

## ABSTRACT

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From the Enlightenment to the end of the nineteenth century, France experienced political change and literary innovation which resulted in new definitions of the relationship between mankind and God. Current research in nineteenth century French literature has discovered a wealth of diverse and provocative topics within this humanist tradition precisely because it was a time of experimentation and change which gave birth to new viewpoints on everything from gender roles and sexuality to socialism and human rights. This dissertation delves into the evolution of an often overlooked element of French life which went hand in hand with social and intellectual innovation: religion and spirituality. Under the Catholic monarchy, France had traditionally relied on religion as the foundation for a collective morality. Enlightenment philosophy challenged traditional religious concepts and France's post-Revolutionary break with the Catholic Church encouraged intellectuals to continue exploring new notions of the divine. This dissertation focuses on a number

of spiritual ideas put forward by various writers. While some, such as Chateaubriand, Ballanche and Lamennais famously advocated a return to Catholicism, others like Mme de Staël and Lamartine used their writings as a means for devising a new spiritual direction that would rely less on institutionalized religion and more on the conscience. Advancements in science and in the study of history ushered in a new awareness of the relationship between the past and the future which inspired scientifically minded intellectuals, such as Auguste Comte and Emile Zola, to consider themselves as part of a progressive succession of human beings more dominated by time and society than by any god. By shedding what they saw as outmoded conceptions of the universe, philosophers, poets and novelists alike moved to embrace a more progressive spiritual direction incorporating compassion, empathy and justice as sources for moral truths. These are concepts that have carried over into secular France today as citizens continue to focus on ethical concerns in political debates that touch on topics such as welfare programs, immigration, and secularism.

REDEFINING RELIGION THROUGH LITERATURE IN NINETEENTH  
CENTURY FRANCE

By

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

From the Enlightenment to the end of the nineteenth century, France experienced political change and literary innovation which resulted in new conceptions of humanity's relationship with god. Current research in nineteenth century French literature has discovered a wealth of diverse and provocative topics within this humanist tradition precisely because it was a time of experimentation and change which gave birth to new viewpoints on everything from politics to gender roles and sexuality to socialism and human rights. This dissertation delves into the evolution of an often overlooked element of French life which went hand in hand with social and intellectual innovation: religion and spirituality. Religion has perhaps been overlooked by contemporary scholars because occidental nations are overwhelmingly living in what Gabriel Vahanian has referred to as a "post-Christian" culture in which the question of religion no longer seems relevant to a great majority of intellectuals. My research shows, however, that for the intellectual visionaries who sought to influence France's social reconstruction after the Revolution, a solution for the reconciliation of modern society and religion was vital. Under the Catholic monarchy, France had traditionally relied on religion as the foundation for a collective morality. Enlightenment philosophy challenged traditional religious concepts and France's post-Revolutionary break with the Catholic Church encouraged intellectuals to continue to explore new notions of the divine. The Restoration and subsequent revolutions would continue to fuel new reflections on the place of religion in society.

As Susanna Lee has pointed out, secularism was a gradual process which “developed as an impression and an idea” (12). This slow but continuous shift in religious thought is reflected in the perpetuation of the belief in some kind of God or religious system throughout the century even as conceptions of the divine more ever further from Christianity. As the title of this dissertation suggests, rather than abandon religion, authors overwhelmingly sought to *redefine* religious notions in light of changing social and political convictions. This dissertation examines a variety of essays, novels and poetry concerning religion and spirituality from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century in an effort to follow the progression from a predominantly Christian-based moral religious theory to a more universal secular moral philosophy.

While some, such as Chateaubriand, Ballanche and Lamennais famously advocated a return to Catholicism, others like Mme de Staël and Lamartine used their writings as a means for devising a new spiritual direction that would rely less on institutionalized religion and more on the individual conscience. Advancements in science and in the study of history ushered in a new awareness of the relationship between the past and the future which inspired scientifically minded intellectuals, such as Auguste Comte and Emile Zola, to consider themselves as part of a progressive succession of human beings ruled more by time than by any god. By shedding what they saw as outmoded conceptions of the universe, philosophers, poets and novelists alike moved to embrace a more progressive spiritual direction incorporating compassion, empathy and justice as sources for moral truths. These are concepts that have carried over into secular France today as citizens continue to focus on ethical concerns in political

debates that touch on topics such as welfare programs, immigration, and, of course, secularization.

In recent years, researchers have begun to rekindle an interest in religion in nineteenth century literature. Susanna Lee's 2006 *A World Abandoned by God* looks at secularism as a phenomenon in nineteenth century fiction. For Lee, "the absence of God has proven as versatile an instrument of manipulation and political control as the presence of God had been" (15). She nevertheless contends that "Throughout the transition to a nonreligious culture, some sense of the divine must remain intact" (15). Lee explores this conspicuous religious absence in Stendhal, Flaubert, Barbey, and Dostoyevsky but, as we will see, similar observations could be extended to include Sand, Zola and even Renan and Michelet. *La Société des études romantiques et dix-neuviémistes* chose to focus on "Les Religions du XIXe siècle" as the topic for their 2009 conference. The use of the plural in "religions" is indicative of the diversity of religious viewpoints presented in the eleven panels presented over three days. In her opening remarks to the conference, Sophie Guermès commented on the use of the plural "religions," correctly pointing out that "De fait, l'un des traits dominants du XIXe siècle en ce domaine aura consisté en un progressif décentrement manifesté par la tentative de penser la diversité en reconstruisant l'histoire religieuse des peuples" (2). Guermès cited efforts by Quinet, Michelet, Hugo and others who sought to unify humanity by emphasizing the similarities in diverse religious traditions. The new religious conceptions invented in the nineteenth century, such as Saint-Simon's *Nouveau christianisme* and Auguste Comte's *religion positiviste* likewise provide plurality of thought while sharing common liberal political values. Finally, I am

deeply indebted to Paul Bénichou's incredibly comprehensive four-volume oeuvre *Romantismes français* (1973-1992) which introduced me to many of the authors I chose to include here. My work, however, differs from Bénichou's in that his is a broad and almost encyclopedic investigation which encompasses commentaries on multiple works by each author intermingled with biographical information. My analysis is not meant to be entirely comprehensive. Rather, it seeks to provide a more intimate look at specific texts in order to examine detailed examples of each author's religious thought according to specific works at specific moments in time.

The historical and biographical contexts surrounding these works are complex to say the least. The years covered by these chapters are some of the most turbulent in French history. The literature produced during these decades interacts with and responds to the realities endured by authors who lived through an unstable religious and political atmosphere. Prior to 1789, Enlightenment philosophy already questioned religion and its relationship with government. Although my first chapter begins with the *Vicaire savoyard*, Rousseau was writing in the philosophical context of his time, addressing not only the Church but his fellow *philosophes* immersed in deism which "required that reason first establish the *foundation* of faith" (Dupré 3). The Revolution would subsequently change France's rapport with religion forever. Republicans would interpret Enlightenment philosophy as a basis for new policies on religion. According to Charles Gliozzo, Voltaire's opinion that the clergy should play a less mystical and more civil role in society, for example, influenced the 1790 Civil Constitution of the Clergy which instituted the democratic election of clergy and required clergy to swear allegiance to the nation (275). For Paul Bénichou, eighteenth

century deism changed more than just the rapport between Church and State. Deism changed individual views on spirituality on a personal level since the philosophy encouraged free interpretation (Le Sacre 36-7).

In 1794, the French state ceased funding religious orders and in 1795 the Constitution declared freedom of religious choice while emphasizing the idea that “la loi ne reconnaît ni vœux religieux, ni aucun engagement contraire aux droits naturels de l’homme” (Durand 11). From year to year, new issues arose, including a popular Catholic backlash substantial enough to warrant its own study in Suzanne Desan’s 1990 book, *Reclaiming the Sacred*. The post-Revolution religious situation is far too intricate to sum up here. What is important to remember as far as we are concerned is that this rift in the Church’s social and political status likely introduced the first glimmers of opportunity to redefine religion.

Catholicism would not be restored as the official State religion until Napoleon’s 1801 Concordat but even then France’s reunification with its longtime religious tradition was hardly a return to the monarchical alliance. Napoleon hoped to use religion as a means for manipulating the people and winning over monarchists in support of his regime (Durand 13). The Emperor’s self-coronation was symbolic of the very real political power he intended to wield over the Church. The Concordat, for example, states as its first provision that “the Roman Catholic Religion shall be freely practiced in France” but nevertheless asserts that the Premier Consul retains the right to nominate “archbishops and bishoprics” (Barbara 254). The Concordat, including the state nomination of clergy, remained intact until 1905. The Charter of 1814, which accompanied the Restoration of Louis XVIII, upheld social equality and promised

freedom of religion even as it declared Catholicism the only official religion of the State<sup>1</sup>. The Charter, as we will see in the chapters on Ballanche and Lamennais, was ill received by conservative monarchists. Charles X (1824-1830) made strides towards a traditional monarchy through socially conservative legislation, such as the introduction of the Law of Sacrilege, ultimately increasing protests against the Church (Kroen 45). Surprisingly, even clergy were protesting the Restoration policy of “oubli,” “a national campaign to undo the major accomplishment of the Revolution: the creation of ideological difference” (Kroen 33, 45). Missionaries, for example, staged dramatic conversion ceremonies wherein the faithful repented for the sins of their eighteenth century relatives (Kroen 45).

The Second Empire forged an alliance with the Church and increased grants and stipends to the clergy in hopes that organized religion would promote order amongst the people (Plessis 136). This alliance, however, drew criticism from an increasingly secular-minded population. According to Alain Plessis, “The rising generation, resolutely positivistic, not only spoke out against a Church whose head condemned the modern world with intransigence but also refused to support the Empire” (153). A return to republican government and the separation of Church and State were already imminent. Incidentally, the Second Empire’s cooperation with the Church unraveled in the 1860s after Church-led protests concerning the invasion of the Papal States prompted the government to revoke special privileges granted to the clergy in 1852 (Plessis 154). Increasing efforts to dislodge the Republic from its association with the

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the *Charte constitutionnelle du 4 juin 1814* is available on the official web site of the French *Assemblée nationale*: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/constitutions/charte-constitutionnelle-1814.asp>.

Church finally began to take root under the Third Republic. The 1880s, for example, witnessed the passage of laws against “unauthorized congregation” and the establishment of public secular education (Ducattillon 81).

Changes within the Church also inevitably impacted religious thought in the nineteenth century. Six different popes reigned from 1800-1900 alone. Especially during the last half of the century, under Pope Pius IX, encyclicals spoke out against liberalism, denouncing socialism and communism, and proclaimed new dogma such as the Immaculate Conception in 1856 and papal infallibility in 1870 (New Advent). In 1890, Pope Leo XIII declared (through a speech delivered by French Archbishop Lavigerie) that the Church must accept the Republic and renounce its previous support for the monarchy in order for Catholicism to survive in France (Ducattillon 80). Many French Catholic political activists nevertheless refused to give up their loyalty to the crown (Ducattillon 80).

The personal lives and, in particular, the individual spiritual beliefs of each author are also relevant to the texts in question. Their biographies reveal diverse religious backgrounds including devoted Catholics, Protestants, atheists, and other less conventional beliefs such as Victor Hugo’s well-known association with spiritism. By the same token, more details on the philosophical influences of the time, such as Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, among others, would have better explained the origins of many of the lines of thought analyzed throughout the following chapters. Unfortunately, due to the limitations necessary to completing the dissertation in a timely fashion, I have ignored many of these details which would admittedly have fleshed out the circumstances surrounding these texts. As I continue

my career, I look forward to enriching this research with the addition of historical and biographical material. For the moment, however, my purpose is to analyze the chosen texts in comparison to each other. My focus here is almost exclusively on the texts themselves which already present a wealth of information. For the most part, I limit each chapter to only one or two works per author in order to carefully consider how each one relates to movement towards or away from a more humanistic, secular point of view. I do mention historical or biographical context when necessary, especially if the events are alluded to within the text in question, but more work could be done to shed light on these connections in the future. I am likewise aware that I have oftentimes isolated individual texts from the author's complete body of work.

Obviously, all of these authors penned more than a few works of interest to the topic of religion but, again, it was necessary to narrow my scope in order to take a detailed approach towards one or two particularly noteworthy pieces.

The following chapters focus on a number of spiritual ideas put forward by various writers spanning over a century of religious and political thought. The texts I have chosen range from just before the Revolution to the dawn of the nineteenth century which would usher in France's separation of Church and State in 1905. While a completely comprehensive study of the numerous publications concerning religion during this time period was an unfeasible task for this project, I nevertheless sought a broad scope which would simultaneously allow me to delve into the details of individual works. I chose over a dozen authors whose contributions to the ongoing discussion on religion capture the spirit of innovation in religious thought throughout the nineteenth century. I tend to limit each chapter to only one or two texts per author,

examining each work in detail in order to extract the text's particular impact on defining religion. There are two notable exceptions to this general pattern. Chapter 8 compares the theme of compassion in works by Vigny, Quinet, and Lamartine. I grouped these authors together since the obvious parallels in their subject matter offered the chance to consider compassion as a romantic theme not limited to a particular author. I used a comparable method in chapter 13 which compares Emile Zola's *Trois villes* to Auguste Comte's *Catéchisme positiviste*. Again, the parallels were too uncanny to ignore. Studying these two authors together enhances our understanding of the increasingly important friction between science and religion towards the end of the century. Both of these chapters, however, are divided in such a way as to provide an individual analysis of each work within the body of the chapter. By the same token, in the chapters focusing on a single author's work, relevant connections to other chapters are made when appropriate.

In order to better seize the complexity of the debates, the authors represented in this dissertation vary from Enlightenment thinkers to ultramontane conservatives and from romantic poets to scientists and historians. I also made a conscious effort to include an array of textual genres. The analysis of essays alongside poetry and fiction frames literary themes concerning religion within their historical contexts and, conversely, enriches our understanding of philosophical notions such as liberty and justice by considering the ways these ideas have been illustrated in fictional religious contexts. A few of the essays, such as Lamennais' *Paroles d'un croyant* and Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus* walk the line between essay and fiction, demonstrating the role that imagination played in redefining religion. Certain works also challenge our

modern conceptions of what it means to be “conservative” and “liberal.” Ballanche’s work, for example, completely rejects religious tolerance while admitting the necessity to update Christianity according to changing social customs, advocating the separation of Church and State as a means for preserving the Church in the event of future Revolutions. Saint-Simon, on the other hand, endorses a complete upheaval of religion in support of progress and charity but rejects the concept of equality in his proposed socio-religious hierarchy. Finally, I am aware that many of the books analyzed here, such as Rousseau’s *Profession de foi du Vicaire savoyard* and Chateaubriand’s *Génie du christianisme* may seem like obvious selections which have been thoroughly studied elsewhere. While such works are commonly referenced, few of my contemporaries have actually taken the time to read these texts in their entirety. Much of the scholarship on library shelves concerning these authors is decades old. By considering these works in conjunction with other lesser known works, I hope to create new interest in studying them as part of the often ignored influence that religious thought generally exercised in society and politics.

Chapter I begins by introducing the concept of natural religion in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard* which serves as a foundational theory for many of the nineteenth century works in subsequent chapters. Chapter II follows the influence of natural religion on Mme de Staël with a special focus on the growing importance of the concept of morality as the common thread between literature and religion. Chapter III, “Negotiating the Dream of a Universal Religion in Mme de Staël’s *Corinne*” analyzes the author’s attempt to reexamine a number of spiritual themes discussed in *De la littérature* in a fictional context. Chapter IV,

“Society, Morality and Sentiment versus Individualism, Opinion and Reason in Pierre-Simon Ballanche’s *Essai sur les institutions sociales*,” considers Ballanche’s theory that social progress advances according to a divine plan. Ballanche also offers an alternative perspective on sentiment compared to Mme de Staël. While *Du sentiment* echoes various liberal themes, such as humanity and unity, the ultramontane seeks to unify by excluding conflicting opinions, thereby imposing one tradition on the many rather than encouraging individuals to open their minds to diversity. Chapter V, “Injustice as God’s Will in Joseph de Maistre’s *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*,” examines the most extreme conservative attitudes towards religion in society, exposing a dubious sense of morality which provoked a liberal counterattack in defense of compassion and charity for the underprivileged classes. Chapter VI considers one of the most influential liberal innovators, Henri de Saint-Simon, and his focus on education in the sciences to support social progress in his 1825 *Nouveau Christianisme*. Chapter VII, “Between History and Progress: Lamennais from *De la religion* to *Paroles d’un croyant*,” follows saint-simonian inspired themes of fraternity and liberty in Lamennais’ transition from ultramontane to anti-catholic. Chapter VIII, “Fallen Angels in Restoration France: The Case for Compassion in *Éloa*, *Ahasvérus* and *Cédar ou la chute d’un ange*” delves into the growing fixation on compassion as the most paramount moral concept in religion and society. Chapter VIII, “George Sand’s *Spiridion* and the Doctrine of *L’Évangile éternel*,” examines her fictional representation of spiritual ideas introduced in essays by saint-simonian and romantic authors, in particular the concept of the *Évangile éternel* which proposes a balance of wisdom and love as the ultimate path to spiritual

evolution. Chapter X, “Hugo’s ‘Dream Pope’: Religion versus Republican Ideals in *Le Pape*,” follows Hugo’s pope character through a revelatory dream which unites him with the people who reveal the sanctity of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Chapter XI continues the theme of compassion in Ernest Renan’s fictional depiction of the historical Jesus in his *Vie de Jésus*. Chapter XII moves towards the more scientifically minded writings of Jules Michelet whose critiques of the negative effects of superstition and mysticism target the role of women in the family in his 1864 *Bible de l’humanité* which reworks ideas already touched upon in his 1845 *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*. Chapter XIII closes the century with the struggle to finally reconcile religion and science in Auguste Comte’s *Catéchisme positiviste* and Emile Zola’s *Trois villes*.

In the course of my research and in the writing of this text, the choice of appropriate terminology to express the ideas surrounding these often complex religious notions sometimes proved to be surprisingly challenging. In particular, I struggled to come to terms with distinguishing “religion” from “spirituality” and “God” from the “Infinite” or the “Eternal.” In an era in which multiple voices were redefining religion for themselves, the words often seem to mean different things to different authors. Within my analyses of the texts, I tend to repeat the terminology originally employed by the author. In general, however, when I choose the word “religion,” it is meant to evoke the very broad notion of religious systems. I use the term “spirituality” in reference to less structured religious notions. By the same token, I tend to employ the word “God” to refer to the supreme being of a particular religious system while the

“Infinite” or the “Eternal” is reserved for the supreme being of a less defined spiritual concept.

