimed, for Christianity is not only a creed for our faith; it is the law of humanity, the spirit of the future.”²¹⁹

The belief that it was not appropriate for good Christians to engage in violent rebellion reflected a Saint-Simonian ideal rather than a Catholic one. The distaste for slavery also echoes a Saint-Simonian concern.

Indeed, the next story in the book of three tales, *The Serf*, tells the tale of a young serf, also growing up in the area that Souvestre knew as 19th century Brittany. After a series of injustices related in the beginning of the story, Jehan runs away. He encounters a man who claims to be a leper, and is shocked later to find that the man’s “leprosy” is in fact, dried oatmeal; the leper explains that so long as he was healthy,

²¹⁹ Émile Souvestre, *The Lakeshore (The Slave, the Serf, and the Apprentice)*, (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, 1855), 70.

he was condemned to be miserable because he was not permitted even the freedom of living as a hermit unless he were first a free man. Only when a beggar taught him how to imitate the disease by making a paste from rye and millet did he find a way to live in peace and freedom. In fact, the people even built the hut he lived in and gave him a cow, an orchard, and a vineyard, and after performing a funeral for him, the people made sure his needs were always attended to though he was forbidden to have any contact or communication with any of the people.²²⁰

While Jehan decides that a false life as a leper will not work for him, he instead spends some time in a monastery, finally making his way to Paris where, after a year and a day, he is legally free and so returns to buy the freedom of his father and fiancée. His cruel lord will hear none of it, however, and instead sells the village to another even more cruel landlord; ultimately, his father and fiancée both end up dead. At this point, Jehan sees his future plainly before him, and returns to the monastery, the one place in the world where one born a serf may live freely – in peace and liberty. There he encounters a former novice, also born a serf, who ten years earlier had advised him to join the monastery. He points out that earlier Christians were tried more severely than those of their time, and expresses again the belief that one day, Christian peace and liberty, rather than violence, will be the law of the land.

Finally, there is the story of *The Apprentice*, and this final tale in fact departs from Christian moralizing and focuses almost entirely on the rise of the self-made man. Importantly, the story does focus on the reliance of individuals on the self – a strongly bourgeoisie, economic liberal ideal. A dying widow advises her young sons upon her death bed. She notes that the younger brother, Frederic, loves to work, and

²²⁰ Ibid, 12.

that will serve him as fortune enough. In contrast, she warns the older brother, Francis, that his laziness would be his undoing, but by sticking with his younger brother and taking his advice, he would get by. As her dying wish, she makes Francis promise he will not leave his hardworking younger brother's side, and then she dies. Francis, given to laziness and drink, loses job after job and resolves to rob Frederic's wealthy employer, locking Frederick up in order to achieve the deed, but Frederic is able to warn his employer of the coming disaster. The others involved are caught and sent to justice, though Francis is able to run off. Mr. Kartmann, the employer, offers Frederic whatever he asks as a reward – lessons. Thus, Frederic diligently works, learns, advances his station, and is adopted as a son and made a member of the family business. The important lesson here is that individuals must rely on themselves, work honorably, and pursue education – and, in doing so, can pull themselves up by their bootstraps. There is no mention of Christianity in this story, but the other lessons are pure nineteenth century, bourgeois liberalism, which are also echoed in other stories. Here, too, there is perhaps more of a residual Saint-Simonianism than Catholicism – the emphasis on being a producer rather than an idler.

On women, too, Souvestre's ideas cannot be said to be reflective of social conservatism or Catholicism. His belief that women should enjoy greater equality as well as education in society is a constant theme throughout his writings; indeed, his daughter later ran a school. Again and again, in book after book he addresses the issue. In this respect, the influence of his involvement in the Saint-Simonian movement made a lasting and deep impression. Souvestre best sums up, in very Saint-Simonian terms, his beliefs regarding the equality of women and,

simultaneously, their natural differences from men, in a quote in *Leaves from a Family Journal*. Consider:

But this trifling circumstance made me reflect on the advantages that would accrue from the association of women in our intellectual pursuits, as well as practical concerns. Surely our companion for life is our most natural interlocutor: why should any separation exist between our minds? And would not men do well to initiate her into the world of ideas, that she may be fitted to follow them through it? We leave her in ignorance of the greater part of the questions which occupy our thoughts, allowing her to blindly influence and counsel us, yet do not grant her the means of enlightenment. What is there to prevent our raising her to our own level? Interested in all that concerns us, she would then know better how to assist, console, support and soothe. She would live with us that inner life, be acquainted with our every thought, and know exactly what spring to touch and what wound to heal. There would, in fact, be but one soul between us, or rather, two souls in perfect communion; for there, as elsewhere, the woman would bring her more acute sensations and practical faculties into action be the question one of art, philosophy, or education, and she would e'er be able, like Molière's housekeeper, to enlighten even genius itself, upon the realities of life.²²¹

In this telling passage, Souvestre indicates that if women were allowed to fulfill their talents and capabilities, they would be better companions to men, better able to counsel, assist, console, support, soothe, and heal their men; for Souvestre, women may be equal but women's role is indeed complementary and sentimental.

In other areas, Souvestre departed from typical Saint-Simonian thinking. Labour, for example, is a consistent theme running throughout all of Souvestre's works; consistently emphasizing the noble value and inherent dignity of a man's labour. Souvestre does not seem to have had quite the stridently elitist view toward labor that the Saint-Simonians did; he believed passionately in the nobility of labor and the equality of workers.. Consider from *Pleasures of Old Age*, Souvestre recounts the tale of the sandal and the crown; the sandal reminds the crown that they are sisters, remarking:

²²¹ Émile Souvestre, *Pleasures of Old Age*, (London: G. Routledge, 1868), 11.

And can you not, with equal propriety, make us the same reply, humble workers, who undertake as your vocation the rough labours of the world in order to give us the necessary leisure for more refined and intellectual occupations? Are you not indeed the feet of that society, the hands of which treat you with contempt? Cursed then be the human pride, which apportioned out its esteem for the kind of work, and not for the devotion of the worker – which refuses equal respect for an equal fulfillment of duty - which has thrust the modest and the useful under the feet of the brilliant of the superfluous, despising the labourer to whose exertions we owe the harvests which support life, while glorifying the artist who succeeds in depicting them for the gratification of the eyes only.”²²²

After reading this story, with its emphasis on the equality of all members, it is easy to understand why some readers might ascribe to Souvestre a tendency toward the type of socialistic leanings which predated Marx.

Yet at other times, Souvestre seems to conceptualize laborers in very Saint-Simonian, and elitist terms, as producers and idlers; producers will show themselves to be the elite who can transcend their class through hard work and education, and he encourages them to do so. On the other hand, he gives conflicting ideas about the equality and dignity of individuals. Nevertheless, there are several examples of Souvestre encouraging people *not* to try to rise above their class – even to try to remain part of their class and in this way, to elevate their class.

Jean Jacques Rousseau makes an appearance in several of Souvestre’s works. In *Pleasures of Old Age*, the old man and the narrator of the story has a servant, Felicité, who marries. In want of a new servant, the old man hires an old butler who was schooled by his employer, an old Count who had been a philosopher in the school of Rousseau. The new servant insists that his new employer be sure to include his title when addressing him, referring to him always as “Mr. Baptiste” rather than

²²² Souvestre, *Leaves*, 55.

simply by his last name (Baptiste), “because I shall never forget your title in speaking to you, sir,” and he continues, ““I believe that language influences our habits, and that too great a familiarity in the use of terms ends in begetting a want of proper respect.”²²³ The old man respects his servant’s wishes until Mr. Baptiste becomes ill, and tries to refuse the care of the narrator, who will not refrain from having him cared for as an honored household guest; when Mr. Baptiste recovers, he then requests his employer to call him from thence forward, simply Baptiste, because then they are on familiar terms. Again, the narrator acquiesces.²²⁴

In the introduction to *Confessions of a Working Man*, the characters had all preserved the dress and habits of their trade: “Experience had taught the master-mason to endeavor to avoid for his children the dangers of leaving their own class in life, where the path is well beaten and known, for other roads, where everything becomes a difficulty, because all is new.”²²⁵ In this case, Souvestre goes on to write that it was important for his characters to not try too hard to rise above their own station in life, because they “knew that the law of progress does not require us to bring down that which is above, but to raise that which is below.”²²⁶ At the end of the book, there is a profound scene in which the wealthy godmother of the workman’s daughter wants to take the girl – her own daughter’s favorite playmate – with them to Paris and raise as her own. At first, the working couple feel compelled to do what is best for their child even if the loss of their daughter is heartbreaking to them. However, when the girl becomes haughty after putting on the fancy dress, the parents

²²³ Ibid, 81.

²²⁴ Ibid, 201.

²²⁵ Émile Souvestre, *Confessions of a working man*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853), 10.

²²⁶ Ibid.

conclude that it would actually be counter to the girl's own moral development to send her off to a new advanced social status; they decide to keep her with them after all – not because of their own selfish wish to keep her nearby, but due to their concern for her own moral wellbeing, which would be harmed should she try to raise herself above her station.²²⁷ The sentiment is also foreshadowed earlier in the book. The son of the worker only wants to read and does no work, thinking he will go to Paris and become a great poet. A visitor comes by and helps the son accept his station in life, as well. The visitor shares that he was once a great poet himself but was forgotten, saying:

Reflect..... and look well at all that is certain here, for the uncertain good you will follow yonder. Your family love you; you have grown up with your present habits, you have been brought up to a good trade from childhood: and you are willing to sacrifice all to strangers, of whom you will be the dupe; to customs that will always gall you, to a profession for which you have not been educated. What do you go to Paris to look for? Happiness? You have it. Gratified vanity? Pray that God may never grant it to you. It is the disease of our times, do you see? Every one wishes for a name in print, and to be known to fame; they are ashamed of the work of their hands; everywhere we see fugitives from labour, endeavouring to fly to art, as in former times peasants tried to associate with courtiers. But do you know what I should do, if I had, like you, the advantage of having acquired strength through from labour? I should remain where Heaven had placed me, not only from prudence, but also from pride and choice.... Be persuaded: instead of leaving your own class, try to elevate it. We cannot change our lives as we change our furniture; where the habits and affections are formed, there also is our true position. We should never lightly quit the place where we have been happy, or where we are loved; it should be sacred to us.²²⁸

In the story, the speech has the desired affect. The discourse also seems to reveal Souvestre's own dissatisfaction with fame, and his preference to remain at home with his family and loved ones nearby.

²²⁷ Ibid, 130.

²²⁸ Ibid, 142.

Confessions of a Working Man, to a large extent, extols the virtues of education and how one may raise himself through the ability to read and write, and how he may handicap himself without these abilities. The close family friend, Maurice, who is a constant father figure throughout the novel, is nearly undone by his own inability to read, write, and do arithmetic. Not satisfied with the examples cited above, Souvestre writes of the time that Souvestre and his good friend Maurice go to the home of one of the chief Paris contractors in order to take some information by dictation for their boss. In the home of the wealthy contractor, Pierre Henry surrounded by velvet and silk, feels shabbily dressed – and truly envious when he sees a portrait of a workman in his shirt sleeves hanging in one of the rooms. Discovering the person in the portrait is also the master of the house, he turns to his friend Maurice and asks bitterly, “Why have not you as grand a house as he who lives here? Are you less worthy, or less honest? If he has succeeded better than you, is it not a downright game of chance?..... Why is that this one lives in a palace, while others roost in a pigeon house? Why are these carpets, this silk, this velvet – his, more than ours?”²²⁹ He is suddenly cut off with, “Because he has earned them!”²³⁰ The contractor notes that Pierre Henry is jealous, stating, “You shall know by what right I have all this, and shows him the tools and books by which he has educated himself, saving from his own bread and sleep, in order to raise himself in life!”²³¹ Upon the departure of Pierre Henry, the contractor says, “Instead of envy, try to have a little honest ambition: do not waste your time in swearing at those above you, but

²²⁹ Ibid, 71.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

try to work your way up to them.”²³² The contractor offers assistance if ever requested, (and eventually, it will be because his friend Maurice will need a job). The character pursues some learning on his own for a while, though he will have to give it up when he gets married and has a family. The passage reflects a belief in the Horatio Alger style stories of the new Americans, that men can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and become anything they want if they just work hard enough.