## **Chapter 2: The Conscience as Truth in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard**

The nineteenth century religion of humanity grew out of “la religion de l’homme” or the concept of natural religion proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although Bernard M.G. Reardon dismisses Rousseau’s religious thought as “no more than a *réchauffé* of the prevalent deism” of the time, Rousseau’s influence as the voice of said deism is unrivaled (27). In his *Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard*, published in 1762 as part of the fourth book of *Émile ou l’éducation*, Rousseau describes an ideal of spirituality based in morality which continues to resound for decades to come. As Arthur M. Melzer points out, “Rousseau’s religious writings – once so famous and now virtually ignored – are crucial for understanding the whole phenomenon of post-Enlightenment religiosity, which is, of course, still very much alive today, in our surprisingly pious age” (344). Through the vicar’s *profession*, Rousseau redefines what it means to be a holy man by redefining both the concept of faith and the source of divine authority. One might say that he turns religion “outside-in” by affirming that introversion is the path to truth. The man who is in touch with his feelings, in contrast to the man who follows prescribed ritual or social obligations, has better access to his own conscience. While Christianity traditionally used ritual as a means for creating social unity, the natural religion in the *Vicaire Savoyard* questions the durability of such bonds and suggests that such a religion cannot produce faith. Faith, for the vicar, is something that one feels and not something that one thinks. For Rousseau, the outside world is not only superficial, it is illusory. The retreat into the self is a step toward truth. Furthermore, every man who seeks to follow this path to faith can do so

without the necessity of an intermediary, without swearing anything to an organization. It is a religion free from the ties of money or prestige. Personal religion liberates man from social restrictions. It puts the power of faith in the hands of each individual who is clear-minded enough to hear his inner voice.

Rousseau's choice to structure his *Vicaire Savoyard* as the story of a young man receiving aid and advice from a good natured priest adds to his argument by providing an example to accompany his philosophy. The priest character allows Rousseau to criticize Christianity from the perspective of someone who is actually in the Church. Looking back on his life, the priest does not credit the Church for teaching him morality. His comments on the Church give evidence that even the clergy are not required to truly be in touch with God. Clergyman is a professional function that one performs like any other and, in this case, one that was accepted not because of a spiritual calling but out of financial desperation.

Assurément ni mes parents, ni moi, ne songions guère à chercher en cela ce qui était bon, véritable, utile, mais ce qu'il fallait savoir pour être ordonné. J'appris ce qu'on voulait que j'apprisse, je dis ce qu'on voulait que je disse ; je m'engageai comme on voulut, et je fus fait prêtre. Mais je ne tardai pas à sentir qu'en m'obligeant de n'être pas homme, j'avais promis plus que je ne pouvais tenir. (24)

The clergyman's emphasis on the idea that he was made into a priest highlights the fact that the transformation was actually performed on him by others, externally. It is an illusion. He is still a human regardless of his promise to renounce worldly desires. In addition to costing him his manhood, the Church creates moral dilemmas for him

because of the contradictions he discovers between his conscience and Church practice.

Voyant par de tristes observations renverser les idées que j'avais du juste, de l'honnête, et de tous les devoirs de l'homme, je perdais chaque jour quelque'une des opinions que j'avais reçues; celles qui me restaient ne suffisant plus pour faire ensemble un corps qui pût se soutenir par lui-même, je sentis peu-à-peu s'obscurcir dans mon esprit l'évidence des principes ; et, réduit enfin à ne savoir plus que penser, je parvins au même point où vous êtes... J'étais dans ces dispositions d'incertitude et de doute, que Descartes exige pour la recherche de la vérité. (26-7)

Doubt is thereby established as the path to truth. Consequently, faith cannot exist without the experience of doubt, of experimentation, which replaces received knowledge (from the Church doctrine) with subjective knowledge. Through meditation on the vices of others, however, the *vicair*e arrives at understanding that what is most important in life is seeking truth (27).

Before any explanation of the priest's faith is made, the reader is able to observe the positive effects on the priest's compassion towards the young man and the benefits that his charity had on him. The *Vicair*e *Savoyard* takes Rousseau's natural religion out of the realm of the hypothetical and puts it into use in a believable situation. The young man's story is a coming of age tale about the journey of self-awareness. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau reveals that the vicar was modeled after two clergymen that he knew as a young man who he recognized as key figures in his own moral foundation, Monsieur Gaime et Monsieur Gâtier. Describing the lessons of morality that he learned from Monsieur Gaime, he writes:

Il me fit un tableau vrai de la vie humaine, dont je n'avais que de fausses idées; ... Il amortit beaucoup mon admiration pour la

grandeur, en me prouvant que ceux qui dominaient les autres n'étaient ni plus sages ni plus heureux qu'eux. Il me dit une chose qui m'est souvent revenue à la mémoire: c'est que si chaque homme pouvait lire dans les cœurs de tous les autres, il y aurait plus de gens qui voudraient descendre que de ceux qui voudraient monter. Cette réflexion, dont la vérité frappe, et qui n'a rien d'outré, m'a été d'un grand usage dans le cours de ma vie pour me faire tenir à ma place paisiblement. Il me donna les premières vraies idées de l'honnête, que mon génie ampoulé n'avait saisi que dans ses excès. Il me fit sentir que l'enthousiasme des vertus sublimes était peu d'usage dans la société ; qu'en s'élançant trop haut on était sujet aux chutes; que la continuité des petits devoirs toujours bien remplis ne demandait pas moins de force que les actions héroïques ; qu'on en tirait meilleur parti pour l'honneur et pour le bonheur, et qu'il valait infiniment mieux avoir toujours l'estime des hommes, que quelquefois leur admiration. (85-6)

Here, Rousseau reveals (from M. Gaime) that the social order itself is an external illusion. The holy man has insight into human nature which reveals that the social order is already reversed at the internal level of human consciousness. This discourse also establishes the idea that man should, rather than seek harmony in the afterlife, ideally seek to unify with his fellow men on Earth. Though he admits that Gaime spoke less candidly than his *vicair savoyard*, the passage reveals two valuable lessons learned from the clergyman: first, that a high social position is not a measure of one's happiness or self-worth; and second, that the small gestures of morality in everyday life are more valuable than useless grandiose gestures.

Though his mention of Gâtier is brief, he highlights his great sensitivity and amicable teaching style:

Il était blond, et sa barbe tirait sur le roux: il avait le maintien ordinaire aux gens de sa province, qui, sous une figure épaisse, cachent tous beaucoup d'esprit; mais ce qui se marquait vraiment en lui était une âme sensible, affectueuse, aimante. Il y avait dans ses grands yeux bleus un mélange de douceur, de tendresse et de tristesse qui faisait qu'on ne pouvait le voir sans s'intéresser à lui. [...] Son caractère ne démentait point sa physionomie ; plein de patience et de complaisance,

il semblait plutôt étudier avec moi que m'instruire, il n'en fallait pas tant pour me le faire aimer;... (114)

The *Vicaire Savoyard* incorporates the practical moral lessons that Rousseau describes in the lessons of Monsieur Gaimé and combines that morality with Monsieur Gâtier's friendly teaching style and sensitive personality. His memories of these two men, however, are only part of the foundation for the personage of the vicar. The philosophy that Rousseau communicates through the priest goes beyond a simple moral lesson and becomes a critique of organized religion on the whole while proposing an entirely different system of spirituality.

By having the vicar appeal to the young man as an equal, religion becomes accessible. Instead of commanding that the young man repent or lecturing him, he makes himself the young man's friend, thereby bringing God to a human level.

Il commença par gagner la confiance du prosélyte en ne lui vendant point ses bienfaits, en ne se rendant point importun, en ne lui faisant point de sermons, en se mettant toujours à sa portée, en se faisant petit pour s'égaliser à lui. C'était, ce me semble, un spectacle assez touchant, de voir un homme grave devenir le camarade d'un polisson, et la vertu se prêter au ton de la licence, pour en triompher plus sûrement. (12)

Willingly becoming an equal with the young man also challenges the idea that one man can have more of a connection with God than another. It essentially challenges the hierarchy of the Church separating laymen from clergy. By closing that gap, the vicar takes a step toward the equality of men – a necessary foundation for justice. The vicar teaches not through sermons but by providing his friend with a good example of the benefits of a moral lifestyle, with work and, ultimately with an inner sense of self-

worth. "Pour garantir le jeune infortuné de cette mort morale dont il était si près, il commença par réveiller en lui l'amour-propre et l'estime de soi-même" (13-4). The clergyman makes morality accessible to the young man by allowing him to first make a personal connection with himself.

For Rousseau, one of the major flaws of religion is that it does not separate morality from rituals and superstition. Followers of an organized religion must accept not only the moral lessons of a religion but also a set of rituals and laws that must be accepted along with them. For Rousseau, the problem with religion is that theologians have not admitted that there are mysteries of the universe that man can never know. After meditating, the narrator makes his first conclusion: "Le premier fruit que je tirai de ces réflexions fut d'apprendre à borner mes recherches à ce qui m'intéressait immédiatement; à me reposer dans une profonde ignorance sur tout le reste, et à ne m'inquiéter, jusqu'au doute, que des choses qu'il m'importait de savoir" (32). Limiting his spiritual beliefs to only things that he can know and only questions that are truly important, he makes his first step toward discovering truth. The one thing that man can know is the truth that he feels in his conscience. In order to understand others, the vicar suggests that man should first study himself.

Mais qui suis-je ? Quel droit ai-je de juger les choses, et qu'est-ce qui détermine mes jugements? S'ils sont entraînés, forcés par les impressions que je reçois, je me fatigue en vain à ces recherches, elles ne se feront point, ou se feront d'elles-mêmes, sans que je me mêle de les diriger. Il faut donc tourner d'abord mes regards sur moi pour connaître l'instrument dont je veux me servir et jusqu'à quel point je puis me fier à son usage. (35)

The first lesson that the Vicaire Savoyard teaches the young man is to have compassion for others, even those who are better off than he. Rather than envy others, he teaches him to pity them: “Emu de compassion sur les faiblesses humaines... il voyait partout les hommes victimes de leurs propres vices” (18). Compassion becomes an essential value in humanist religious thought throughout the nineteenth century. As we will see in later chapters, conservatives such as Joseph de Maistre spoke out against the trend towards compassion while more liberal writers such as Edgar Quinet, Saint-Simon, later Lamennais, and Jules Michelet insisted upon compassion as essential to Justice. The vicar recognizes that his own poverty was a blessing, providing him with a simple life free from vice in which he was able to conserve “toute la clarté des lumières primitives” (25). It is precisely the formation of his conscience, however, that keeps him in doubt of Church practices which he recognizes to be unnatural and which sparks his search for the truth (26-7). The endurance of false religious practices is a result of man’s inability to accept doubt: “il aime mieux se tromper que de ne rien croire” (27). He goes on to show, however, that traditional religion only served to create more doubt (29). The mysteries of the universe cannot be solved from outside sources. They must be approached from within: “Je pris donc un autre guide, et je me dis: consultons la lumière intérieure, elle m’égara moins qu’ils ne m’égarent, ou du moins, mon erreur sera la mienne” (32).

#### In Praise of Introversion: Deifying the Internal Voice

In order to confirm the authority of the self, he argues first that feeling is something inside the self that is motivated by stimuli outside the self; second, that ideas are outside the self and separate from these feelings (they are one of the stimuli on

feelings); and third, that perception and judgment are separate and one should not confuse them (36-38). Truth is in the things themselves, not in how one judges those things and, therefore, the less human judgment there is on something, the closer one is to its truth. Rousseau opposes “judgment” with “justice.” In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau defines justice as divine in origin (“Toute justice vient de Dieu”) but warns that governments often do not know how to properly receive and interpret it and thus justice as we know it is perverted (39). Judging characterizes religion since people are judged by the Church or by the angry God created by the Church. Instead of associating God with judgment, we will see that the *Vicaire savoyard* associates God with justice.

The vicar’s most distinguishing quality is that he is an accomplished introvert in tune with his conscience. This, and not his position as a priest, is what makes him a spiritual authority. Rousseau’s vicar is less mystical and more practical-minded than the typical clergyman, rejecting miracles and even the revelations of the Bible in favor of a spirituality rooted in reason. Reasoning is based on knowledge and he argues that sentiment is the knowledge that allows him to make reasonable conclusions about God. Feeling God becomes positive proof of his existence: “Je crois donc que le monde est gouverné par une volonté puissante et sage; je le vois, ou plutôt je le sens...” (61). The self is the first thing that one must be able to know in order to hear the inner voice, the true “word” of God. A revelation revealed by another cannot communicate truth.

The true holy man, according to the vicar’s example, is he who is in touch with the inner voice and not necessarily he who follows accepted doctrine. Still, this man is

shown to be participating in society, according to society's prescribed social norms. On the inside, however, he remains unaffected by outside influences. Though the concept of a prophet to interpret God's word is discouraged in the *Vicaire Savoyard*, Rousseau does explain that some men are more in tune with their inner voice than others. Those who are too removed from nature do not hear the voice even though it speaks inside every man: "S'il parle à tous les cœurs, pourquoi donc y en a-t-il si peu qui l'entendent? Eh ! c'est qu'il nous parle la langue de la nature, que tout nous a fait oublier" (112). The vicar makes an important distinction between senses and sentiment: "La conscience est la voix de l'âme, les passions sont la voix du corps" (96). An overindulgence of the senses, according to the vicar, leads to a dulling of sentiment. Outside stimuli cause the conscience to retreat. Conscience itself is described as an introvert: "La conscience est timide, elle aime la retraite et la paix" (109). Man's unhappiness springs from self-conflict. Man's internal inclination to do good is in conflict with his external inclination to do wrong. The point of this conflict, however, is to add "la gloire de la vertu" to inner goodness. Without this virtue, man would be "like the angels" – he would not have the satisfaction of earning his faith (118).

#### Universal Religion: Unity Through Individuality

Just as the vicar says that there is no use trying to conceive of eternity, he also believes that there is no sense in focusing on the circumstances of creation. Rousseau's natural religion is focused on living in the present and, above all, living in harmony with others. All man needs to know is that God created everything. This is

knowledge he can feel by observing the world around him (92). Earthly harmony is proof that God (defined as a “superior will”) created earth. From the viewpoint of “la suprême intelligence,” “toutes les vérités ne sont ... qu’une seule idée” (95). He also reasons that a God who would make only one veritable religion would be a tyrant since all men cannot know which one religion is true (134-5). Rousseau extends the concept of oneness to verify that what an individual feels to be true must be a universal truth, reasoning that because truth is universal, what is truth for one man must be truth for all. The vicar uses this reasoning to prove that there is no use in claiming allegiance to one single human religion because the foundation of all religions is the same: man instinctively admires morals (100-4). “Si l’on n’eût écouté que ce Dieu dit au cœur de l’homme, il n’y aurait jamais eu qu’une religion sur la terre” (130). He also reasons that God is not concerned with ceremony:

Ne confondons point le cérémonial de la religion avec la religion. Le culte que Dieu demande est celui du cœur ; et celui-là, quand il est sincère, est toujours uniforme. C'est avoir une vanité bien folle, de s'imaginer que Dieu prenne un si grand intérêt à la forme de l'habit du prêtre, à l'ordre des mots qu'il prononce, aux gestes qu'il fait à l'autel , et à toutes ses génuflexions. (130)

In this passage, we are struck by a problem with the definition of religion. Some may define religion as the performance of these ceremonies. In Catholicism, the rituals themselves are sacred. Religion is thus in the process of being reimagined as spirituality, as a belief in a higher being without subscribing to the rituals put into place by an institution. Though reason is an important path to truth, Rousseau also

dismisses any thoughts that do not originate in the conscience. Truth cannot be found purely through philosophy. It must originate in the heart (95).

The vicar furthermore insists that God would not be so unreasonable as to expect everyone on earth to be informed of a revelation from just one corner of the world. The “faith” of the *Vicaire Savoyard* introduces the idea of individuals being united through an internal feeling or goodness that is felt in the individual but is not separate from humanity and, in fact, ultimately links humanity because the internal truth is universally consistent. Because this feeling links people together, it leads to acts of charity and compassion. The retreat to organized religion, which was hitherto the route to harmony, pulls man away from a religion of the few (of one pastor or one prophet) and draws him toward a religion of the whole of humanity. The only worthy sentiment is one that fosters unity (68).

Liberty is not simply freedom from others but freedom from outside ideas that stifle the self, inhibiting the individual from unifying with humanity through his conscience (75). Man’s desire for things outside of the self is the source of his unhappiness. Real happiness is only found within: “mais pour chercher un bien-être imaginaire, nous nous donnons mille maux réels” (80).

#### Abstraction and Doubt

According to the vicar, the problem with belief in God is that God is usually explained in the abstract and man has difficulty conceiving of abstract concepts such as eternity. By taking the focus off of Church dogma and notably off of revelations, he removes elements of Christian doctrine that inevitably induces doubt. By moving spirituality inward, he creates a situation in which man can directly access God

without the mediating factors that create doubt. Rousseau could have done this by making the vicar a protestant who preaches a protestant Christianity in which the concept of God is more “personal” than in Catholicism. After all, protestant denominations did allow the people to read the Bible for themselves and limit ritual. Instead, however, Rousseau suggests that the Bible itself, being a revelation written by other men, is already a compromise of the true natural religion that God proclaims inside each human being.

The vicar bases his insistence on the existence of God on the idea that a will must be the source of laws of the universe (45-7). This is his first article of faith, expressed in a rather Cartesian manner that supports his emphasis on reasoning. The vicar explains that abstraction cannot be conceived well enough by the human mind to be believed. For Rousseau, abstraction cannot produce faith. His second article of faith backs this up by using the harmonious structure of the universe as proof that some intelligent being must have put it in order. He famously uses an open watch as his analogy for the structure of the universe:

Je suis comme un homme, qui verrait, pour la première fois, une montre ouverte, et qui ne laisserait pas d’en admirer l’ouvrage, quoiqu’il ne connût pas l’usage de la machine, et qu’il n’eût point vu le cadran. Je ne sais, dirait-il, à quoi le tout est bon, mais je vois que chaque pièce est faite pour les autres; j’admire l’ouvrier dans le détail de son ouvrage, et je suis bien sûr que tous ces rouages ne marchent ainsi de concert que pour une fin commune, qu’il m’est impossible d’apercevoir. (55-6)

Rousseau’s main point here is that one need not know something works in order to realize that it works for a purpose or know that someone must have created it. His method of finding truth is to observe and then to evaluate those observations using

sentiment. The outside is filtered through the inside. His religion is not taught from the outside but felt from the inside (67). Man's duality is a conflict between this internal quest for truth and the external stimuli of sensations – between soul and body (68).

Rousseau puts morality above religion, which explains why the divinization of the conscience is so necessary. According to the vicar's reasoning, "l'être souverainement bon, doit être aussi l'être souverainement juste" (81). Justice is the law of an all-knowing God. The world is well-ordered and "love of order... is called justice" (82). The vicar perceives that God's words written on his soul are "sois juste et tu seras heureux" (82). The vicar's natural religion focuses on life on earth, on being a just person in the present. He posits that among the many mysteries that man must admit to not being able to know, man cannot know anything about eternity or about the future of his soul since abstraction is beyond his capacity of understanding.