A number of Souvestre’s writings are focused on the very bourgeois theme of temperance. In *Confessions of a Working Man*, for example, the main character recounts that as a child, his father dropped his baby sister on her head in a bout of drunkenness and she died the following day;²³³ the father himself also died soon after of an accident caused at work by his drunkenness. As a result, Pierre Henry himself, after a bout of his own drunkenness as a young man, is shown where his father’s accident and death occurred, and is filled with self-remorse for causing his mother to suffer (as well as for the lost wages he does not give her) and finally chooses to never drink again, saying: “I have been exposed to all the temptations of intemperance, and at last I have not even had to be on my guard against them; it is the first steps which determine the road in good as well as in evil. It is sometimes impossible to conquer a habit, but it is almost always easy to avoid it.”²³⁴ Souvestre also advances this theme when the character of *Leaves From a Family Journal* saves significant funds and raises his station in life because he chooses not to drink or smoke.

In addition to a significant focus on labor issues, a number of Souvestre’s topics deal with the philosophy of patriotism. Souvestre himself is also an ardent

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid, 17.

²³⁴ Ibid, 39.

defender of patriotism, the new France, and the Republic – all best expressed in his most famous work *Un philosophe sous les toits* as well as in *Leaves from a Family Journal*. Importantly, while Souvestre stands out as a regional author who supported the Republic, he did clarify who he thought should be eligible – and who he thought should be ineligible – for citizenship. While there are other more subtle examples of anti-Semitism in his work, it is interesting to note that in discussing citizenship privileges, Souvestre asserted the Blood and Soil argument. He did so well before Charles Maurras, the famous monarchist, became famous for using “Blood and Soil” as the ideological underpin of his *Action Française* – a movement which would have significant support in Brittany:

Would you have us then regard the land in which we first beheld the light no more than any other portion of the earth, the spot which has witnessed our birth, from we receive our first impressions, our language and habits, every thing in fact that makes a man? We might as well say the mother who bore us is the same to us any other woman. The Greeks of former times held that they were born of the very earth they cultivate; is not this a precedent for all other nations? May we not say that each nation is born of its own soil, with which it is connected by a thousand invisible roots, and that, to a certain degree, its temperament is influenced by it? Each race is planted in its appropriate soil and climate, each occupies its place, fulfills its appointed part, accomplishes its evolution, gives *its note*, whilst the whole composes, as some one has said, ‘the gamut of human feeling.’ Attempt to amalgamate the nations, diminish their personality, and you will have false notes, and destroy the gamut, consequently any idea of harmony in the vast concert of nations is impossible. A distinction between nations is as necessary as between individuals, if you wish to preserve each group of humanity its peculiar instincts and capabilities.²³⁵

While showing himself to be a patriot in some cases, Souvestre nevertheless expresses sympathy for the Breton sentiment that Brittany was mistreated by the Kingdom of France and then, by the Republic of France. In *The Flower Garden*, he

²³⁵ Souvestre, *Leaves*, 52:

says, “Elsewhere she speaks of the sum Brittany paid to free herself from a tax which was nevertheless fastened upon her three months afterwards; upon the Bretons revolting, they sent an army thither, which pillaged, burned, murdered innocent children, and spread throughout the province a wholesome terror ²³⁶(after the Le Voisin affair, under Louis XIV).²³⁷

Souvestre’s many works also reflect the manner in which 19th century history was taught, with an emphasis on Greco-Roman culture, a keen interest in Christian slaves in Rome, as well as frequent reference to the origins of humanity based on the Biblical account in Genesis. Specifically, *Causeries Historiques et Littéraires* provides an extensive historiographical analysis of the Hebrew Bible, focusing on the early Hebrew years when the Hebrew tribes were wondering in the desert. He sees the early Hebrew tribes as his direct ancestors, and their wondering in the desert as an example of the exercise of liberty – liberty that has been mandated by God. Souvestre expresses his belief that liberty is mandated by God and is not only a natural state of mankind, but is a natural accoutrement of true religion: “Mais la liberté et l’égalité créent surtout des droits; pour constituer le devoir, Moïse met la charité dans la loi; Pour la première fois, les hommes s’appellent frères!”²³⁸ “Nous le demandons, ne sont-ce point là les véritables bases de la société chrétienne, c’est-à-dire du monde moderne, et ne reconnaissons-nous point, dans cette organisation religieuse et politique, la racine d’où a jailli l’arbre qui nous ombrage?”²³⁹ From here he moves into a discussion of nationalism, which he

²³⁶ Émile Souvestre, *The Flower Garden*, (Baltimore: J. Murphy & Co. 1864), 96.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Émile Souvestre, *Causeries et Littéraires*, (Paris, M. Levy, 1861), 49.

²³⁹ Émile Souvestre, *En Bretagne*, (Paris, M. Lévy frères, 1867), 49.

believes to be mandated by God, and thus, holy: “La patrie est ainsi toujours identifiée avec la religion; celle-ci est la véritable frontière des Juifs. Pour les empêcher de se confondre avec les autres peuples les intérêts positifs, il ne fallait pas moins que cet intérêt divin.”²⁴⁰ For Souvestre, religion is always identified with the fatherland.

In *En Bretagne*, it is evident that Souvestre values greatly his Breton background, and seems sympathetic toward the “whites” whose “liberty” was threatened by the encroaching “blues.” The tale of *The Bargeman of the Loire* exemplifies this well. In this story, a respected and strong young bargeman, André, is about to ask another boatman for the hand of his niece, Entine, in marriage, though her cousin Francis will try to thwart them because he wants her for himself. When André is challenged to a boat race which is rigged and dangerous, he is saved and wins because of the efforts of his father. That his father – known only as a drunkard – is a master boatman is a shocker for everyone until he utters several drunken phrases that gives his identity away as a drowner – one who served with the “blues” during the Revolution of 1789 to drown the enemies of the Revolution in the river. Evidently André’s father is not allowed on the water because of a role he played during the Revolution, scandalously assisting the Blues. Indeed, his shipmates later tell him, “We turned your father out because he was a rascal; we turn you out because you are his son.”²⁴¹ Despite his support for the Republic, Souvestre’s description of the character Carrier and his home reveal that he nevertheless seemed to hold a low opinion of those who had fought against their countrymen; the next chapter sees

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 50.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 41.

Andre's father, Master Jacques, go to the home of the Republican bourgeoisie in whose service he had fought. Carrier lives in a home surrounded by an overgrown garden, neglected and ignored by everyone and everything save one nun, Sister Clara, who demonstrates her disapproval of the man's actions, and makes it absolutely patent that in providing service to him, she is merely doing her duty. Souvestre describes Carrier as a man who had allowed the passions of his youth to propel him into headstrong participation in the Revolution, going so far as to battle for life and property against his own countrymen. In retribution, he is condemned to a miserable, lonely existence in his later years, even if he is wealthy. Likewise, André's father, who threw in his lot behind that of Carrier, lives a crazed and wretched existence on the outskirts of acceptable society. In this story, however, the old revolutionary leaves a purse full of money to Master Jacques's son (because Jacques once saved his life) and Jacques delivers it to André just before an avalanche of ice wipes out all the remaining bargemen and any relatives who would withhold consent of Entine's right to marriage André due to his association with his father. Souvestre portrays the old revolutionary as a sinner, who made a mistake during his youth and lived a life paying the consequences, too arrogant and blind to repent. But the real villains in the story are the members of the later generation, who cannot forgive the sins of the past, i.e. who cannot forgive the son for the sins of his father, the drowner, despite the fact that the son is unaware of his father's crimes until that point at which everyone else becomes aware of them, and despite the more important fact that the son is known to be honest and hardworking. It seems that Souvestre would agree that pro-revolutionaries may have acted imprudently in the past, but that the past is, after all,

the past, and needs to be forgiven and forgotten – in keeping with true Christians values.

Les Derniers Paysans, as a collection of stories, in many ways reflects the passing of an era, from the old regime to the new republic. Indeed, while in other stories Souvestre extols the virtues of nationalism and patriotism, in *Les Derniers Paysans* he seems to reject the idea that French liberalism had much to offer. He refers to the “despotism of modern liberality.”²⁴² In the story of *The Chouans*, Souvestre tells the tale of a particular Chouan whose mother had managed to get the king himself to intervene on behalf of her son who was to be hanged for smuggling salt; she was forever after loyal to the Crown. “Her devotion to the Church was part and parcel of her loyalty to the Crown. The tongue that denied and insulted the one, blasphemed and insulted the other; and the same impious hand was uplifted for the destruction of both. Eventually, the struggle became to Jean what it was to the whole population of western France – one waged for rights and liberties, against the despotism of revolutionary equality.”²⁴³ This is the story of the passing of an era as much as anything else.