Ne me demandez point, ô mon bon ami ! s'il y aura d'autres sources de bonheur et de peines; je l'ignore, et c'est assez de celles que j'imagine pour me consoler de cette vie et m'en faire espérer une autre. Je ne dis point que les bons seront récompensés ; car quel autre bien peut attendre un être excellent, que d'exister selon sa nature ? Mais je dis qu'ils seront heureux, parce que leur auteur, l'auteur de toute justice les ayant fait sensibles, ne les a pas faits pour souffrir ; et que n'ayant point abusé de leur liberté sur la terre, ils n'ont pas trompé leur destination par leur faute ; ils ont souffert pourtant dans cette vie, ils seront donc dédommagés dans une autre. Ce sentiment est moins fondé sur le mérite de l'homme, que sur la notion de bonté qui me semble inséparable de l'essence divine. Je ne fais que supposer les lois de l'ordre observées, et Dieu constant à lui-même. (87-8)

Here, we understand that man's recompense for being just will be reaped in the here and now. Unlike in the system of Grace, man is rewarded according to his good

deeds. “Goodness” is truly divine. Jules Michelet’s *Bible de l’humanité* continues to explore this link between recognition of good deeds and justice in the second half of the nineteenth century, as we will see in a later chapter. The vicar’s reasoning that a superior being must be just leads him to have faith in the fair judgment of God.

Understanding God as a good and just being removes potential doubt in the moral system he imposes.

Because Rousseau removes the possibility of eternal damnation, the consequences of one’s actions must be redefined. Though he denies eternal damnation – or at least asserts that it is not reasonably conceivable – he warns that the consequences of one’s actions will be reckoned with in this life. Hell is created by people who have no connection to their inner voice, to their conscience, and they are therefore existing in the absence of God. If God is the force that creates goodness and goodness is created in the hearts of men, it follows that those who hear the inner voice are already with God and those who do not are in hell on earth. Hell is the absence of God.

Ne me demandez pas non plus si les tourments des méchants sont éternels, et s’il est de la bonté de l’auteur de leur être de les condamner à souffrir toujours; je l’ignore encore, et n’ai point la vaine curiosité d’éclaircir des questions inutiles. Que m’importe ce que deviendront les méchants? Je prends peu d’intérêt à leur sort. Toutefois j’ai peine à croire qu’ils soient condamnés à des tourments sans fin. Si la suprême justice se venge, elle se venge dès cette vie. Vous et vos erreurs, ô nations, êtes ses ministres. Elle emploie les maux que vous vous faites, à punir les crimes qui les ont attirés. C’est dans vos cœurs insatiables, rongés d’envie, d’avarice et d’ambition, qu’au sein de vos fausses prospérités les passions vengeresses punissent vos forfaits. Qu’est-il besoin d’aller chercher l’enfer dans l’autre vie ? Il est dès celle-ci dans le cœur des méchants. (88-9)

Rewards and punishments for behavior are delivered in this life, not in an abstract afterlife. Living in the present allows man to take responsibility for his own actions in life. He converses with God instead of praying to him. God has already given him power over his actions through his conscience (122).

### Rejection of Revelation

Towards the end of the *Profession*, after not having mentioned the Bible or Christianity specifically throughout most of the text, the vicar finally speaks out against revelation and so-called miracles which he believes are not the work of God. “*Témoignages humains*” actually obscure divine authority by pulling the focus away from God’s true voice inside man and accepting the words of other men as truth (136-7). The main problem with revelation is that it is external information that pulls man’s focus away from the true voice of God speaking within the self.

The vicar rejects miracles as an invention: “je crois trop en Dieu, pour croire à tant de miracles si peu dignes de lui” (141). To prove his point, he follows this assertion with a dialogue between an “*inspiré*” and a “*raisonneur*.” The dialogue serves to discredit two main ideas: first, that there is a religious elite in the eyes of God and second, that revelation is positive proof to support religious dogma. The *raisonneur* debunks the prophet’s claims to authority. Revelation is supposed to add positive proof to back up religious doctrine but the “*raisonneur*” shows that second-hand knowledge cannot create the proof necessary to produce faith. Again, the source of faith should be personal experience through feeling. He furthermore denies that any ultimate truth could be exclusively found in books since books are not available to all of the people of the world and language barriers add to the impossibility of correctly translating

God's will. God's will needs no translation because it speaks personally to each man (158-9).

As he concludes, the vicar brings his argument back to the example of himself. His new faith allows him to better deliver the mass presumably because it infuses the mass with truth that is not inherently in the ritual (179). He also redefines blasphemy to mean the denial of the conscience. Though he has obviously blasphemed against the Church by professing an alternate faith, he does not recognize that action as blasphemy since the Church has ceased to be the voice of God for him. Instead he proclaims: "je ne blasphèmerai point contre la justice divine," emphasizing God's association with justice (182). He proposes less religion and more charity (185), values that the nineteenth century liberals continued to pursue using religious themes. Interestingly, he does not advocate a social upheaval to usher in a religious revolution<sup>2</sup>. He simply proposes that the new cult be discreetly practiced within the limits of the law (184). For Rousseau, religion is personal, inherently internal.

Defending his *Vicaire savoyard* against Church scrutiny, Rousseau explains in his letter to Monseigneur Beaumont: "Tels sont, Monseigneur, mes vrais sentiments, que je ne donne pour règle à personne, mais que je déclare être les miens, et qui resteront

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<sup>2</sup> In *Du Contrat social*, Rousseau divides religion into "la religion de l'homme" and "la religion du citoyen." The former is associated with "le droit divin naturel" and the latter with "son culte extérieur prescrit par des lois" (146). A third category, "la religion du prêtre," is described as a religious institution which is at odds with the governmental institution submitting citizens to "les devoirs contradictoires," pitting their public and private loyalties against each other (147). For Rousseau, religion should be neither controlled by the state nor at odds with the state but rather existing in tolerant harmony. For this reason, a religious revolution would be contrary to sociability. He criticizes the pure "religion de l'homme" as dangerously anti-social and "la religion du citoyen" as insincere, "un vain cérémonial" (148). His solution is a simplified civil religion which provides both an external socializing structure and room for liberal personal interpretation: "Il y a donc une profession de foi purement civile dont il appartient au souverain de fixer les articles, non pas précisément comme dogmes de religion, mais comme sentiments de sociabilité, sans lesquels il est impossible d'être bon citoyen ni sujet fidèle" (151-2).

tels, tant qu'il plaira, non aux hommes, mais à Dieu, seul maître de changer mon cœur et ma raison: car aussi longtemps que je serai ce que je suis, et que je penserai comme je pense, je parlerai comme je parle" (Lettre 57). Rather than impose a certain doctrine, Rousseau encourages spiritual change through doubt on an individual basis which will ideally come together as a people unified in reason: "il suit que c'est un grand bien à faire aux peuples dans ce délire, que de leur apprendre à raisonner sur la Religion: car c'est les rapprocher les devoirs de l'homme, c'est ôter le poignard à l'intolérance, c'est rendre à l'humanité tous ses droits" (Lettre 71). Civil justice and natural religion form an alliance of truth in the human heart which needs no sanctioning from the Church or State: "un cœur juste est le vrai temple de la divinité" (189). In all religion, according to the vicar, the foundation of morality is loving one's neighbor as himself and loving God above all things. In the end, doing good and forgetting one's own desires for the benefit of society as a whole are the keys to happiness: "c'est en s'oubliant qu'on travaille pour soi" (198).

### Conclusion

This ultimate goal of religion in service of humanity and the reshaping of religion to support justice are the overarching themes which we will see addressed in literature throughout the nineteenth century. Rather than argue for a secular state, nineteenth century liberals overwhelmingly opt to redefine religion in favor of contemporary ideals, echoing Rousseau's fear that "L'oubli de toute religion conduit à l'oubli des devoirs de l'homme" (10). A number of themes in the *Vicaire savoyard* thus resurface in the nineteenth century. The concept of unity through individuality, of knowing others by becoming acquainted with the self, is especially notable in fictional works

concerning religion throughout the nineteenth century. Although Chateaubriand refuses to be compared to Rousseau, his *Atala* and *René* both attest to a need to explore the individual conscience before one can accept Christianity. George Sand's *Spiridion* and Emile Zola's *Trois villes*, on the other hand, both recognize self-discovery as a necessary step in the systematic evolution of modern spirituality. As part of the overarching trend towards individualism in modern times, analytical doubt, as seen in the *Vicaire savoyard*, is increasingly valued as a tool for casting off superstition and discovering universal truths. Scientifically minded writers, such as historians Ernest Renan and Jules Michelet, present doubt as a path to positive thinking. Nevertheless, even the most liberal intellectuals continue to recycle Catholic structures and insist on some sort of spiritual system as a necessary component to society. Consequently, revelation, which was adamantly rejected in the *Vicaire savoyard*, remains in various forms as a means for supporting agendas from the social theories of Saint-Simon and early Lamennais to Ernest Renan's historical convictions in his *Vie de Jésus*. According to Jeremiah Alberg, Rousseau's approach to religion required him to discount the Bible in order to invent a new religious system (72). "If the Scriptures are gone, a new Christ, a new Church, and in fact, a new Trinity become necessary" (73). The following chapters of this dissertation trace the nineteenth century effort to fulfill this perceived need for a new religious outlook. In the following chapter, we will see that Mme de Staël continues with Rousseau's conscience-based religious theory as well as the promotion of modeling and imitation of exemplary moral figures (in the tradition of the *Imitation of Christ*) as a means for ensuring social harmony.

### Chapter 3: Morality as the Common Ground between Literature and Religion in Mme de Staël's *De la littérature*

Post-Revolution, Mme de Staël's youthful admiration of enlightenment ideals were doubtless put in check by her disappointment with the chaos and violence of 1790s France. Staël nevertheless retained her enthusiasm for liberty and her positive outlook on human nature. These were themes which originally attracted her to the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As Mme de Staël explains in her 1798 *avertissement* to the second edition of the *Lettres sur les ouvrages et le caractère de J.-J. Rousseau*, she had been excited about the possibilities of a republican France when she originally penned the letters a decade earlier. Looking back, she remarks, "Il faut, je le pense, persister dans l'amour de la liberté, malgré les sacrifices cruels qu'elle a coûtés; mais on a besoin de prouver que l'on exprimait ce sentiment à l'époque où il était inspiré par l'humanité la plus pure et la plus courageuse" (i). 1798 was incidentally the year that Mme de Staël began her monumental *De la littérature dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*. In *De la littérature*, the author considers her experiences during the Revolution and the Terror as motivation for focusing public attention on the immediacy of the problem of morality. Mme de Staël calls for the introduction of sentiment in literature in order to establish a moral society. Sentiment would balance reason to create a logical but compassionate society. In her third letter on *Emile*, the young Mme de Staël had admired the faith in the conscience and effort to unify reason and instinct in Rousseau's *Vicaire savoyard* (Lettres 60). Ten years later in *De la littérature*, Mme de Staël expresses an evolved understanding of these themes on the eve of the nineteenth century.

Without proposing any specific religion to enforce morality, *De la littérature* emphasizes the general necessity of being in touch with the soul and listening to the conscience. She makes a point, nevertheless, to continuously return to the idea of religion throughout the work in order to dispel the confusion between religion (which she sees as a positive influence on society compatible with reason) and superstition or fanaticism. For Mme de Staël, it seems that religion has a necessary role in society but she has not yet come to a definitive conclusion on what form religion should take.

#### Balancing Religion and Reason

Like Rousseau, Mme de Staël considers internal human goodness to be connected to the truth since it naturally evokes sentiments of justice, pity and humanity. Mme De Staël's proposal for a moral society could be considered a middle ground between royalists and liberals. As a protestant, she does not champion a Catholic agenda but she does insist on morality as a cornerstone of society and is not opposed to the concept of religion as a moral stabilizer. She still values liberty, often using the relatively new American nation as an inspirational example, but openly recognizes the flaws in republicanism. Mme de Staël's views on religion in *De la littérature* are presented in the context of rebuilding a nation's moral foundation through its literature. Although her definition of religion is left noticeably vague, the author explains in her preface to the second edition, she believes that religion cannot be eradicated from a properly functioning society. Religious morality has always been a method of improving human society (60). For Mme de Staël, religious morality has contributed to the continual betterment of humanity which she refers to as "perfectibility":

Ce système ne peut être contraire aux idées religieuses. Les prédicateurs éclairés ont toujours représenté la morale religieuse comme un moyen d'améliorer l'espèce humaine; j'ai tâché de prouver que les préceptes du christianisme y avaient contribué efficacement. Il n'est donc aucune opinion, excepté le gouvernement despotique, qui puisse s'avouer contraire à la perfectibilité de l'espèce humaine. Quels sont donc les dangers qu'un esprit raisonnable et indépendant peut redouter d'un tel système ? (61)

In the first discourse, the opening paragraph declares that the book's purpose is to examine the influence of religion and morals on literature as well as the influence of literature on morals and laws (65). Throughout the text, which alternates between a discussion of aesthetics and a discussion of morality, Mme de Staël links the two concepts through sentiment. Virtue and beauty are inseparable and inspire similar feelings in human beings: "La parfaite vertu est le beau idéal du monde intellectuel. Il y a quelques rapports entre l'impression qu'elle produit sur nous et le sentiment que fait éprouver tout ce qui est sublime, soit dans les beaux arts, soit dans la nature physique" (67). Beautiful literature even inspires repugnance for "vile things" (69). Mme de Staël champions the idea that *esprit* can be a replacement for superstition in modern religion. Though enlightenment ideas were blamed for the terror after the French Revolution, she defends philosophy by pointing out that it was actually the lack of enlightenment in leadership that allowed the terror. Superstition and fanaticism took over the country. Reason, however, in cooperation with morality, is the key to true progress. "Encourager l'esprit dans une nation, ... c'est faire prospérer la morale" (70). She describes the end of the eighteenth century as notably deficient in compassion, suggesting that a lack of sentiment caused the downward spiral of French society. In a "civilisation sans lumières...ils se sentent indifférent aux

malheurs des autres” (72). In accordance with Rousseau, her main critique of science is that it does not take sentiment into account and thereby leads to cold calculations that encourage amorality (79). The progress of science can most benefit society when it is balanced by the progress of morality.

For Mme. de Staël, western religion has two opposing forces: sentiment and superstition. She sees morality as compatible with the progress of the sciences but superstition is the shadow of religion that has traditionally stifled progress. In order to keep the beneficial aspects of religion, a separation of morality and superstition is necessary. Rather than throw out the entire concept of religion in favor of a purely secular philosophy of morality, *De la religion* examines the past to determine which parts of religion have historically benefitted society and which parts have held society back. Though she does not propose a new religion or religious reforms, she suggests that some form of personal religion or natural religion will foster enlightenment. Mme de Staël’s vision of humanity is as a progressive process: the human race perfects through progress. Morality is necessary to support progress (62).

Les lumières de l’expérience et de l’observation n’existent-elles pas aussi dans l’ordre moral, et ne donnent-elles pas aussi d’utiles secours aux développements successifs de tous les genres de réflexions ? Je dirai plus, les progrès des sciences rendent nécessaires les progrès de la morale ; car, en augmentant la puissance de l’homme, il faut fortifier le frein qui l’en empêche de l’abuser. (62)

Despite her belief that abstract ideas risks confusing the masses, Mme de Staël defends the role of abstract ideas in the advancement of knowledge. All meditation, for her, promotes progress and some good concepts can be born of flawed institutions

(174-6). She shows that the study of theology, for example, actually helped to advance the progress of science.

Les dogmes spirituels exerçaient les hommes à la conception des pensées abstraites ; et la longue contention d'esprit qu'exigeait l'enchaînement des subtiles conséquences de la théologie rendait la tête propre à l'étude des sciences exactes. Comment se fait-il, dira-t-on, qu'approfondir l'erreur puisse jamais servir à la connaissance de la vérité ? C'est que l'art du raisonnement, la force de méditation qui permet de saisir les rapports les plus métaphysiques, et de leur créer un lien, un ordre, une méthode, est un exercice utile aux facultés pensantes, quel que soit le point d'où l'on part et le but où l'on veut arriver. (174-5)

Though superstition and fanaticism made the institution of Christianity imperfect, she argues that “la spiritualité des idées chrétiennes” inspired the genius of Bossuet, Rousseau and various eighteenth century English and German writers (182).

Including Rousseau in this group is somewhat provocative since he certainly was not appreciated by the Church. Public burnings of *Emile* were staged by Church officials in 1762 on charges of blasphemy (Rousseau and the Original Sin 773). Nevertheless, for Mme de Staël, it is still the *sentiment* that counts and religious ideas can be appreciated for their philosophical value regardless of the judgment of organized religious institutions. Mme de Staël chooses to focus on religion's role in fostering philosophy throughout history. For her, religion and philosophy share an essential common goal: humanity. “Enfin ce que la morale de l'évangile et la philosophie prêchent également, c'est l'humanité” (185). She defines philosophy as a science that considers both political and religious institutions as well as human sentiment and the natural rights of man (187).

Il faut rappeler ici de nouveau le sens que j'ai constamment attaché au mot philosophie dans le cours de cet ouvrage. J'appelle philosophie, l'investigation du principe de toutes les

institutions politiques et religieuses, l'analyse des caractères et des événements historiques, enfin l'étude du cœur humain, et des droits naturels de l'homme. Une telle philosophie suppose la liberté, ou doit y conduire. (187)

Religion is a part of philosophy, not separate from it or against it. She recognizes that superstition and fanaticism have suppressed philosophy and the arts but that royal governments opposed such movements and preserved the arts and sciences. In the case of Galileo's persecution, for example: "Le fanatisme est ennemi des sciences et des arts, aussi bien que de la philosophie; mais la royauté absolue ou l'aristocratie féodale protègent souvent les sciences et les arts, et ne haïssent que l'indépendance philosophique" (188). Again, imperfect institutions can still yield some benefits to society. In this case, feudalism showed a more progressive attitude towards the arts than French republicanism. Mme de Staël also credits Christian monks as being the most accomplished literary scholars of feudal times. When speaking of the negative effects of Christianity, she does not use the term "Christianisme" or "religion." She uses the terms "superstition" and "fanatisme" instead. Two opposing forces in the Church simultaneously encouraged and objected to intellectual development: "Ainsi donc les mêmes causes qui faisaient renaître les lettres en Italie, s'opposaient au développement de la raison naturelle" (187).

#### Literature and History as Inspiration

For Mme de Staël, the definition of literature includes morality. "Je comprends dans cet ouvrage, sous la dénomination de littérature, la poésie, l'éloquence, l'histoire et la philosophie, ou l'étude de l'homme moral" (90). Philosophy is not just a science of reason. Sentiment is key to its foundation: "L'alliance des sentiments avec les

sensations est déjà un premier pas vers la philosophie” (91). Throughout much of the nineteenth century, other progressive thinkers such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, and even Auguste Comte will likewise use sentiment as the foundation for all other human progress. Sentiment is a built-in mechanism for discovering truth. In an argument similar to Rousseau’s watch analogy in the *Vicaire Savoyard*, Mme de Staël carries over the concept of a “divine guide” in the creation of literature: “Il me semble qu’une main divine conduise l’homme dans les recherches nécessaires à son existence” (94).

*De la littérature* looks to the past as a guide for France’s future. As she explains in the beginning of the second part of the text :

Mes conjectures sur l’avenir seront le résultat de mes observations sur le passé. [...] Il me reste maintenant à examiner, d’après l’influence que les lois, les religions et les mœurs ont exercée de tous les temps de la littérature, quels changements les institutions nouvelles, en France, pourraient apporter dans le caractère des écrits. Si telles institutions politiques ont amené tels résultats en littérature, on doit pouvoir présager, par analogie, comment ce qui ressemble ou ce qui diffère dans les causes modifierait les effets.” (299-300)

As Céri Crossley explains in *French Historians and Romanticism*, nineteenth century intellectuals would continue to reference the past in order to make informed projections on the future. France’s rejection of its own past after the Revolution sparked a renewed interest in the lessons of history. “No other nation had gone so far in attempting to eliminate and eradicate the sense of the past” (4). Liberal intellectuals between 1815 and 1830 follow Mme de Staël’s lead in the development of human unity through a rediscovery of shared history (Crossley 4-5).

Through the example of past cultures in *De la littérature*, Mme de Staël is able to make a general critique on the rapport between art and religion throughout history. She first examines the case of the Greeks whose paganism aided their perfection in the arts because man was inspired by gods who were close to humankind but still above them (98). Because of the lack of sentiment in pagan religion, Mme de Staël asserts that the moderns have advanced beyond the ancients in terms of morality. Morality is thus associated with sentiment and not strictly with justice. As we will see in later chapters of this dissertation, positivist philosophies towards the end of the century reject sentiment and wholly embrace justice based solely in reason as the enforcer of morality. In particular, the absence of women in Greek intellectual life denied Greek society the sentimental power that inspires the unity of humanity. Mme de Staël offers the Greek concept of love as an example. Love was defined not as unity with another human being but rather as an illness inflicted on men by the gods (100). Moreover, she concludes: “Les Grecs n’ont jamais exprimé, n’ont jamais connu le premier sentiment de la nature humaine, l’amitié dans l’amour” (100). Consequently, the lack of sentiment has a negative effect on Greek style: “La privation absolue d’une telle affection se fait apercevoir, non seulement dans la peinture de l’amour, mais dans tout ce qui tient à la délicatesse du cœur” (101). Mme de Staël in contrast praises Roman society for fostering nostalgia and also for the “invention” of affection towards women (149-50). Nevertheless, she points out that epicureanism and the dogma of fatalism seriously denatured heartfelt sentiment (151). She suggests that Christianity was finally responsible for the establishment of morals in antiquity: “Le système d’Epicure, le dogme du fatalisme, les mœurs de

l'antiquité avant l'établissement de la religion chrétienne, dénaturent presque entièrement ce qui tient aux affections du cœur" (151). She goes on to claim that Christianity, scientific discoveries and philosophical enlightenment combined are responsible for the abolishment of Barbary in Rome (162).

### Unity and Perfectibility

The chief benefit of Christianity, according to Mme de Staël is that it harmonized society by preaching a doctrine of unity. Mme de Staël challenges those who believe, like Chateaubriand and Ballanche, that the human mind has regressed since ancient times. She insists that humans have advanced over the centuries "et pour la propagation des lumières, et pour le développement des faculté intellectuelles" (163-4). The idea of self-sacrifice found in Christianity was necessary to succeed as conquerors (164). Christianity was one of the key elements in the progress of reason in her view because the "rewards and punishments" dogma of pre-Christian society was only created to encourage or punish actions in war – not to establish morality as a foundation for a peaceful society (165). She distinguishes Christianity from other world religions by claiming that Christianity better developed the "virtues and faculties" of the soul (167). She also credits Christianity with the unification of people from the north and midi into nations that blended "the energy of the north" with the "enlightened minds" of the midi (168-9). Christian peoples enjoyed domestic tranquility and were ennobled by sympathy and pity for others (170).

Even in non-Christian societies, Mme de Staël recognizes the value of religion as a guide for the natural inclinations of the soul: "Des idées religieuses positives, soit chez les mahométans, soit chez les juifs, soutiennent et dirigent dans l'orient les

affections de l'âme" (203). Comparing eastern and northern melancholy, however, she does find that the melancholy of the north leads to more suffering, which in turn provides deeper self-discovery:

Ce n'est pas ce vague terrible qui porte à l'âme une impression plus philosophique et plus sombre. La mélancolie des orientaux est celle des hommes heureux par toutes les jouissances de la nature ; ils réfléchissent seulement avec regret sur le rapide passage de la prospérité, sur la brièveté de la vie. La mélancolie des peuples du nord est celle qu'inspirent les souffrances de l'âme, le vide que la sensibilité fait trouver dans l'existence, et la rêverie, qui promène sans cesse la pensée, de la fatigue de la vie à l'inconnu de la mort. (203)

Mme de Staël recognizes the protestant religion of the north as having removed superstition but still envisions an even more perfect religion that would be directed purely by morality and not by worldly interests. Here, she recalls Rousseau's religion of the conscience but her call to action for the creation of this new religion is perhaps even more passionate than Rousseau's. Whereas Rousseau argued to keep religion simple and close to the heart, it was ultimately a personal, internal affair capable of quietly working within the Catholic system. Mme de Staël's evocation of "la nature humaine" demonstrates the wide-reaching possibilities of such a spiritual change on the population on the whole, not simply as individuals but as members of the human race:

Mais je le demande aux penseurs éclairés, s'il existe un moyen de lier la morale à l'idée d'un Dieu, sans que jamais ce moyen puisse devenir un instrument de pouvoir dans la main des hommes, une religion ainsi conçue ne serait-elle pas le plus grand bonheur que l'on pût assurer à la nature humaine! À la nature humaine tous les jours plus aride, tous les jours plus à plaindre, et qui brise chaque jour quelques-uns des liens formés par la délicatesse, l'affection ou la bonté. (212)

Mme de Staël, like many enlightenment philosophers, considers England as a country that has achieved a relatively harmonious social balance. She explains, for example, that England is better suited to comic theater than other countries because the government is founded on “la confiance générale” rather than on force (234-5). When the government is founded on the confidence of the people, it has no reason to fear its own people. She also notes that the English have preserved “nature” as the remaining aspect of northern religion in their culture. The man who is inspired by nature receives moral and religious impressions that unite him with the future:

L’aspect du ciel et de la terre, à toutes les heures du jour et de la nuit, réveille dans notre esprit diverses pensées; et l’homme qui se laisse aller à ce que la nature lui inspire, éprouve une suite d’impressions toujours pures, toujours élevées, toujours analogues aux grandes idées morales et religieuses qui unissent l’homme avec l’avenir. (236)

Mme de Staël praises the English for encouraging solitude which in turn leads to philosophical progress: “Quelle sublime médiation que celle des Anglais! comme ils sont féconds dans les sentiments et les idées que développent la solitude!” (237). She also suggests that different languages may express certain ideas more profoundly than other languages, foreshadowing the romantic idea of an original language that has perhaps degraded into imperfect human languages. Sentiment is the universal language: “Mais n’est-ce point assez de savoir parler la langue des affections profondes; faut-il attacher beaucoup de prix à tout le reste?” (237).

In her analysis of German literature, Mme de Staël states that German religious and political thought is even more independent than that of the English, partly due to the fact that there is no longer a dominant religion in Germany (257). Instead, “ils adoptent successivement toutes les sectes mystiquement religieuses” which has

enabled them to lead the world in expressions of deep sentiment from “l’homme passionné” (258). For Mme de Staël, Goethe’s *Werther* is the best example of profound sentiment. The imagery she uses to describe the feelings produced by such works evokes a mystical or spiritual experience. Nevertheless, she does so without using an overtly religious vocabulary or direct references to religion. She describes how they make the reader feel, however, in a mystical language.

Ces expressions vous raniment, vous transportent, vous persuadent un moment que vous allez vous élever au-dessus de tous les égards factices, de toutes les formes commandées, et qu’après une longue contrainte, le premier ami que vous retrouverez, c’est votre propre caractère, c’est vous-même. (262)

The goal in mysticism, then, is to get in touch with the self, with an inner power.

Following her insistence on the importance of solitude in the development of English literature, she continues in the second part to try to show how conscience accessed through solitude can also enlighten French literature (300). In order to unite with the people, one must first journey inside the self:

Il faut écarter de son esprit les idées qui circulent autour de nous, et ne sont, pour ainsi dire, que la représentation métaphysique de quelques intérêts personnels ; il faut tour à tour précéder le flot populaire, ou rester en arrière de lui : il vous dépasse, il vous rejoint, il vous abandonne ; mais l’éternelle vérité demeure avec vous. (300)

Again, without insisting on the reestablishment of organized Christianity, she makes a link between good taste, good ideas and durable impressions that would make up the soul of a nation (312). The suffering that France was already experiencing would be the gateway to healing the nation once that emotion could be harnessed into profound sentimental expression: “Ce que notre destinée a eu de terrible force à penser; et si les

malheurs des nations grandissent les hommes, c'est en les corrigeant de ce qu'ils avaient de frivole, c'est en concentrant, par la terrible puissance de la douleur, leurs facultés éparses" (312). The call to sentiment is, in a way, a call to a new religion akin to the one proposed by Rousseau in his *Vicaire Savoyard* in which conscience is a source for the divine. Mme de Staël continually emphasizes the influence of women as an important element in human progress. Women possess a natural moral superiority which was valued by the *ancien régime* but which is no longer valued under the republic.

Sous la monarchie, l'esprit chevaleresque, la pompe des rangs, la magnificence de la fortune, tout ce qui frappe l'imagination, suppléaient, à quelques égards, au véritable mérite ; mais dans une république, les femmes ne sont plus rien, si elles n'en imposent pas par tout ce qui peut caractériser leur élévation naturelle. (315)

Women are associated with imagination and enchantment. Christianity's incorporation of these "female" elements renders it valuable in the history of the advancement of society. For Mme de Staël, one of the main benefits that the establishment of Christianity brought to western culture was a new sense of equality for women that did not exist in ancient society. Christianity brought men and women together by making marriage a sacrament (171). Ancient religion was founded on force but Christianity, according to Mme de Staël, was founded on sympathy (172). Later nineteenth century writers, such as Michelet and even Zola, criticize Christianity for what they consider a feminization of western culture that is allegedly contrary to reason. Mme de Staël, however, clearly considers Christianity's link with femininity to be an attribute. For her, feminine influence through Christianity greatly

advanced western culture. Female-inspired sentiment brought people together and made them aware of humanity. The “invention” of love for women was responsible for the moderns’ philosophical freedom because women encouraged internal reflection (181). The introduction of female influence on thought shifted the focus of philosophy from the public to the private sphere creating a more intimate and sympathetic outlook on humanity in general (180-2). Moderns, she concludes, thus became more advanced in morality than their ancestors by excelling in the application of Christian love (182-4).

### Religion and Hope

For Mme de Staël, even paganism offers something that complete atheism does not: hope. She explains: “lorsqu’on croit au surnaturel, l’impossible n’existe pas; ainsi l’espoir n’est jamais totalement détruit” (106). The Greeks recognized sentiment as being related to the divine: “les héros agissent toujours par l’ordre des dieux... Il existait un dogme religieux pour décider de chaque sentiment” (108). Their religion, she reasons, gave them “un esprit sage et modéré” even if they were not as personally in touch with sentiment as the moderns (112).

Mme de Staël believes that the new republican nation should produce literature that promotes hope. She insists that fiction must move people, not just amuse them. Mme de Staël’s vision of the ideal role of literature in society is not unlike the role of prophetic texts throughout time – it should inspire men by touching “les émotions de l’âme” (342). Voltaire’s style, for example, is too negative for a nation which needs to inspire “l’amour du bien et des hommes” (344). According to Mme de Staël, virtue and vice were badly defined in the eighteenth century. Especially in comedy, trickery

was a virtue and vice was hailed as “grande pensée” (347). In the future, comedies must set a more responsible example: “il faut que la comédie s’attache à faire sentir avec talent que l’immortalité du cœur est aussi la preuve des bornes de l’esprit...” (347). She suggests that a Voltarian cult of esprit is to blame for the lack of heart in nineteenth century reasoning (347). By reestablishing good taste, the nation will reestablish goodness itself: “Ce qui est vraiment beau, c’est ce qui rend l’homme meilleur...” (351).

Mme de Staël’s vision for the republic is one in which leaders champion morality in order to persuade the people to follow them through trust rather than through force. The people need to see the morality in their magistrates (328). Though she established earlier in the text that abstract ideas have their place in the advancement of philosophy, she argues in the second half of the book (in agreement with Rousseau this time) that the people generally do not understand abstract ideas and therefore their leaders must convince them through actions that gain their confidence.

Vous ne pouvez attacher le peuple à l’idée même de la vertu, qu’en la lui faisant comprendre par les actions généreuses et le caractère moral de quelques hommes. On croit assurer davantage l’indépendance d’un peuple, en s’efforçant de l’intéresser uniquement à des principes abstraits ; mais la multitude ne saisit les idées que par les événements ; elle exerce sa justice par des haines et des affections : il faut la dépraver pour l’empêcher d’aimer ; et c’est par l’estime de ses magistrats qu’elle arrive à l’amour de son gouvernement. (329)

Abstract ideas, which she describes as “les dogmes ou les systèmes métaphysiques,” can even create fanaticism because one becomes passionate about an image generated by the idea. Enthusiasm for a mental image drives one to defend that image and ultimately to believe it, regardless of whether or not it is real (372). Superstition is

shown to be a received idea rooted in imaginary fears. Its source is outside of the self. Sentiment, on the other hand, is an inherent truth that springs from within the self. For Mme de Staël, sincere expression will bring forth morality. She criticizes verse as being too restrictive and praises the advancement of prose (355). Writers should look to the examples of J.J. Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre who, according to Mme de Staël, have created a new genre of poetry which she describes as blending nature and sentiment (358). Keeping religious sentiments grounded in nature allows one to unite with the world around him in a real way. When nature itself is considered mystical, there is no need to invent superstitions in a misguided effort to uphold religion: “Tout se lie dans la nature, dès qu’on en bannit le merveilleux” (359). The eternal can be found in reality. She cites Kant, stating that the pleasure in eloquence, for example, comes from the ability to “reculer les limites de la destinée humaine” through the sublime beauty of language (360). She describes melancholy as having a similar ability to imagine the infinite (361). The ideal religion would be able to keep the hope inspired by the infinite but remove the superstitions that too often accompany it. Superstition would ideally be replaced by philosophy (363). For Mme de Staël, religion can, after all, be reasonable: “Les idées religieuses ne sont point contraires à la philosophie, puisqu’ils sont d’accord avec la raison” (363). Modern philosophy must balance morality and reason: “La philosophie maintenant doit reposer sur deux bases, la morale et le calcul” (374). According to Mme de Staël’s line of reasoning, the terror was due to a post-revolution absence of sentiment. Cold calculation was mistakenly favored over morality. People claimed that killing a few would benefit the majority but pity was removed from that calculation (374).

La philosophie maintenant doit reposer sur deux bases, la morale et le calcul. Mais il est un principe dont il ne faut jamais s'écarter ; c'est que toutes les fois que le calcul n'est pas d'accord avec la morale, le calcul est faux, quelque incontestable que paraisse au premier coup d'œil son exactitude.

L'on dit que dans la révolution de France, des spéculateurs barbares avaient pris pour bases de leurs sanglantes lois, des calculs mathématiques, dans lesquels ils avaient froidement sacrifié la vie de plusieurs milliers d'individus, à ce qu'ils regardaient comme le bonheur du plus grand nombre. (374)

The most valuable human sentiments, such as pity, courage, and humanity, are naturally occurring in man. They do not require calculation: "Les idées religieuses qui plaisent tant aux âmes pures, animent et consacrent cette élévation spontanée, la plus noble et la plus sûre garantie de la morale" (378). Mme de Staël associates these sentiments with internal religion. She quotes Seneca who argues that there is an inner god, not unlike the inner voice described by Rousseau's *Vicaire Savoyard*: "Dans le sein de l'homme vertueux, disait Sénèque, je ne sais quel Dieu; mais il habite un Dieu" (378). Man does not need new religious systems, he simply needs to fortify his natural love of morality: "La morale doit être considérée dans l'homme, comme une inclination, comme une affection dont le principe est dans notre être, et que notre jugement doit diriger" (379). The whole point of religion is to reinforce morality and if we are to establish a secular society, morality should be deified. "La consolante idée d'une providence éternelle peut tenir lieu de toute autre réflexion; mais il faut que les hommes déifient la morale elle-même, quand ils refusent de reconnaître un Dieu pour son auteur" (380). This "deification" of morality is an idea which steadily progresses throughout the century to include Justice and, of course, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

Having established the dominant role that morality should play in a republic, Mme de Staël concludes by returning to the importance of style as a vessel for encouraging morality. Even while promoting sentiment, order prevails in the spirit of reason. In good style, images, sentiments and ideas must be in harmony (381). Good style attests to “les qualités de l’âme” of a nation’s magistrates (389).

Ce style de l’âme, si je puis m’exprimer ainsi, est un des premiers moyens de l’autorité dans un gouvernement libre. Ce style provient d’une telle suite de sentiments en accord avec les vœux de tous les hommes honnêtes, d’une telle confiance et d’un tel respect pour l’opinion publique, qu’il est la preuve de beaucoup de bonheur précédent, et la garantie de beaucoup de bonheur à venir. (390)

Again, although she does not insist on any particular religion to dominate the nation, she continually argues that the concept of religion should not be completely removed from the national identity. Using the example of George Washington’s eulogy, she demonstrates how an evocation of providence can ennoble a nation and bring people together (390).

For Mme de Staël, eloquence is something more than an aesthetic pleasure when it serves to “defend liberty, protect innocence, and fight oppression” (390). She reminds readers that eloquence should be used to elevate the conscience, not fan the fires of fanaticism as leaders did after the Revolution (396). Moving people by appealing to their hearts will encourage an enlightened society instead of a “despotisme raisonneur” (396). According to Mme de Staël, people avoid talking about morality since the Revolution because they are afraid of their own immorality or of offending a public that is all too aware of its moral trespasses in recent history. She insists that the topic must nevertheless be addressed in order to progress as a nation.

Ce que les anciens appelaient l'esprit divin, c'était sans doute la conscience de la vertu dans l'âme du juste, la puissance de la vérité réunie à l'éloquence du talent. Mais de nos jours, tant d'hommes craignent de se livrer à la morale, de peur de la trouver accusatrice de leur propre vie ! (397)

Here, "l'esprit divin" is defined as the unification of justice and virtue, truth and artistic expression. In the final pages of *De la littérature*, Mme de Staël concludes by reiterating the importance of sentiment in the formation of the nation, the importance of melancholy in fostering eloquence, and the necessity of eloquence in order to communicate truth and earn the trust of the people (404). She makes a plea for religious tolerance, which she believes will further enlightenment (409). Moreover, she argues for the benefits of enthusiasm and exaltation in order to develop the soul and, consequently, morality: "Il faut à toutes les carrières un avenir lumineux vers lequel l'âme s'élance ; il faut aux guerriers la gloire, aux penseurs la liberté, aux hommes sensibles un Dieu" (411). In the romantic era and throughout the nineteenth century, "*les hommes sensibles*" will continue the search for such a god.

### Conclusion

In *De la littérature*, Mme de Staël proposes a balance of sentiment and reason which would allow elements of natural religion to flourish in modern society. In particular, she advises a reinforcement of the conscience through literature. Reason would banish the superstition which holds humanity back from progress but sentiment would allow the growth of virtues like compassion and justice. For Mme de Staël, sentimental literature should play a role in drawing human society towards these virtues which are commonly associated with religion.