It is in *The World as it Shall Be* that Souvestre most strikingly addresses his repudiation of the Saint-Simonian ideals he had embraced during an earlier époque, and also demonstrates that he holds the bourgeois values of his contemporary Republic but also of the Catholic Church as the bedrock of a stable society. First published in 1846, this dystopia is the only book of Souvestre’s that remains in print, in both English and French, in current years; indeed, the most recent edition was

²⁴² Souvestre, *Les Derniers Paysans*, 161

²⁴³ Ibid, 241.

printed in 2004 by the Wesleyan University Press. The book has been hailed by many as a prelude to science fiction, but Souvestre did not write the book as work of science fiction; it is a work along Orwellian lines, warning those who would embrace the promises of men like Saint-Simon, Fourier, etc. what the future would like in their perfectly ordered, state controlled societies.

The story opens with a young married couple, deeply in love, but very poor. When Souvestre introduces the young husband, Maurice, it is as if he is writing about his own youthful opinions and activities:

Maurice studied the socialists: Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Swedenbourg. If you listened to them, each one had the answer to the problem of Pandora's box; it needed merely to be opened to release universal happiness for mankind; only despair would be left behind! Maurice tried each of the magic boxes in turn; he lifted the lids and looked inside. It seemed to him, that, although there was some good in each of them, plenty of other things were mixed in: wheat came mixed with ryegrass; but, before a nutritious meal could be made, there had to be a lengthy process of winnowing and milling. All these studies had, however, strengthened his faith in the future – that promised land for those who have no clear view of the present. He believed in the limitless progress of mankind as ardently as some provincial, newly recognized as a *man of letters*, believes he has a future as a writer. Even the bewitching influences of his honeymoon had not altered his preoccupations; for Marthe had similar aspirations, and what might have been a barrier separating them had instead become a powerful bond between them. United in the one hope, their two souls met in a single flame whose radiance lit up the world around them. As Christian spouses when they are in love, are drawn together in their love of God, they were drawn together in their love of humanity.

Souvestre, of course, was himself a young man of letters and a newlywed in Paris when he first encountered the Saint-Simonian scene, which appealed to his concern for the poorest classes. It was of course also through the Saint-Simonian movement that the young moralist met his second wife, who shared Souvestre's youthful

commitment to the creation of a futuristic utopia. Perhaps the young Marthe and Maurice, reflect something of Souvestre and his wife in his Saint-Simonian days, as they stand in the opening scene staring out their attic window, expressing their faith in the future and their wish to be able to see it, when none other than Johnny Progress arrives to show it to them.

Souvestre's referral to the notion of progress as a cold, emotion-less and foreign – notably, English – process is not unique to this story, but it is more drawn out than in earlier writings. The shady optimist hands the young couple his business card, referring to “M. John Progrès, Member of all the Utopian Societies of Europe” and he promises to usher the young couple through a long deep sleep after which they will wake to a happy, new life in the perfect, brave new world of the year three thousand.²⁴⁴ The young couple awaken in a brave new world which is dominated by a single state, the Republic of United Interests.²⁴⁵

The book makes significant use of metonym both in the naming of characters and in describing the imagery of setting; in this, the book not only differs drastically from Souvestre's many other works, but bears a striking resemblance to the writing style of a contemporary English writer who also seemed disimpressed by the obsession with progress and greatly concerned with the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the poor, Charles Dickens.

Noise has a constant presence in the story, and personal value is very much related to one's usefulness to the state, eerily foreshadowing the future realities of totalitarianism. The characters, revealing their promiscuity and general lack of

²⁴⁴ Émile Souvestre, *The World as it Shall Be*, (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004, 1846), 7.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

morality, are scantily clad in fashions which are easily as revealing as modern western fashion. Men, for example, wear shorts. Not only do the people wear very little, however, but they also invest a great deal in clothing accessories and makeup which meant to accomplish the same goals as modern day plastic surgery – the deceptive appearance of youth, thinness, and beauty. The women, in particular, spend a great deal of money and go to great lengths to hide their age and size. Though Souvestre's fashions, depicted in drawings throughout the book, are truly ridiculous, the general concepts of what has become acceptable for western men and women to wear, and the lengths they are willing to go to conceal their true age and size, are apt descriptions of today's western societies. The people of Souvestre's horrifying future are extremely materialistic, and deeply concerned with the financial value of each other – to the point of financial worth being the major basis upon which people make marriage decisions. Given that the Saint-Simonians were deeply interested in banking, it is not surprising that he ridicules an obsession with banking throughout the book.