Mme de Staël avoids endorsing a specific religion and instead opts for a historical approach which analyzes religious and moral systems of the past in order to

reconsider the place of religion in the present. She values Christianity chiefly for its promotion of sentiment which *De la littérature* identifies as a result of female influence on religious philosophy in ancient Rome. Although she praises Christianity for unifying European people by promoting noble virtues such as domestic tranquility and self-sacrifice, the author insists on the perfectibility of religion which in turn denies the infallibility of Christian dogma. According to the theory of perfectibility, humanity will ideally move towards a religion based purely on morality and thus free from abstract ritual. Mme de Staël envisions an internal moral religion which would support the growth of society from the inside-out, from the self to society. A shift in spiritual focus to the self and the home reconnects man with the most basic elements of humanity. Again, Mme de Staël reiterates that female influence on philosophy is key to this shift in focus. Religion and literature are united in the task of providing the people with hope. Literature, she says, should model the virtues which nourish a moral society. Eloquence must therefore serve the betterment of humanity by encouraging sentiments which grow the conscience in order to advance to a morality-based civilization. Mme de Staël's own novels are models of the inspirational eloquence she promotes in *De la littérature*. In the next chapter, we will examine the role of religion in her 1807 novel, *Corinne*, which reprises arguments discussed in *De la littérature*.

#### Chapter 4: Negotiating the Dream of a Universal Religion in Mme de Staël's *Corinne*

In *De la littérature*, Mme de Staël considered the spiritual influences of Northern and Southern European peoples in order to envision a more universal idea of religion that would promote morality and support the growth of a young nation. *De la littérature* imagines the possibility of literature as a tool for guiding France through the nineteenth century. In *Corinne*, Mme de Staël makes this possibility a reality. Using Corinne and Oswald as representatives of two conflicting cultures rooted in two very different forms of Christianity, *Corinne* reexamines a number of spiritual themes discussed in *De la littérature*. The novel allows Mme de Staël to put the two cultures in dialogue with each other, each one alternately falling in love with and feeling alienated by the other. The addition of associating each spiritual tradition with a gender allows the author to exaggerate the “masculine” preoccupation with reason in the north and the “feminine” inclination toward superstition in the south. While both cultures are touched by sentiment, neither can benefit from sentiment until social limitations have been trespassed. Mme de Staël shows that the crossing of perceived social boundaries is possible through the transformative power of female sentiment coupled with the ability to self-reflect and self-critique. Although Oswald is in touch with his melancholy, he is limited by jealousy and ethnocentrism and therefore is incapable of using his sentiment to benefit humanity. Corinne, however, is able to use the feminine gift of adaptation to rise to a new level of consciousness. Solitude allows Corinne to feel pain, to push her distress beyond the present and to shed the presumption that the sole purpose of feminine genius is to provide entertainment for

men and feed the coquettish ego. Corinne embraces religion at the end of her life as a means of breaking free from social constraints on the soul. Sacrificing her own desires for the good of others and even sacrificing her own identity, she advances to join a larger community – “the universe”- which exists outside of time and space. While Oswald recognizes that he and his lover are from different “cults” and wishes Corinne belonged to his, Corinne sees the similarities rather than the differences in their spiritual origins: “Notre âme et notre esprit n’ont-ils pas la même patrie?” (239).

#### Separation and Universality: Making Religion Whole

The separateness suffered by Oswald and Corinne throughout the novel is not only a romantic disconnection. It is also an ideological division caused by the lack of unification among all people of differing faiths. The two main characters show a common need for unity and even for spirituality but the methods by which they seek a connection with the divine, the ways in which they process the concepts of spirituality, society, sentiment and the human experience are so different that Corinne and Oswald are unable to recognize the common roots of their religions – namely conscience, giving back to humanity, and taking one’s place in human history. Their respective spiritual and philosophical traditions have discovered pieces of universal truths but neither has achieved the fusion necessary to create a truly universal religion.

Almost everything about Corinne evokes universality. Corinne is naturally adept at foreign languages, effortlessly blending into English, Italian and French society (49). As Simon Balayé points out in the preface to his 1985 edition of the novel, Corinne is

at once “une image glorieuse de l’Italie” and “à demi-italienne, à demi-anglaise” (17). Her personnage “réunit harmonieusement en sa personne le génie du nord et celui du Midi” (17). Her talents are above any that might simply have been formed by education. The narrator implies that her genius is, in fact, divine: “on sentait que ce n’était pas la société, que c’était plutôt le ciel même qui avait formé cet être extraordinaire” (51). Her poetry, described as “divine verses,” flows from her in multiple forms and in multiple languages. She aspires to speak not only to Italy but to act as an intercessor or poet-prophet to the world: “Je suis poète lorsque j’admire, lorsque je méprise, lorsque je hais, non par des sentiments personnels, non pour ma propre cause, mais pour la dignité de l’espèce humaine et la gloire du monde” (57). Throughout *Corinne*, as in *De la littérature*, Mme de Staël makes a point of linking various religions without singling one out as particularly superior. Never in the book does she specifically cite any denomination of Christianity or any other religion as definitively true. Instead, she tries simply to trace the ongoing need for some kind of religion as a response to the natural human inclination toward sentiment. As in *De la littérature*, history plays an important role in executing this discovery. Corinne’s history of Rome begins with the city’s ancient pagan mythological influences and ends with Christian art. All of Rome’s religious influences are treated with equal importance. Christianity is only given special attention because of its insistence on sentiment. The Christian “truths” that Corinne focuses on have little to do with the story of Jesus. For her, the real value in Christianity is its message of love and recognition of human suffering. At Saint Peter’s Basilica, the narrator explains:

La prière seule, l’accent du malheur, de quelque faible voix qu’il parte, émeut profondément dans ces vastes lieux. Et

quand sous ces dômes immenses on entend de loin venir un vieillard dont les pas tremblants se traînent sur ces beaux marbres arrosés par tant de pleurs, le culte de la douleur, le Christianisme, contient le vrai secret du passage de l'homme sur la terre. (74)

Saint Peter's Basilica is described as a blend of Christianity and paganism implying that Christianity is not necessarily a superior religion but it is a religion that approaches a certain sentimental universality. According to Corinne, "Et en effet Saint-Pierre est un temple posé sur une église. Il y a quelque alliance des religions antiques et du christianisme dans l'effet que produit sur l'imagination l'intérieur de cet édifice. Je vais m'y promener souvent, pour rendre à mon âme la sérénité qu'elle perd quelquefois" (74-5). It is the palingenesis of religious traditions that Corinne finds soothing in Christianity, not the doctrine itself. Corinne is able to appreciate a feeling produced in the imagination on the *idea* of religion rather than the practice of any specific religion.

Oswald too conserves a hint of the spirit of universality in his religious reflections. Though he will not kneel with the Catholics because it is not his "cult," he does recognize that all religions address common human needs through prayer: "Hélas! en effet, est-il une invocation à la pitié céleste qui ne convienne pas également à tous les hommes?" (251). Still, as a protestant, he considers ceremony in general as a hindrance in the personal relationship between man and god since ritual is an artifice that ignores natural sentiment. Presumably voicing Oswald's feelings, the narrator explains: "la régularité des cérémonies d'une cour introduite dans un temple gêne le libre élan du cœur, qui donne seul à l'homme l'espérance de se rapprocher de la divinité" (253). Corinne addresses the differences in their religion as if they were

differences in personality: “La différence de nos religions, mon cher Oswald, continua Corinne, est cause du blâme secret que vous ne pouvez vous empêcher de me laisser voir. La vôtre est sévère et sérieuse, la nôtre est vive et tendre” (258). In Oswald’s “severe and serious” English Protestantism, the moral focus is primarily on man’s sense of duty. Oswald’s sense of duty is clearly illustrated in his preoccupation with living his life according to his father’s rules. In Oswald’s culture, reason trumps imagination. Italian Catholicism, according to Corinne, promotes imagination through the arts thereby encouraging love, hope and faith:

Notre religion, comme celle des anciens, anime les arts, inspire les poètes, fait partie, pour ainsi dire, de toutes les jouissances de notre vie, tandis que la vôtre, s’établissant dans un pays où la raison dominait plus encore que l’imagination, a pris un caractère d’austérité morale dont elle ne s’écartera jamais. La nôtre parle au nom de l’amour, la vôtre au nom du devoir.  
(258)

Corinne’s religion proposes a blend of life, art and the divine (262). She makes a plea to Oswald to join her: “Cher Oswald, laissez-nous donc tout confondre, amour, religion, génie, et le soleil et les parfums, et la musique et la poésie” (262). For Corinne, religion is whatever one desires it to be, as long as those desires are pure and beautiful: “il n’y a d’athéisme que dans le froideur, l’égoïsme, la bassesse” (262). For Oswald, divinity is found in reason and enthusiasm (262). His concept of religion puts nothing between man and god, diminishing the ability to incorporate art and nature into religion : “De quelque manière que vous considérez les pompes extérieures, et les pratiques multipliées de votre religion, croyez-moi, chère amie, la contemplation de l’univers et de son auteur sera toujours le premier des cultes” (263). Nevertheless, when both Oswald and Corinne witness a papal ceremony on Easter

Sunday, both feel the same enthusiasm and conclude: “tous les cultes se ressemblent” (264). Religious sentiment, regardless of the specific religion, unites people when individualism and fanaticism are removed.

Both Protestants and Catholics in *Corinne* blend romantic love with notions of god. Although Oswald considers Corinne’s blend of love and religion as a characteristic typical of Italian women, even Oswald’s father uses romantic love as an anchor for religious sentiment. In his writings, his father states that man can become closer to god through his relationship with “une épouse fidèle” (191). Oswald’s father’s core belief that the world is fleeting and simply en route to Providence echoes Corinne’s insistence that there is something more to human existence than duty alone (193). For Oswald’s father, religion links generations through traditions. It is a link between fathers and their children (193). As something that is unphased by the passage of time, religion is a source of everlasting hope (193).

Perhaps the most noticeable blend of religious imagery and romantic love in *Corinne* can be found in the use of angelic references surrounding loved ones. Corinne sees Lord Nelvil as “un être angélique” until he finally becomes the source of her disillusion with romantic love (410). Instead of playing the role of the guardian angel, he is transformed in the image of a warrior angel, heading into battle against his lover:

Je le trouve coupable envers moi; mais quand je le compare aux autres hommes, combien ils me paraissent affectés, bornés, misérables! Et lui, c’est un ange, mais un ange armé de l’épée flamboyante qui a consumé mon sort. Celui qu’on aime est le vengeur des fautes qu’on a commises sur cette terre, la divinité lui prête son pouvoir. (476)

Corinne's reference to Oswald as a warring angel eerily recalls a moment in the beginning of the novel when superstitious old women mistake Lord Nelvil for the archangel, Saint Michael, the patron saint of soldiers. Corinne is thus associated with superstition long engrained into her culture through religious symbolism.

Oswald makes few references to Corinne as angelic but his references to Lucile as an angel are too numerous to list. Oswald's first impressions of Lucile highlight her "figure vraiment angélique" and "pureté céleste" (418). Lucile speaks very little, mostly due to traditional English social constraints that bar women from engaging in intelligent conversation. Because of her silence, Oswald is easily moved by the slightest vocalization from "cette figure angélique qui ne semblait pas faite pour les affections de la terre" (421). Oswald even dreams of Lucile appearing to him as an angel (422). His inability to know Lucile on an intimate level increases her mysteriousness and produces the illusion of a divine aura around an otherwise ordinary human being. Moreover, as a model of obedience, Lucile fulfills the ideal of Oswald's "culte du devoir." Whereas Corinne is an earthy "goddess," likened to Dido and Helen, Lucile is removed from humanity and seemingly above nature. Lucile's angelic persona is derived primarily from her physical beauty and mastering of demure English social graces, "sa céleste modestie" (483). Corinne, in contrast, is referred to as divine because of her genius and goodness. Corinne's "expression de bonté céleste" surfaces when she speaks "avec une grâce et une élégance qu'il n'avait rencontrées dans aucune autre femme" (485). Corinne is perceived as divine because of what she does, unlike her sister who is perceived as divine because of what she refrains from doing. After Lucile prays to Corinne at their father's grave, Corinne

seems moved to become the kind of “dieu de bonté” that she believes in since the beginning of the novel. Instead of waiting for an abstract god of destiny to arrange their troubles, Corinne takes matters into her own hands and makes personal sacrifices for the good of the others. She moves ever closer to Immanuel Kant’s “religion of good life-conduct”<sup>3</sup> (Kant 71). Although Lucile is most often described as the angelic one, she struggles with her own selfishness and jealousy and is therefore unable to appreciate Corinne’s sacrifice until the end. Corinne’s sentiments are too advanced to be readily understood. In Corinne’s *Dernier chant*, she seems to welcome the “angel of death” as a replacement for Nelvil, the “ange armé”:

Quand les desseins de la Providence sont accomplis sur nous,  
une musique intérieure nous prépare à l’arrivée de l’ange de la  
mort. Il n’a rien d’effrayant, rien de terrible; il porte des ailes  
blanches, bien qu’il marche entouré de la nuit; mais avant sa  
venue, mille présages l’annoncent. (524)

Inspired by her sister’s example, Lucile is able to become the intercessor in the end between Oswald and Corinne. Finally touched by the power of painful sentiment, Lucile too sheds her own individual concerns, “Lucile allait de l’un à l’autre: ange de paix entre le désespoir et l’agonie” (526). Women are therefore blessed with the power of spiritual mobility.

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<sup>3</sup> In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant explains: “All religions... can be divided into *religion of roagation* (of mere cult) and *moral religion*, i.e. the religion of *good life-conduct*. According to the first, the human being either flatters himself that God can make him eternally happy (through the remissions of his debts) without any necessity on his part *to become a better human being*; [...] According to moral religion, however (and, of all the public religions so far known, the Christian alone is of this type), it is a fundamental principle that, to become a better human being, everyone must do as much as it is in his powers to do; and only then, if a human being has not buried his innate talent, if he has made use of the original predisposition to the good in order to become a better human being, can he hope that what does not lie in his power will be made good by cooperation from above.”

Michel Brix has suggested that Corinne recalls Plato's definition of love as "un être intermédiaire assurant la liaison du fini et de l'infini" (86). This intermediary quality, which also suggests a sort of saintly intercession on the part of love, can be observed in the portrayal of the loved one as angelic. Brix goes on to argue, however, that "En tant que chemin vers l'amour divin, l'amour humain doit être à l'image de ce dernier: absolu, pur, idéal, sans tache. Il n'est pas permis de d'attacher à une créature céleste pour elle-même; il faut aimer en celle-ci la créature céleste. L'ange, par essence intouchable" (87). Later in this chapter, however, we will see that Corinne's true celestial nature only shines through when she is no longer perfectly beautiful or infallible. She is most angelic when she is human, sacrificial, and humble.

#### Women and the Arts in Italian Spirituality

Corinne herself (especially in the beginning of the book when she is most effectively in command of her poetic power blended with feminine mystique) is an object of female worship, a living example of "le culte de la dame." The excitement and anticipation in the Roman crowd waiting for Corinne's arrival at the beginning of the novel is incomprehensible to Oswald who has never seen such attention given to a woman. Churches ring their bells and the city canons are set off to celebrate Corinne's arrival. According to the Romans, "c'est une divinité entourée de nuages" (25). Although female adoration is presented as a typical Italian ritual, Corinne far surpasses the average Italian lady. She is larger than life, possessing, according to Oswald, "toutes les charmes qui caractérisent les différentes nations" (136).

Gender roles in Italy are shown to be reversed. In Italy men are criticized for infidelity while women are free to keep multiple lovers (133). In a letter to Corinne, Oswald accuses Italian men of being feminized, even enslaved by their female conquerors (139). Interestingly, the same critique is proposed by Jules Michelet several decades after the publication of *Corinne*. After complaining that Italians' elaborate funeral ceremonies have destroyed veritable sentiments toward death, he hones in on the sexual role reversal that he feels has equally destroyed Italian love:

Enfin, et c'est là surtout ce qui détruit l'amour, les hommes n'inspirent aucun genre de respect aux femmes; elles ne leur savent aucun gré de leur soumission, parce qu'ils n'ont aucune fermeté de caractère, aucune occupation sérieuse dans la vie. Il faut, pour que la nature et l'ordre social se montrent dans toute leur beauté, que l'homme soit protecteur et la femme protégée, mais que ce protecteur adore la faiblesse qu'il défend, et respecte la divinité sans pouvoir, qui, comme ses dieux Pénates, porte bonheur à sa maison. Ici l'on dirait, presque, que les femmes sont le sultan et les hommes le sérail. Les hommes ont la douceur et la souplesse du caractère des femmes. (138-9)

Corinne, however, is far from being "la divinité sans pouvoir." Her universal appeal has the power to bring people together.

The adoration that Corinne receives in Roman society is a result of her expertise in the arts: "À chaque instant on la nommait, on racontait un trait nouveau d'elle, qui annonçait la réunion de tous les talents qui captivent l'imagination. L'un disait que sa voix était la plus touchante d'Italie, l'autre que personne ne jouait la tragédie comme elle, l'autre qu'elle dansait comme une nymphe et qu'elle dessinait avec autant de grâce que d'invention" (24). One of the major lessons that Corinne attempts to reveal to Oswald throughout their exploration of Rome is that Italians welcome the

intermingling of art and religion. Art feeds the Italian soul: “Il y a tant d’âme dans nos beaux-arts, que peut-être un jour notre caractère égalera notre génie” (75).

For Corinne, the major virtue of Christianity as a religion is that it highlights sentimentality, especially love and melancholy, through its art. She appreciates Pagan art but finds that it is more concerned with the physical than with the spiritual. The narrator’s explanation of the combination of pagan and Christian art themes found at the Vatican museum illustrates the contrast well: “Ils allèrent d’abord au musée du Vatican, ce palais des statues où l’on voit la figure humaine divinisée par le paganisme, comme les sentiments de l’âme le sont maintenant par le christianisme” (197). According to Corinne, sculpture therefore is the best medium for paganism, a physical religion, while painting best suits the sentimental leanings of Christianity. In painting, Corinne appreciates elements of visual art which are consistent with Mme de Staël’s style in the literary arts. Corinne values the overall impression of a work rather than the minute details of the story itself. Fabienne Bercegol asserts that in the creation of her characters, Mme de Staël insists more on the sincerity of their expressions than on their physical appearance (46). Corinne glimpses “l’âme immortelle” not just in the religious subject matter of Christian painting but in the colors and technique:

La sculpture ne saurait présenter aux regards qu’une existence énergique et simple, tandis que la peinture indique les mystères de recueillement et de la résignation, et fait parler l’âme immortelle à travers de passagères couleurs. Corinne soutenait aussi que les faits historiques, ou tirés des poèmes, étaient rarement pittoresques. Il faudrait souvent, pour comprendre de tels tableaux, que l’on eût conservé l’usage des peintres du vieux temps, d’écrire les paroles que doivent dire les personnages sur un ruban qui sort de leur bouche. Mais les sujets religieux sont à l’instant entendus par tout le monde, et

l'attention n'est point détournée de l'art pour deviner ce qu'il représente.