Souvestre is deeply focused on how his futuristic society would affect that institution he holds most dear, marriage. As the residents of the future are solely concerned with financial interests, Marthe recalls a love story from her youth, in which a very poor bride is married to a wealthy suitor in what was known to all as a match made in heaven.²⁴⁶ It is clear in this story that love in the Saint-Simonian future would not hold a candle to the true love of Souvestre's own nineteenth century.

Souvestre continues, addressing the breeding and raising of children in a scene eerily similar to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Children are not created in

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 40-42

petrie dishes here, as in Huxley's novel, but they are immediately abandoned to the Industrial Revolution after birth. Marthe and Maurice visit a nursery where newborn infants are kept. They see that the children are assigned serial numbers, each kept in small cells in rows where they can be observed, with electronically powered feeding tubes that pump milk at selected feeding times, were a doctor constantly on duty oversees them. Souvestre describes elaborately decorated baby cells: "In short, everything possible had been done to ensure the comfort of the newly born. They wanted for nothing, except their mothers."²⁴⁷

Souvestre incorporates the Saint-Simonian obsession with increasing and improving technology, and reflects an almost Luddite disapproval in expressing that thought people would be increasingly independent, this could surely not have a positive outcome since it led to an increased lack of engagement with and therefore of concern for others.²⁴⁸

Expanding on this idea that the residents of the future would experience a pronounced lack of engagement with and therefore concern for one another, Souvestre addresses how residents of the future might deal with those who are ill at ease in technology-driven society. Marthe and Maurice visit the insane asylum, where they encounter Miss Reveuse, whom Marthe, in particular, finds to be the most sane of all the people she encounters in the future.²⁴⁹ Miss Reveuse was originally placed in the asylum to her grief at the loss of her mother as a child, her love of fairy tales and old stories and the values that came with them, and her refusal to marry the wealthy suitor chosen for her.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 57.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 37.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 122-126.

Though Souvestre was deeply committed to the causes of women's equality and women's education, we have discussed earlier in this paper that the Saint-Simonians themselves had very traditional views regarding the place of women in society. As discussed above, the Saint-Simonians believed that women and men, though equal, had very different natures which must be fully expressed in an ideal society. Women, who were sentimental and feeling, in this view, complemented men, who were rational and practical. Further, because women were nearer to perfection than men, women were better not tainted by interaction in the public sphere, which was best left to men while women should remain in the private sphere.

While it appears that Souvestre's commitment to women remained a passion from his Saint-Simonian youth which infused all of his life's work and writings even when he dismissed many of the other more utopian aspects of the movement, it can also be argued that he continued to embrace the very traditionalist perspective of the Saint-Simonians toward women's causes. In a scathing interpretation of the goals of feminism, Souvestre describes a meeting of the Society of Sensible Women, led by the, stereotypically, very unattractive and simultaneously super-academic Miss Spartacus. Souvestre makes clear in the opening of this meeting that she hates men, and they hate her in return, and proceeds to outline what the "Rights of Liberated Woman" would include:

according to Souvestre, liberated women would insist that God would henceforth be a woman, and that from then on women would do the commanding while men must obey. However, the most telling are articles 2 and 5. For Article 2, he writes, "The

rights of women consist in not recognizing those of men,”²⁵⁰ while article 5 is summed up, “That is to say, that [men] will be enslaved and have only duties, while [women] will be free and have only rights.”²⁵¹ While Souvestre may have been passionately devoted to the cause of women’s education equality on his own terms, he does not appear to have fully grasped the goals or intentions of the women’s rights movement and, indeed, seems to have been deeply threatened by female advocates for female liberty.