Corinne pensait que l'expression des peintres modernes, en général, était souvent théâtrale, qu'elle avait l'empreinte de leur siècle, où l'on ne connaissait plus, comme André Mantegna, Péruigi et Léonard de Vinci, cette unité d'existence, ce naturel dans la manière d'être, qui tient encore du repos antique. Mais à ce repos est unie la profondeur de sentiments qui caractérise le christianisme. (206-7)

For Corinne, the superiority of master painters comes from the fact that they offer a tableau on which one can meditate whereas “les tableaux d'effet” are striking only at first but gradually lose their power (208). The painter, like the poet, channels inspiration from a higher power. His “saint enthousiasme” gives him the strength to work through terrestrial tribulations through his art (208). The passage recalls Chateaubriand's commentary on painting in the third part of the *Génie du christianisme*. For Chateaubriand, Christian art in particular inspires man with the concept of the “beau idéal,” encouraging the artist to attempt to depict scenes which are more perfect than pure nature, to express man's nostalgia for his lost state of perfection. Christian art, he says, is more virtuous than art based on pagan mythology because it inspires man to better himself. For Corinne, however, the value of religious subject matter in art is that it is universally understood and therefore contributes to human unity. It is the emotion evoked by the scene rather than the moral of the story which is truly valuable.

Even contemplation of pagan religious art produces valuable religious sentiment capable of bringing one closer to humanity through the appreciation of beauty:

Corinne fit remarquer à lord Nelvil ces salles silencieuses où sont rassemblées les images des dieux et des héros, où la plus parfaite beauté, dans un repos éternel, semble jouir d'elle-

même. En contemplant ces traits et ces formes admirables, il se révèle je ne sais quel dessein de la divinité sur l'homme, exprimé par la noble figure dont elle a daigné lui faire don. L'âme s'élève par cette contemplation à des espérances pleines d'enthousiasme et de vertu; car la beauté est une dans l'univers, et, sous quelque forme qu'elle se présente, elle excite toujours une émotion religieuse dans le cœur de l'homme. (197)

For Corinne, a society's ability to create inspirational religious art is an indicator of its connection to the soul. Perhaps even more importantly, the beauty of religious art produces a combination of hope, enthusiasm and virtue that is the source of religious feeling. No one element produces religious feeling. It must be the product of harmony. In the passage above, harmony is made possible through beauty. The narrator contrasts Roman statues with those of the Egyptians, noting that Egyptian art failed to capture man's likeness because the society itself failed to forge a sense of human harmony:

Une autre salle renferme les monuments tristes et sévères des Egyptiens, de ce peuple chez lequel les statues ressemblent plus aux momies qu'aux hommes, et qui par ses institutions silencieuses, roides et serviles, semble avoir, autant qu'il pouvait, assimilé la vie à la mort. Les Egyptiens excellaient bien plus dans l'art d'imiter les animaux que les hommes, c'est l'empire de l'âme qui semble inaccessible. (201)

In Oswald's mind, however, one cannot give form to thought (209). For him, only the vague dreaminess of music can be "purely religious" (209). For Oswald, music moves the soul with enthusiasm, inspires noble feelings and is capable of expressing pure emotion without artifice. He seems in agreement with Chateaubriand that art depicts the most beautiful representation of pure nature.

La musique double l'idée que nous avons des facultés de notre âme; quand on l'entend, on se sent capable des plus nobles efforts... elle a l'heureuse impuissance d'exprimer aucun sentiment bas, aucun artifice, aucun mensonge... il semble qu'en écoutant des sons purs et délicieux on est prêt à saisir le secret du créateur, à pénétrer le mystère de la vie. (238)

No other form of expression, save "le regard de ce qu'on aime," is capable of producing such an effect on mankind (238). Harmony is the key to music's ability to move the soul. Attending a vocal concert, both Oswald and Corinne are struck by the music:

La justesse admirable de deux voix parfaitement d'accord produit... un attendrissement délicieux, mais qui ne pourrait se prolonger sans une sorte de douleur: c'est un bien-être trop grand pour la nature humaine, et l'âme vibre alors comme un instrument à l'unisson qui briserait une harmonie trop parfaite. [...] On dit qu'un prophète, en une minute, parcourut sept régions différentes des cieux. Celui qui conçut ainsi tout ce qu'un instant peut renfermer avait sûrement entendu les accords d'une belle musique à côté de l'objet qu'il aimait. (238-9)

It is music itself here which seems to produce the impression of the divine. For Chateaubriand, the music is made beautiful by the religion which inspires it. For Mme de Staël, however, it is not the religious affiliation which renders the music beautiful but the harmony itself. Just as the voices are in harmony, Oswald and Corinne find themselves coming into harmony as well. Music is a tool for human unification through the soul since everyone is capable of making a personal connection with the melody: "le vague de la musique se prête à tous les mouvements de l'âme, et chacun croit retrouver dans cette mélodie, comme dans l'astre pur et tranquille de la nuit, l'image de ce qu'il souhaite sur la terre" (239).

The Heavenly Father

Italy is described as a place on Earth that is closer to god, partly because of its idyllic climate. Other countries, according to Corinne, feel abandoned by God but “ici nous sentons toujours la protection du ciel” (39). Corinne believes in a good, all-powerful god protector in an immortal universe. Describing Italy, she explains: “Ici l’on se console des peines même du cœur, en admirant un dieu de bonté, en pénétrant le secret de son amour; les revers passagers de notre vie éphémère se perdent dans le sein fécond et majestueux de l’immortel univers” (40). Her description of God emphasizes his goodness and strength as well as his rapport with the fecund and feminine universe. The divine is a part of the daily for the Italian people. Corinne’s conception of god is akin to the good-natured male protector that Oswald believes she is seeking, “la protection d’un ami, protection dont jamais une femme, quelque supérieure qu’elle soit, ne peut se passer” (28).

Oswald’s “dieu de bonté,” however, is his recently deceased father whom he considers to be a morally superior being (perhaps because Oswald himself could not live up to his father’s moral demands, which were socially motivated). Oswald is repentant, constantly seeking to reunite with the invisible father through good deeds. In doing so, however, he ignores his natural sentimental inclinations toward Corinne. Oswald dreams of unifying himself with Corinne and his past with his future: “que serait-ce donc s’il pouvait à la fois retrouver les souvenirs de sa patrie, et recevoir par l’imagination une vie nouvelle, renaître pour l’avenir, sans rompre avec le passé!” (44).

Raised in “la maison paternelle,” in a sort of “cult” of paternity, Oswald loved his father above all else (295). Oswald’s world was one of masculine reason. Previous

women in his life were unable to deliver him from his melancholy and he points out that only the company of a male friend was able to save him from his depression (297). The women in his life were false, “soignée” and manipulative. Their emotions were insincere (300-12). Oswald, especially after having been duped by a woman who caused him to fall from grace with his father, places his faith firmly in “la bonté paternelle” (315). Oswald is unable or unwilling to recognize that his own will has caused events that he chalks up to fate, most notably his separation from Corinne which he attributes to “les êtres célestes” (316). Advice from his father, especially after his father’s death, takes on the importance of a biblical message. His father particularly criticized Oswald’s tendency to live in the present as an individual (317). He stressed the importance of solitude and contemplation in order to connect with the conscience (319). His father’s ideas are not so out of touch with Corinne’s spiritual beliefs after all in that both of them encourage a deeper connection with humanity through contemplation.

When Corinne explains her process of intercession through the Virgin Mary, Oswald admits that he too uses his own deceased father as an intercessor with god (388).

Corinne explains that praying directly to god would seem too imposing for her.

Oswald agrees:

Je ne la fais pas non plus toujours cette prière directe, répondit Oswald; j’ai aussi mon intercesseur, l’ange gardien des enfants, c’est leur père; et depuis que le mien est dans le ciel, j’ai souvent éprouvé dans ma vie des secours extraordinaires, des moments de calme sans cause, des consolations inattendues; c’est aussi dans cette protection miraculeuse que j’espère, pour sortir de ma perplexité. (388)

Corinne understands Oswald's feelings but responds with a surprising reflection on the importance of taking ownership of one's own beliefs and having the courage to question those beliefs:

On croit confusément à une puissance surnaturelle qui agit à notre insu, et se cache sous la forme des circonstances extérieures, tandis qu'elle seule est l'unique cause de tout. Cher ami, les âmes capables de réflexion se plongent sans cesse dans l'abîme d'elles-mêmes, et n'en trouvent jamais la fin! – Oswald, lorsqu'il entendait parler ainsi Corinne, s'étonnait toujours de ce qu'elle pouvait tout à la fois éprouver des sentiments si passionnés, et planer, en les jugeant, sur ses propres impressions. (389)

Here it is as if Corinne already foresees her future disillusion with her idolization of Oswald as well as certain inadequacies in her own religion which fails to reach the depths of sentimentality.

### The Question of Morality

Religion for Corinne is not so much a moral reinforcement (as it seems to be for Oswald) but rather a connection with the eternal and consequently with the entirety of humanity. Religion for Corinne is a way to connect the self with all that surrounds it, with everything that is bigger than the self. Corinne describes Saint Peter's Basilica, with its seamless mélange of mythological references and Christian art, as a temple of universal religion – not just Roman Catholic Christianity (77-8). Religion serves to put man in his place, reducing individual human importance in the service of a greater good, even in cultures that tend to value ritual and relics over profound religious meditation: "Voyez comme l'homme est peu de chose en présence de la religion,

alors même que nous sommes réduits à ne considérer que son emblème matériel!”  
(78).

Awareness of “eternity” and universality is produced by Rome itself as a city of ruins which serve as a reminder “qu’il y a dans l’homme une puissance éternelle, une étincelle divine, et qu’il ne faut pas se lasser de l’exciter...” (85-6). At the Coliseum, the greatness of architecture and art in general impresses a spiritual feeling on the spectator even though the place itself is completely devoid of a moral lesson. Oswald finds it difficult to admire the Coliseum since it was historically a place where immorality reigned – including the sacrifice of Christians. “Oswald ne se laissait point aller à l’admiration qu’éprouvait Corinne... il ne voyait dans ces lieux que le luxe du maître et le sang des esclaves, et se sentait prévenu contre les beaux-arts, qui ne s’inquiètent point du but, et prodiguent leurs dons à quelque objet qu’on leur destine” (91).

For Corinne, however, religion and morality are not synonymous. Christianity’s best quality is not simply its moral code but the “enthusiasm<sup>4</sup>” it inspires. Corinne understands Christianity to be first and foremost a cult of sentiment with a message of love (260). Love for her is divine, a “remnant” of man’s “celestial heritage” (260). The divine can exist outside of morality and the definition of morality varies from culture to culture:

Ne portez point, dit-elle à lord Nelvil, la rigueur de vos principes de morale et de justice dans la contemplation des

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<sup>4</sup> Enthusiasm, as a philosophical term, has long been associated with man’s connection to the divine. Peter Fenves’ article, “The Scale of Enthusiasm,” provides a succinct but informative history of the term. Mme de Staël’s definition of enthusiasm was likely comparable to Immanuel Kant’s definition. Kant distinguished “enthusiasm” from fanaticism by explaining that enthusiasm leads to great actions while fanaticism is delusional and destructive behavior (Fenves 123). According to Fenves, “‘Enthusiasm’ names the condition under which moral feeling turns into effective action (123).

monuments d'Italie; ils rappellent pour la plupart, je vous l'ai dit, plutôt la splendeur, l'élégance et le goût des formes antiques, que l'époque glorieuse de la vertu romaine. Mais ne trouvez-vous pas quelques traces de la grandeur morale des premiers temps dans le luxe gigantesque des monuments qui leur ont succédé? (91)

For Oswald, virtue and divinity are inseparable and sentiment is their source. Virtue is the product of celestial power working inside man to subjugate "l'homme mortel" (92). Corinne does not disagree with him but she does recognize that the ancients approached the divine in their devotion and sacrifice, regardless of their moral trespasses. She criticizes modern man for his individualism:

Nous vivons dans un siècle où l'intérêt personnel semble le seul principe de toutes les actions des hommes; et quelle sympathie, quelle émotion, quel enthousiasme pourrait jamais résulter de l'intérêt personnel! Il est plus doux de rêver à ces jours de dévouement, de sacrifice et d'héroïsme qui pourtant ont existé, et dont la terre porte encore les honorables traces. (102)

According to Corinne, suffering is one of the most effective ways for man to access the divine (105). Nevertheless, she fervently rejects fanaticism, as in the example of vestals buried alive (114). Religious tolerance is continuously mentioned as being especially important to Corinne who dreams of a religion of universal harmony (114-5). Harmony is true morality: "L'homme est une partie de la création, il faut qu'il trouve son harmonie morale dans l'ensemble de l'univers" (114-5). Corinne's concept of morality is that which serves to bring humanity together as a whole or bring man closer to the divine source that harmonizes humanity. Oswald's definition is more concrete. His rules are black and white, with clear lines between good and evil while Corinne's view of the universe includes more subtle shades of grey justified by their beauty or harmonizing qualities.

### Defining the Sacred

Early in the novel, Mme de Staël examines ritual as an external manifestation of a sentiment shared across multiple faiths but which differs from religion to religion (13). In an example provided early in the text, “Le culte grec, le culte catholique et le culte juif existent simultanément et paisiblement dans la ville d’Ancône. Les cérémonies de ces religions diffèrent extrêmement entre elles; mais un même sentiment s’élève vers le ciel dans ces rites divers, un même cri de douleur, un même besoin d’appui” (13). The vision of religious harmony through tolerance and a common human need is beautiful but pages later Mme de Staël shows how fragile harmony can be when superstition infects the minds of the people. As in *De la littérature*, Mme de Staël repeats the theme of superstition throughout the novel to show how contrary superstition can be to harmony. Upon his arrival in Italy, Oswald witnesses a horrifying scene in which superstition completely upsets the harmony of the city of Ancône when villagers blame a fire on the Jewish population and attempt to leave the Jews for dead (15). This episode sets up Italian superstition as one of the most nefarious result of imagination unchecked by reason.

Even Corinne is superstitious despite her intelligence because superstition is assumed to be a typical Italian character trait. Her own superstitions appear as one of the negative influences blocking her unity with Oswald. As the happy couple is travelling to Naples, Corinne cannot resist the draw of superstition which casts a shadow on their joy:

...je me disais que ces moments que je passais avec vous à présent étaient les plus heureux de ma vie: et comme je

ournais mes regards vers le ciel pour l'en remercier, je ne sais par quel hasard une superstition de mon enfance s'est ranimée dans mon cœur. La lune que je contemplais s'est couverte d'une nuage, et l'aspect de ce nuage était funeste. J'ai toujours trouvé que le ciel avait une impression, tantôt paternelle, tantôt irritée, et je vous le dit, Oswald, ce soir il condamnait notre amour. (276)

Oswald's perspective on ritual is informed by his protestant cultural background and he tends to liken it to superstition. He questions the effectiveness of ritual in religion claiming that Italian Catholic ritual is not consistent with morality and is solely external. In his own life, however, social customs are as ritualistic and seemingly arbitrary as religious ritual and may even be compared to superstition.

Corinne defends religious ritual as a means of creating a constant rapport with the divine. She admits that rituals are impractical but explains that their impracticality is exactly what makes them valuable – ritual serves as a vital link to the “invisible world” which has its place in daily life: “les pratiques religieuses sont plus nécessaires que vous ne pensez; c'est une relation constante avec la Divinité; ce sont des actions journalières sans rapport avec aucun des intérêts de la vie, et seulement dirigées vers le monde invisible” (260). Mme de Staël juxtaposes the extremes of Italian ritual and superstition with long passages detailing the flat and unsentimental world of English women (351-2). England itself is even described as an infertile landscape (359). Passionate people, in contrast, have a stronger connection with the divine, even if they do not understand that connection or lack the ability to deepen it (376).

Both Oswald and Corinne contemplate the sublime in nature. Here, their spiritual tendencies are united but their interpretations differ. Corinne recognizes in her *Dernier chant* that “le sublime en tout genre est un reflet de la divinité” (524). At

Mount Vesuvius, for example, Corinne explains that volcanoes actually gave poets the concept of Satan and hell because the erupting lava is a naturally occurring landscape that is contrary to Providence (321). Hell, in Corinne's mind and presumably for Italians in general, is concrete. It is a place. For Oswald, however, hell is his own intangible sentimental torment (322). Both of them, however, see hell reflected in the volcano.

Just as Corinne and Oswald can glimpse eternity in the sublime, "le malheur" takes on a sublime quality on a smaller scale for the individual. For Corinne, "le génie dans le malheur" provokes a mystical vagueness. Taking the world out of focus actually unites it through "un vertige qui confond tous les objets" (339). Towards the end of the novel, Corinne harnesses her sorrow as a means of provoking spiritual enlightenment. Her voyage to England is a self-sacrifice that marks the beginning of her transformation from a goddess of the arts to a martyr for the promotion of harmony (439). It is also perhaps a sort of death for her, foreshadowing her actual death. In England, she is the nameless and invisible spectator of society (444). Corinne's spiritual awakening coincides with a loss of self-interest in her love for Oswald and Lucile. Sacrifice of the self for the good of the other is truly noble. Making peace with the North, Corinne suddenly appreciates England as a "respectable country" and renounces her quest for "personal glory" (448). Lord Nelvil becomes a cult figure for her and she is willing to sacrifice everything for him: "c'est lui qu'il faut conserver" (448). She makes a plea to god to spare him: "Pardonnez-lui, mon Dieu! quand je ne serai plus" (448). Corinne soon recognizes, however, that her beloved, much like the paternalistic god figure, plays a conflicting role in her life. He

is “ou le protecteur le plus sûr, ou le maître le plus redoutable” (451). God is either the origin of justice or the unfeeling enforcer of injustice. In Corinne’s disappointment with Oswald’s infidelity, she reflects upon the instability of ideas gleaned purely from emotion and wonders how two people who once believed their love to be ordained by God can suddenly become strangers (474). Questioning her own sentiment and belief systems allows her to begin discovering a new way of being. Released from the idolization of her lover, Corinne is finally able to seek a higher authority. A visit to her own father’s tomb motivates her to sacrifice herself for the well-being of her sister. Both sisters pray to their father (and Lucile, in addition, prays to Corinne) (458). Corinne concludes that “l’*autorité paternelle tout entière condamnait son amour*” (459). Corinne transforms from a goddess in her own right to a humble human being, asking god for aid and going to church to pray for Oswald and Lucile (462). Corinne comes to believe that god chose for her to suffer and that her suffering makes her special, “une exception à l’*ordre universel*” (467). Through her suffering, Corinne becomes truly alone (471). It is consequently through her solitude that she then finds enlightenment.

Although Oswald surmises that Corinne has come to the end of her genius, he fails to recognize that the genius of her spirituality is the beginning of something new for Corinne, even as she lay dying. Corinne’s most advanced accomplishment as a human being is her ability to adapt. Throughout the novel, she easily adapts to new situations and continuously keeps an open mind but in the end she advances to a complete transformation of selflessness that elevates her to a saintly status. Feeling betrayed by her faith in Oswald, the object of her “cult” of love, she realizes that “il n’est pas

celui que je croyais” (510). Doubt is thus the path to truth, just as the author had suggested in *De la littérature*. Corinne soon finds refuge in the “universal” spirituality that she has been contemplating all along. At first, her rejection of the world is individualistic, as a means of protecting herself. In her final letter to Oswald, she explains that religion was a comfort to her because it was outside of all things Earthly which she associates with her love for Oswald.