Finally, at the very end of *The World As It Shall Be*, Souvestre addresses Christianity and the role of the Catholic Church very specifically. While throughout his works, Souvestre stridently asserts his strong devotion to Christianity, it is never clear in any of his many previous works that he re-embraced the Catholicism of his youth after his departure from the Saint-Simonian school. Only in *The World as it Shall Be* does Souvestre firmly establish his belief that the Catholic Church – in contrast to many of the existing Protestant churches, particularly those established by the English – properly does the work of spreading the Gospel. In this chapter (XXII), Souvestre writes of the “New Church,” perhaps a stand-in for Saint-Simon’s New Christianity and the resulting Saint-Simonian religion. Here Souvestre writes of an unwed father who comes in to arrange for the First Communion of his child, who has never been baptized; the priest, for a sum, is willing to arrange it.²⁵² On the other hand, with the customary sarcasm he uses to paint his disapproval throughout the book, he describes the characters’ disgust for the Catholic Church, versus their admiration for English Protestant missionaries, who, in Souvestre’s words, adopt the

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 204.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 204.

²⁵² Ibid, 223.

customs and dress of the “savages” whom they are supposed to convert in order to better relate to them. He writes, “Far from following the example of those apostles of the Catholic faith..... the honorable English missionary had found it convenient to participate in their practices and had repeated the miracle of Alcibiades to the advantage of his faith and his business.”²⁵³ In describing the immorality of the New Church, Souvestre most surely is describing his horror of the Saint-Simonian Church; he broke with the movement, after all, because of his disgust over Enfantin’s endorsement of free love, which the young moralist found unacceptable. Souvestre’s works, nevertheless, bear their own criticisms of the abuses of the priesthood and of the Catholic hierarchy, and his home region of Finistère became increasingly vocal in its own criticism of those abuses. Thus, the story regarding the corrupt priest may also reflect Souvestre’s feelings regarding the corrupt Catholic priesthood of nineteenth century Europe, so much the object of scorn of nineteenth century French Republicans. As a Republican, Souvestre was sympathetic to the anti-Catholic concerns of the anticlericals.

However, he was also a Breton. There, on the last pages of one of his last works, in just one line, does he very subtly make a statement of faith, but it is an important assertion, missing from his many other works. To Souvestre, it is “those apostles for the Catholic faith who, with no weapon but prayer book and Crucifix, presented themselves in the midst of savage tribes as messengers from God, calling on them to renounce the error of their ways”²⁵⁴ as opposed to the English Protestant ministers, who have no principles and do not value Christianity, who, to Souvestre,

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

truly represented the Gospel. In this late work, Souvestre has indeed come full circle, not only embracing a fervent Christianity, but asserting that the institution that so dominated his early life, the Catholic Church, was the most authentic representative of the Christian message – even if he found himself to be critical of some of the customs and practices of the institution.

Conclusion

Émile Souvestre was an important, and prolific regional author of the nineteenth century. Yet today, outside his home region, he is little known. Souvestre, like so many of nineteenth century Europe's most famous intellectuals, was deeply involved with and influenced by the Saint-Simonian movement. Though his flirtation was brief, it made a lasting imprint on his many works of literature. Souvestre's works are deeply imbued with a focus on women's equality and concern for the working classes. While the concern with women's issues was deeply influenced by, and unique to, the Saint-Simonian movement, the interest in labor issues as a result of the Industrial Revolution had significant importance throughout Europe and including in Souvestre's home region of Lower Brittany. This concern for the "amelioration of the lot of the poorest classes" would drive intellectuals such as Souvestre throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century to flirt with socialistic movements such as Saint-Simonianism, and far more importantly, Marxism, in the latter half of the century. As a result, the Catholic Church would have to respond, and indeed, elements within the Catholic Church were drawn toward the development of "social Catholicism" and later, of a fully formed and powerful Christian

Democratic political movement, both of which from their inception to present day have been powerful influences in Souvestre's home region of Finistère.

Many have seen the history of nineteenth century as a great battle between anticlerical, pro-France nationalist Republicans versus deeply pious Catholics, loyal to the Church and their region and suspicious and fearful of the "foreign" interloper French state, sending its armies in to conscript and tax. Brittany stood out as a major outpost for the old regime, in this view, resisting France.

Scholars point out, however, that in the early days of the Revolution, Bretons embraced the Republic, only resisting when they perceived an assault on their traditions, including on their Church.

Émile Souvestre, however, was deeply committed to the Republic, yet he was passionately committed to Christianity, and he spent much of his life preserving the lore of Brittany. Souvestre hailed from a region which, though fiercely loyal to the Catholic Church, would vote increasingly Republican in the latter years of the nineteenth century. A study of Souvestre's life and works is instructive in gaining a broader understanding of the social and political forces at work in nineteenth century France.

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