Que serais-je devenue sans le secours céleste? Il n’y a rien dans ce monde qui ne fût empoisonné par votre souvenir. Un seul asile me restait au fond de l’âme, Dieu m’y a reçue. [...] Se rendre digne de l’immortalité est, je me plais à le croire, le seul but de l’existence. Bonheur, souffrances, tout est moyen pour ce but; et vous avez été choisi pour déraciner ma vie de la terre: j’y tenais par un lien trop fort. (514)

Oswald’s most remarkable role in her life was therefore not as an idolized lover but as a catalyst for the doubt which leads to enlightenment. The pain produced by the loss of Oswald is what turns Corinne into a true prophet pursuing “une prière habituelle, une rêverie religieuse qui a pour but de se perfectionner soi-même” (515). As she explains in her *Dernier chant*, darkness allowed her to see the light: “Déjà la nuit s’avance à mes regards; mais le ciel n’est-il pas plus beau pendant la nuit? Des milliers d’étoiles le décorent. Il n’est de jour qu’un désert. Ainsi les ombres éternelles révèlent d’innombrables pensées que l’éclat de la prospérité faisait oublier” (523). On her deathbed, Corinne is perhaps still far from spiritual perfection. Her last gesture is, after all, an indication to Oswald that she sees the same cloud passing over the moon that sparked her superstition en route to Naples. Oswald’s fate, however, is presented as unremarkable in the short paragraph that is devoted to the rest of his life. The reader is left to compare Corinne’s emotionally charged death with Oswald’s

bland domestic existence regulated by duty. The narrator's disinterest in what became of Oswald emphasizes the idea that acts of great sentiment do make an impression on the world while uninspired morality is forgotten.

### Conclusion

In *Corinne*, Mme de Staël is able to use the novel as a tool for illustrating the hypotheses expressed in *De la littérature* concerning religion and morality in society. Through the personages of Corinne and Oswald, she provides both negative and positive examples of situations where spirituality, art, and social progress intersect. She furthermore uses gender as a means for categorizing opposing cultural and spiritual tendencies. She associates northern austerity with masculinity and creativity with femininity. Conversely, masculinity is also associated with the religious simplicity she favors in *De la religion*. Femininity is associated with a higher susceptibility to superstition. Associating gender with the North and South, however, allows Mme de Staël to use gender as a means for uniting the contrasting cultures. Corinne herself is representative of an idealized universality since her talents and knowledge transcend cultural boundaries. The protestant's minimalist religious ceremony, for example, is appealing to Corinne despite her professed catholic faith because she ultimately seeks sincerity above all things.

As in *De la littérature*, Corinne's focus on history, especially on the history of Christianity, highlights the idea that religions might be able to unite through the universal power of sentiment. The heroine is comforted by the concept of religious

palingenesis because it reassures her that spiritual sentiment is universal. As the novel progresses, we come to understand that this metamorphosis of religion is still in process. Corinne accepts that spirituality is subjective and even malleable. Oswald's Protestantism, in contrast, is notably limited to his specific cultural context. Morality too is defined differently in the two cultures. Oswald's morality focuses primarily on duty while Corinne tends to focus on love and hope. Both Protestants and Catholics, however, are depicted as blending romantic love with the idea of the divine. The lover tends to ascribe angelic or god(dess)-like qualities to the beloved.

Although Oswald ascribes divine beauty to the feminine, he associates religiosity with masculinity. The Englishman retains a holy reverence for his deceased father, regarding him as a saint-like intercessor, emphasizing the paternalistic moral rules by which he lives. Corinne's interpretation of God is much more open, focusing rather on a morality which is less defined by the immediate and more centered on the greater good, on helping humanity. For Corinne, religion is associated with love. The divine can therefore exist outside of definitions of morality which vary from culture to culture. Mme de Staël clearly rejects superstition as a dangerous influence which leads to intolerance. Corinne does, however, defend ritual as serving a vital purpose. Ritual provides a link between daily life on Earth and the "invisible world" of the divine. Both characters are united, however, in recognizing nature as sacred.

Because women in *Corinne* are associated with both sentiment and imagination, Mme de Staël combines these qualities in Corinne who illustrates their divine power.

Corinne is regarded by her own people as a goddess-like figure of adoration. Corinne personifies the feminine influence on Roman culture and religion described in *De la*

*littérature*. Mme de Staël's concept of sentiment would become one of the defining elements of nineteenth century romanticism. As we will see in later chapters, however, sentiment would continue to be associated with spirituality while its definition and its role in socio-religious development remained open for interpretation.

## Chapter 5: Society, Morality and Sentiment versus Individualism, Opinion and Reason in Pierre-Simon Ballanche's *Essai sur les institutions sociales*

The works of Pierre-Simon Ballanche offer an alternative interpretation of the concept of sentiment in contrast to the writings of Mme de Staël. Ballanche echoes the desire for sentiment, harmony, and unity expressed by the author of *De la littérature* and *Corinne* but his conclusions dramatically conflict with Mme de Staël's spirit of tolerance. Whereas Mme de Staël avoids naming one religion or one tradition as the ultimate source of truth, Ballanche clearly favors Christianity as the only plausible religion for France. Corinne's dream of a universal religion was a melding of various traditions into one but Ballanche's *Essai sur les institutions sociales* seeks to encourage the opposite. Ballanche wants to unify by excluding conflicting opinions, thereby imposing one tradition on the many rather than encouraging individuals to open their minds to multiple traditions.

In Ballanche's 1801 essay, *Du Sentiment*, the poet establishes the idea that morality and esthetics are related because they are both products of sentiment. On the surface, his argument mirrors Mme de Staël's association of sentiment with morality and the arts. Ballanche argues that scholarly poetry has diluted poetic sentiment by focusing on form rather than feeling. He calls for a return to a more natural approach to poetry.

Une étude plus sûre et plus vraie, c'est celle de la nature, celle des grands maîtres qui nous ont précédés, et surtout celle du cœur humain.

Toutes les considérations m'ont porté à croire que ce pourrait être un bon ouvrage, qu'une poétique dégagée de tout l'appareil scolastique, une poétique où l'on démontrerait, en remontant à l'origine de nos facultés et de nos affections, que

la morale et les principes des arts d'imitation ont une source commune, le sentiment... (7).

*Du Sentiment* defines sentiment as “la puissance morale qui juge par instinct... ce qui conforme aux lois de notre nature considérée sous le triple rapport de notre animalité, de notre personnalité, et de notre spiritualité,” the combination of which is “notre humanité” (17). For Ballanche, the concept of sentiment is an innate knowledge of the existence of God. Sentiment is the product of individual meditation: “J’appelle sentiment cette conviction intime de l’existence d’un Dieu et de l’immortalité de l’âme” (19). In *Du Sentiment*, Ballanche associates individuality with “personnalité,” the part of humanity dealing with the conscience, while “animalité” refers to the physical senses and “spiritualité” refers to the soul (12). Interestingly, his later works, *Essai sur les institutions sociales* (1818) and *Palingénésie sociale* (1827-1829), focus sharply on the unification of society and reject individuality altogether. *Essai sur les institutions sociales* avoids any suggestion that individual meditation might provide a path to spiritual wisdom.

#### “La force des choses”

Ballanche’s God rules through “la force des choses,” a favorite reference throughout the *Essai*. Rather than convince his public by explaining God’s reasoning,

Ballanche’s argument rests on the assumption that man must not try to understand God’s plan. Individual opinions are harmful to society. Time honored traditions and social systems cannot be critiqued. Their merit lies in the amount of time that they lasted (101). Ballanche essentially proposes to create faith by discouraging doubt. In this sense, Ballanche’s argument is very similar to early Lamennais. Ballanche

encourages a view of history that assumes that everything happened according to God's plan, through "la force des choses," implying that man is not free to choose his destiny – life simply happens to him (101). Mme de Staël, in contrast, created a scenario in *Corinne* which positively portrayed the main character's rejection of social constraint. Ballanche's vision of human history as palingenesis nevertheless impressed notable romantic contemporaries such as Jean-Jacques Ampère, Saint-Beuve, and even the Saint-Simonians, because it hypothesized "the liberation of humanity" (Reardon 597). According to Michael F. Reardon:

If any single contribution from Ballanche's thought could be selected as widely influential, it would be his vision of human history – the historical process as an intellectual movement working for the liberation of humanity, passing through set stages of development, which Ballanche described with his organic metaphor of palingenesis, and resulting in a society bound together by a real brotherhood. His vision found favor because it was presented to a climate of opinion receptive to forms of historicism that attempted to reconcile the traditions of the Old Europe with the new ideas of the revolutionary age and presented a view of the progress of man and society. (597)

Despite Ballanche's belief in an eventual movement towards this rather utopian brotherhood in the vague future, however, he condemned attempts by his contemporaries to enact political changes which would upset the social hierarchy in the present. A vocal critic of the Charter of 1814, Ballanche depicts the disruption of social class structure as contrary to God's plan.<sup>5</sup> For Ballanche, society was created by God and exists to preserve traditions. The social class system is therefore depicted as integral to God's plan for humanity. According to Ballanche, Christianity is evolving but social change can only safely occur in due time. Change unfolds

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<sup>5</sup> According to Michael F. Reardon, Ballanche did initially support the Charter of 1814 as a suitable compromise for France after the Empire but by 1818, his remarks in the *Essai* show that he is notably less enthusiastic.

according to a divine plan unbeknownst to man. Article 1 of the *Charte* promises equal rights to all Frenchmen, thereby usurping this divine plan. Ballanche confirms that equality is inevitable but humans do not have the right to assert it through law. God will grant equality to men when it is time for men to be equal. It will come not as a law but as a revelation. As the author explains in the essay's preface: "L'égalité par le christianisme, c'est-à-dire le christianisme achevant son évolution dans la sphère civile, fait le fond de l'ouvrage suivant" but what actually follows is an argument against the pursuit of equality (12). The essay touches on politics, language, and art as it explains "revelations" on the rapport between religion and society.

Despite his insistence on Christianity, Ballanche uses surprisingly little biblical citation to back up his claims that Christianity is evolving. Instead, he establishes from the first chapter that the authority of his assertions on the topic springs from an internal truth revealed to him not by himself but by : "... je suis réduit à ne consulter que mes propres impressions [...] car je n'ai pas laborieusement étudié ces traditions: elles me sont apparues bien plus que je ne les ai cherchées: je pourrais presque dire qu'elles se sont trouvées en moi" (20). This internal truth, however, seems more rooted in tradition than in the rousseauist conscience. He continues throughout the text to describe the present as a state of spiritual and cultural limbo in which the French have rejected their past traditions but have yet to propose a new way of life. Furthermore, Ballanche believes that the rupture between morality and intelligence has resulted in disharmony. Instead of working together, "l'être moral" must compete with "l'être intelligent" (23). By the same token, immovable "mœurs" clash with the popularity of ever-changing progressive opinions (23). Ballanche bemoans the rise of

the opinion which he sees as a false substitute for traditional morals. He argues first that morals are threatened by opinions and then makes a similar argument that poetry is threatened by prose. These arguments recall the conflict between sentiment and reason previously discussed in *Du Sentiment*. Sentiment, morality, and poetry are shown to share a common foundation in universal truth. Reason, opinions, and prose represent the perceived threat of individual intellectuals working towards social change.

### Society versus Equality

Starting from the second chapter, the *Essai* establishes that man is inseparable from society. Society is described as a whole organism in which individuals are useless on their own (37, 39). Man is tied to humanity and ideas must move from generation to generation: “L’individualité n’est point, pour lui, dans ce monde” (41). All steps in history, even errors, lead to truth and movement of ideas is key to the progress of human intelligence but, once again, these steps must be taken in due time according to a mysterious divine plan (40).

Ballanche sets out to prove that social morals and political laws evolve at different rates, creating social disharmony. He attacks freedom of the press, guaranteed in article eight of the *Charte*, as a prime example. Politically, people believe they want freedom of the press, he says, but their morals are still too sensitive (97). Ballanche agrees that France’s morals must eventually become accustomed to freedom of the press but claims for the moment that, for the moment: “nos mœurs sont trop exquises et trop susceptibles” (97). Freedom of the press would compromise the sensibilities of women, the alleged guardians of conservative values, thereby endangering any

remaining traditions (97). Ultimately, the argument against social change through legislation boils down to an argument against equal rights. Ballanche insists that nineteenth century France is not prepared to accept equality among men because French morals are inherently aristocratic (98)<sup>6</sup>. For Ballanche, equality is “antisocial” – it is contrary to the social order allegedly ordained by God (98). This is one of the rare moments when Ballanche quotes the Bible in an attempt to support the necessity of a social hierarchy: “Il y a plusieurs demeures dans la maison de mon père” (98). Ballanche’s stance against individualism also proves to be very different from Mme de Staël’s. Mme de Staël seems to see all people as being in service of each other for the greater good of humanity. For Ballanche, the individual must be suppressed in support of a more arbitrary, less defined goal. Instead of promoting the sacrifice of individual desires for the good of fellow men, Ballanche encourages individuals to make sacrifices to the social system itself, which he considers sacred: “Le génie antisocial, le fils de la terre, doit être étouffé par le génie de la civilisation, par l’enfant des dieux” (100). Ballanche’s argument is significantly less compassionate than Mme de Staël’s since it abstains from putting a face on humanity and reduces the individual to an insignificant tool in the grand scheme of the divine plan.

By establishing the idea that French society is actually a religious institution, Ballanche is able to build an argument claiming that anti-religious actions are equal to antisocial actions. This would mean that the elimination of religion was somehow hurting society.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Bénichou notes that in the preface of Ballanche’s 1830 *Œuvres*, the author expresses regret for not having recognized the potential of “l’égalité par le christianisme, c’est-à-dire le christianisme achevant son évolution dans la sphère civile” and specifically for having misused this quote in support of inequality (Le Temps 85).

Toutes les révolutions politiques se mêlent ou se lient à une révolution religieuse; celle qui agite en ce moment l'Europe fait une seule exception à ce principe général: l'impulsion qu'elle a reçue a été plutôt antireligieuse; ainsi nous ne devons pas nous étonner si, dans la plupart de ses phases, elle a été antisociale. (111)

Ballanche insists that French morals are inherently Catholic and cannot even be expected to adapt to protestant-style religion, perhaps a reference to articles five and seven of the Charte which respectively guarantee religious freedom and promise state funding for any Christian religion. Protestantism, he argues, is a religion based on reason and devoid of the ceremony that excites sentiment and imagination. French morals, on the contrary, must have an “external” religion: “nos mœurs sont catholiques parce que nous tenons à un culte extérieur, à des signes sensibles de notre croyance” (112). In Chateaubriand’s esthetic argument for the conservation of Catholicism in France, tangible aspects of religion are similarly presented as inspirations for the best works of art. Ballanche, like Chateaubriand, rejects Protestantism on the grounds that its simplicity fails to inspire religious sentiment: “Une religion aride, dépouillée de cérémonies, enfin une foi métaphysique ne peut nous convenir” (Essai 112). As we saw in the last chapter, Mme de Staël, as a protestant, embraced this simplicity as pure, as closer to moral religion.

### Irreligion and Individuality

In *Du Sentiment*, Ballanche praises the rise of melancholy as a boon to the arts: “C’est l’amour, c’est la mélancholie qui ont inspiré nos premiers poètes” (118). He even credits the success of the novel to the positive influence of “la sensibilité des

femmes” (118). The *Essai*, however, flatly rejects melancholy as dangerously antisocial. In the *Essai*, Ballanche blames modern melancholy on the loss of religion claiming that a man without faith feels especially alone because he has been separated from his ancestors, a vital element of the social whole (116). Chateaubriand’s René famously reiterates such sentiments. Ballanche too begrudges Rousseau for having inspired young people with “une fausse direction à la sensibilité” which glorified the “beau idéal” instead of instilling traditional religious sentiments (119). Ballanche foresees that the loss of Christianity will result in a reversal of social progress (120). For him, religion is necessary for curbing dangerous passions and consoling all classes of society (123). The *Essai* goes on to argue that the myth of the good savage is a destructive view of human history because it glorifies the power of the individual. The “savage” is a solitary figure surviving on instinct. For Ballanche, such a man would be a degeneration of the man made by God, made to live in society (153). To concede the existence of a pre-social human being would also be conceding that man must have undergone some process of evolution. Ballanche denies man’s possible evolution from solitary to social on the basis that God made everything and “saw that it was good” (154). Man, therefore, required no evolution to achieve perfection. He furthermore insists that man was created complete with a “social sense” and language explaining that this “social sense” allows humans to be moral and intelligent beings (154). He backs up this idea by pointing out that, in the Bible, man differs from animals because animals are mute (157). For Ballanche, language is necessary to thought.

Although *Du Sentiment* defines sentiment itself as “la puissance morale qui juge par instinct,” the *Essai* insists that man has no instincts. On the contrary, man possesses liberty and will. In his essay, Ballanche is careful not to use the term “instincts” when referring to humans. Humans are unable to know anything on their own and must learn all things from society (187). In agreement with Bonald, Ballanche concurs: “L’instinct des animaux ne peut troubler l’harmonie générale; les facultés de l’homme peuvent la troubler. L’homme n’a point d’instinct; il a une liberté et une volonté. L’absence d’instinct dans l’homme fait qu’il a besoin de tout apprendre” (187). Ballanche’s insistence on man’s absence of instinct conflicts directly with Rousseau and Mme de Staël who value the wisdom gained from sentimental impressions produced in solitary meditation. Though Ballanche explains that religion must be established in society through religious sentiment, society is the source of this sentiment – not the individual. Sentiment is created from external, not internal, sources. Love for one’s country, for example, is explained as an attachment to external elements such as the soil and institutions of that country (193).

Ballanche repeatedly stresses the idea that God wanted man to live in society and not as an individual. Societies were meant to form “un seul tout” (196). Solitude is equivalent to death: “Si l’homme laisse envahir son domaine par la solitude, la nature reprend ses premiers droits; et l’homme est de nouveau frappé par la mort” (191).

Ballanche does admit that man is sometimes drawn to rebel against society but he makes no attempt to justify rebellion (197). Solitude is unnatural and destructive: “La solitude ne vaut rien à l’homme, parce qu’elle n’est pas son état naturelle” (198). Man is not free to choose whether or not he wants to be part of society. Society was not

created by individuals; it was imposed on man by God (199). Ballanche reiterates that the “homme sauvage” is not a true portrait of primitive man. On the contrary, it is a “degeneration” because the savage, as an individual, consumes without producing and is powerless without society (199).

### Language and Social Progress

The *Essai* eventually focuses primarily on “la parole,” language, as a gage for social progress. According to Alan J.L. Busst’s *La Théorie du langage de Pierre-Simon Ballanche*, the question of the origin of human language posed no real threat to Christian thought in the nineteenth century since any argument for human invention could be explained away by claiming “divine revelation.” The most conservative Catholics, however, such as de Maistre, Lamennais, and Bonald, continued to argue for the divine origin of language as a means for opposing equality (Busst 5).

“L’interdépendance, généralement acceptée, de la pensée et de la parole, et le lien manifeste entre l’origine de la société et l’origine de la parole, devaient logiquement mener les traditionalistes à en conclure que l’homme n’avait jamais été privé de la parole, et que celle-ci, loin de s’être lentement améliorée, avait été parfaite dès le début” (Busst 5). Ballanche aims to defend the superiority of the spoken word over the written word, ultimately arguing that language was not invented by men. He believes language was a revelation from God which allowed people to form societies according to God’s plan. Ballanche’s approach is not immediately accessible to the reader since he insists on gradually revealing the purpose of his argument, perhaps mirroring the way that he supposes God must be revealing his own plan to humanity.

The author's approach blends his social agenda with his religious beliefs making commentaries on language and the arts along the way. As Busst points out, Ballanche was unique amongst his ultramontane contemporaries in that he walked the line between conservative and progressive. He recognized that there was a pressing need to reconcile divine providence with human liberty (6).

A large portion of the *Essai* is devoted to Ballanche's version of the history of "la parole" because the poet insists that society cannot exist without language (Essai 199). Language is the key to the future of society (203). According to Ballanche, man was traditionally completely dependent on God and on society (as a vehicle for God's will) for all spiritual and intellectual fulfillment: "L'homme n'a jamais trouvé l'inspiration en lui-même; il l'a toujours puisée hors de lui, ou dans la révélation directe, ou dans les traditions religieuses et sociales, ou dans l'imitation" (205). Ballanche claims that God still speaks to man through his creations (206). God's word is assumed to be eternal but man's language is limited because he is incapable of expressing himself as an individual: "l'homme est un être collectif" (206). Because language is passed down from God to humanity, Ballanche defines language as a revelation (207).

Puisque l'institution du langage vient de Dieu, malheur à celui qui prostitue la parole!

Le type des idées et les sentiments de l'homme repose dans le langage qui lui a été donné par Dieu même; et il connaît ses rapports avec Dieu et avec ses semblables par la parole.

La transmission du langage est une révélation sans cesse existante, où tous les hommes sont tour-à-tour prophètes et initiés, les un à l'égard des autres, et dans les générations successives.

Les langues sont donc une révélation générale qui ne quitte jamais les sociétés humaines; elles sont aussi une révélation

continue pour tout le genre humain depuis l'origine des choses, et qui durera jusqu'à la fin des temps. (207)

This transmission of language from God to man recalls the Catholic doctrine of Jesus as the “Word” and of his reception of the “Word” from the Father. The “Word,” in Christian tradition, is the “truth” or innate knowledge of God<sup>7</sup>. Ballanche has established this truth as sentiment and thus associates it with both the Catholic definition of the “Word” and literal human language. Ballanche’s obsession with “la parole” eventually leads into a discourse on the merits of poetry versus prose. Poetry, according to Ballanche, is the original divine language: “La parole primitive, révélée à l’homme, est la poésie” (208-9). He goes on to claim that allegory is the expression of universal thought (209). Poetry is essential to inspiring religious sentiment: “Le sentiment moral, le sentiment religieux, le sentiment de l’infini: telle est l’impression générale qui doit résulter de toute poésie” (210). His definition of poetry, however, refers exclusively to the spoken word. The spoken word is the only language that he considers “alive” (210). Ballanche claims that God himself only communicates through the spoken word (210). He goes on to suggest that the decadence of poetry began with its separation from music and criticizes authors of written works for allowing a certain distance between themselves and their words (223). He accuses writers of anonymity. Even if one knows the writer’s identity, the writer is nevertheless absent as his words are being read. Ballanche likens the written word to a *courtisane* abandoned by her protector and unable to defend herself against the

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<sup>7</sup> John 1:1 and 1:14 most often cited as the basis for the association of knowledge of God with the “Word.” Lemaître de Sacy’s Bible translates the passages as: “1. Nous vous annonçons la parole de la vie, qui était dès le commencement, que nous avons ouïe, que nous avons vue de nos yeux, que nous avons regardée avec attention, et que nous avons touchée de nos mains.”/ “14: Je vous écris, petits enfants, parce que vous avez connu le Père. Je vous écris, jeunes gens, parce que vous êtes forts, que la parole de Dieu demeure en vous, et que vous avez vaincu le malin esprit” (1590-1).

reader (224-5). Because poetry was meant to be heard rather than read, Ballanche asserts that modern people have confused its form with its essence. The result, he says, is a poetry of convention, a secularization of divine art (226).

Ballanche uses the debate over the origins of language as a means for proving that God must have created society whose foundation rests on the human ability to communicate. He divides men into two camps: those who believe it possible to think without language and those who believe that thoughts cannot exist without language (126). Those who believe language is necessary to thought have a high regard for social laws and believe that God made language and society. Those who believe that thought can be separate from language allegedly also believe that the liberty of a people comes from its laws and not from its history: “les uns placent la raison des lois de la société dans la société même, et les autres dans l’homme” (129). According to this theory, disharmony occurs between these two categories of people not because of a conflict of interests but rather because of miscommunication: some people still speak the “divine” language while others speak a “mortal” language (131). According to Ballanche, spoken language was once divine. The written word, however, formed man-made institutions and created confusion in languages. He explains that it was then that two conflicting languages were born: poetry and prose. Poetry, according to Ballanche, was the divine source for communication – the original language – while prose was simply the written word created by man (139-40). Poetry then is the literary equivalent to morality and prose is dismissed as an equivalent to opinion. In *Du Sentiment*, Ballanche had already polarized reason and sentiment by insisting that reason merely exists in thoughts while sentiment translated into actions. Reason was

described as riddled with human error and ultimately unproductive while “le sentiment produit cette morale universelle qui est indépendant des gouvernements et des opinions” (Du Sentiment 53). Reason is subject to the mind of an individual, “une sagesse spéculative et isolée,” while sentiment is portrayed as a universal source of wisdom since its origins are supposedly divine (53).

### God’s Will and Political Change

Ballanche supposes that God assigned specific missions to different peoples in different eras and that these peoples had a “presentiment” of their mission (Essai 44). God supposedly prepared for Christianity by sowing the seeds of Christian ideology in the traditions of primitive societies (46). Continuing in this vein, Ballanche rewrites French history so that it too fits into the mold of a divine plan. All people and all leaders, according to Ballanche, have a secret purpose ordained by God. Viewed from this perspective, the French people are transformed into a sort of “chosen people” and the Revolution as well as the Empire are absolved as mistakes that served as stepping stones in a divine plan. Paul Bénichou explains in his *Le temps des prophètes* that Ballanche likened Louis XVI to a Christ figure whose death was a necessary sacrifice in order to usher in modern progress (77). French history since 1801 provides Ballanche with examples to support his arguments for a unified Christian society. The differences between *Du Sentiment* and *Essai sur les institutions sociales* might also serve as a reminder of the rapport between religion and politics. As the French political system changed, so did Ballanche’s concept of the divine. Using Bonaparte as an example, he repeatedly tries to show that a leader with only a

few years of social support behind him is inferior to the likes of the Bourbon kings whose centuries-old traditions unify the public (26, 28). He furthermore interprets public acceptance of the Emperor as a social move back towards religious tradition: “Ne l’avons-nous pas vu, en effet, au moment où il saisit les rênes du gouvernement, relever les autels de la religion, et élargir les routes qui ramenaient de la terre de l’exil? Ne l’avons-nous pas vu fouiller dans les fastes de la monarchie, et ordonner des cérémonies expiatoires pour les cendres violées de Saint-Denis?” (33). In Ballanche’s interpretation of recent history, the people were driven not by a thirst for glory but by a need for social and religious traditions. Ballanche eventually suggests that the fall of the Empire is the ultimate proof that Christian morality triumphs over “la puissance du génie et celle de la force” (258). Napoleon’s failure serves as another example of the collective power of society and the lasting influence of God’s eternal word: “Bonaparte a voulu peser sur nous avec le pouvoir qui a précédé le christianisme; et nous, nous l’avons jugé avec les idées morales que le christianisme a données au monde” (258). He concludes that society rejected Bonaparte because social institutions can only be founded on Christianity (259). He argues that political leaders are in charge of the spiritual well-being of their people and goes on to explain that it was a mistake to question the divine right of kings (26). He does, however, conclude that the separation of church and state could benefit the Church by disassociating it from political revolutions. Lamennais would later lodge a similar argument in his *De la religion*. Although Ballanche’s stance on social institutions is clearly reactionary and conservative compared to Rousseau and Mme de Staël, he does stand out among conservative authors of the era since he admits that France

cannot go backwards: change is inevitable. Morals ideally evolve in due time so that they clash less with public opinion. Addressing the nineteenth century clash between morals and opinions, he ponders a separation between the Church and secular affairs.

Il manque à notre Charte ce que nous ne pouvons y ajouter, c'est qu'elle soit assimilée au peuple français par une lente et continuelle intussusception, s'il est permis de parler ainsi, qui est l'œuvre nécessaire des traditions. Il lui faut enfin, sinon l'accord des mœurs et des opinions, du moins une telle indépendance entre ces deux forces, qu'elles ne puissent plus se rencontrer pour se combattre; car nos mœurs ne sauraient s'avancer au niveau de nos opinions; et l'on ne voudra pas souffrir que les opinions rétrogradent pour marcher d'un pas égal avec les mœurs. N'oublions pas que maintenant, comme j'ai déjà eu d'occasion de le remarquer, le principe intellectuel a pris l'ascendant sur le principe moral, pour la direction de la société. (93)

Ballanche recognizes that the separation of Church and state may actually be beneficial to society in that it would prevent the Church from being targeted in political revolutions (255). He adds that religion should not need political support since it is a power in its own right. Asking for political support for religion casts doubt on religion's power (255). He asks that people not seek the help of religion in matters concerning secular institutions because religion may be held accountable for the failure of those institutions. Society evolves but religion must stay constant: "Le mouvement des esprits, qui est l'opinion, peut soulever la société, mais il faut que la religion reste immobile comme Dieu même" (255).

Ballanche asserts that the current social changes are also not a part of God's plan since no new social institutions have been created by God to replace those that were abandoned. Since he insists that society is inherently Christian, he rejects secular laws as "anti-social" (59). In *Du Sentiment*, Ballanche had already juxtaposed sentiment

and law, establishing the concept that man's natural penchant for morality is superior to man-made regulations: "Il est en nous une puissance forte que le despotisme des lois humaines, que l'empire des cultes superstitieux ou immoraux, une puissance qui veille encore sur nous, quand la frêle barque de notre raison est ballottée par la tempête des passions: c'est la puissance du sentiment" (48). In the *Essai*, the power of sentiment as truth felt in the individual is replaced by the power of morality, a truth upheld by social tradition. The message is nevertheless similar. Realizing the impossibility of restoring religion to its previous place in society, Ballanche hopes people will at least accept the idea that the Church's dogmas were true because people believed them to be true for such a long time (65). The lack of new religious institutions increases the need for personal religious sentiment: "La société doit être de nouveau sous la protection des sentiments religieux, qui heureusement ont survécu, et qui doivent servir à rallier tous les sentiments sociaux" (67). Like Mme de Staël, Ballanche seeks to instill religious sentiment through literature but argues that old styles of literature no longer reach modern people: "La morale elle-même a besoin d'emprunter un autre langage pour être entendue" (70-1). Ballanche advises modern "romantic" authors to learn from the mistakes of classic authors who limited their literature to a handful of authors stifled by too many rules (75). Nevertheless, he sees the inclusion of past ideas as essential to modern literature: "consentons à croire qu'avant nous il y avait de la sagesse et de la raison sur la terre" (77).

### Revelations

In the end, Ballanche suggests that the nineteenth century should be awaiting a revelation: “Toutes les fois que la société a cessé d’être gouvernée par les traditions, le besoin d’une révélation s’est toujours fait sentir” (253). The need for revelation surfaces, he says, because man has a “sentiment intime” which reassures him that God continues to watch over him. It is like a collective conscience, “comme la conscience des peuples” (253). According to Ballanche, the fact that moderns are not waiting for a revelation, however, is a unique situation in the history of the world. Ballanche attempts to explain that people are no longer waiting for a revelation because Christianity, the ultimate revelation, is already among the people. There is nothing new to discover in the way of religion: “c’est parce que le christianisme est la perfection même des institutions religieuses, et que le genre humain ne peut avoir que le sentiment de ses besoins réels” (253). For Ballanche, the living word of God is still on Earth: “la parole a conservé toute sa puissance et toute sa fécondité dans la sphère des idées religieuses” (254). Therefore, whereas many philosophers and poets, including Mme de Staël, felt that there was some new wisdom to be found and changes to be made in the way people practice religion and the lessons that they take away from it, Ballanche seems to believe that religion does not need a new direction. It simply needs a restoration to its proper place of influence in society. Ballanche closes his essay with a brief appeal to conserve traditions in order to save literature and the arts. His basic argument is that it is impossible to reject all cultural traditions and expect the literary tradition to survive (261). Ballanche launches into an argument insisting that French literature must remain above all “French” despite being influenced by a variety of European literatures. He subsequently praises the

superiority of the French language (262). Whereas Mme de Staël promoted an inclusive multicultural approach to literature that would lead the nation to connect with sentiment in order to strengthen the conscience, Ballanche fears new directions in literature almost as much as he fears religious reform. His main concern is the conservation of poetry. True poetry, for Ballanche, comes from genuine sentiment. Ballanche accuses modern writers of abandoning truly poetic topics concerning French history and embracing the “riantes créations de la Grèce” (266). He hopes that France will become a haven for poetry:

N’imitons point les anciens mais faisons comme eux [...] La poésie, sans cesser de se consacrer à célébrer les attributs de Dieu, doit entrer davantage dans les affections de l’homme, et surtout dans la liberté morale; car, comme nous le dirons tout-à-l’heure, le règne du fatalisme va finir aussi dans les royaumes de l’imagination, et cela seul change beaucoup toutes les données poétiques. (271, 274-5)

Despite hints of classicism that he perceives in Chateaubriand’s work, he praises his friend for having created the kind of poetry that he hopes France will embrace: “M. de Chateaubriand s’est élevé à la dignité de l’épopée, et ce ne sera pas moi qui contesterai à son bel ouvrage le nom de poème” (275). Ballanche maintains that there must be in society for the arts: “Les arts de l’imagination doivent rester la noble décoration de la société” (278).

The *Essai* concludes with a consideration of the “Conséquences de l’émancipation de la pensée dans la sphère des idées politiques.” He states that the era of Charlemagne, which has characterized most of the history of France, has just ended and a new era is beginning (279). In this new era, Ballanche alleges that morality and intellectualism are no longer one (279). He hopes for an end to war and conquests of glory, juries

instead of duels, and an end to capital punishment (280). The new social order would be an expression of God's will: "Dieu ne s'explique souvent sur la société que par l'ordre social lui-même" (281). He foresees that society's wishes for peace and equality will eventually be fulfilled if it is God's will however society must first realign itself with Christianity:

Ce qu'on a appelé la force des choses constitue aussi, je le sais, une sorte de fatalité; mais lorsque la société nouvelle sera définitivement assise sur ses véritables bases, la force des choses viendra de moins loin, aura moins d'intensité, et les rênes seront plus flottantes. (287)

### Conclusion

Ballanche's definition of sentiment contrasts with reason rather than harmonizing with reason as Mme de Staël had suggested. He seeks to discourage religious doubt and encourage blind faith. For Ballanche, sentiment is an innate knowledge of the existence of God. This differs from Rousseau's conscience and Mme de Staël's sentiment in that it does not simply verify moral truths but focuses instead on verifying Christian dogma such as the immortality of the soul. Whereas Rousseau and Mme de Staël were concerned with the conscience as a guide for one's actions towards fellow humans, Ballanche is concerned with using the concept of sentiment to define man's relationship with the heavens rather than man's relationship with his fellow man.

For Ballanche, God rules through "la force des choses," an unstoppable, unquestionable force which cannot be understood by man. Because of their incapacity to comprehend it, he asserts that humans should not try to question this force. People, he says, should simply have faith in God's judgment. In the *Essai sur les institutions*

*sociales*, the author uses this argument to oppose the equality proposed by the Charter of 1814. Ballanche argues that it is not man's place to impose social regulations because society was actually created by God. This implies that God also created human inequality.

Ballanche categorizes liberal thinking as opinion-based and blames "opinions" for modern social changes, such as religious tolerance, which clash with traditional social mores which he believes to be of divine origin. He establishes sentimentality, morality, and poetry as founded in universal truth and criticizes reason, opinion, and prose as dangerous inventions of radical intellectuals. The vague is thus valued over the concrete. The *Essai* establishes that man is inseparable from society and that society is a divine institution. Anti-religious actions are therefore equated with antisocial actions. Ballanche furthermore insists, against the Charter's tolerance of Protestantism, that Catholicism is the only plausible religion in French society because France needs external religion in order to reinforce religious sentiment which upholds society.

In contrast to *Du sentiment*, which praises melancholy as a constructive influence on the arts, the *Essai* rejects the idea that morality can be attained through instincts. Rather, he insists that society is the institution through which man is destined to acquire his moral code. For Ballanche, God meant for men to live in society and solitude is a corruption of God's intended plan for man. Ballanche supports his interpretation of God as the creator of society by insisting that God created language so that man could communicate with society. Thus, he privileges poetry over prose

and sentiment over reason. Sentiment, he explains, springs from pure truth while reason is the product of subjective human opinion.

For Ballanche, political change throughout history demonstrates the power of God's will. Napoleon's fall is used as an example of God's plan working through the collective power of society. Even when mistakes are made, however, (and Ballanche considers the Revolution to be such a mistake) Ballanche views all historical events as stepping stones in God's plan. He is unique amongst his conservative contemporaries in that he at least accepts that human progress is inevitable. Morals do evolve. Nevertheless, Ballanche contends that changes must come in due time, as God wills it, and not by political decree. For this reason, Ballanche proposes a separation of church and state in order to save the church from being swept into political revolutions.

Ballanche ultimately asserts that a "revelation" is necessary to restore religion to its proper place of influence in the nineteenth century. He closes his essay with an appeal to artists and authors to move towards conserving religious traditions through their work. Ballanche expresses hope for a new social order in France to accompany the contemporary era in which morality and intellectualism have drifted apart. The only way to save society, according to Ballanche, is for society to realign itself with God's will.

## Chapter 6: A Step Backwards into Eden: The Problem with Progress in Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme*

In contrast to Mme de Staël's concept of *perfectibilité* and Ballanche's *palingénésie*, Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme* turns away from the notion of progress altogether in favor of the idea that man's perfection would be found not in his future but in his past. Published in 1801, on the heels of Mme de Staël's *De la littérature* and Ballanche's *Du sentiment*, the *Génie* is a lengthy consideration of the place of religion in society, art and literature. While *De la littérature* and *Du sentiment* certainly differ in their spiritual views, Mme de Staël and Ballanche nevertheless shared the basic idea that humanity does improve with time and that progress is imminent. Chateaubriand, on the other hand, suggests that Christianity does not move forward with the times. Rather, salvation can be found in Christianity because it is the path that leads backwards into Eden by nullifying original sin. Fabienne Bercegol suggests in her *Chateaubriand: Une poétique de la tentation* that Chateaubriand, inspired by saint Augustine, sees Christianity as a way of glimpsing man's "vérité idéale," or the perfection man held before the Fall (45). Thus, as with the artistic "beau idéal," there is a sense of longing for unachievable spiritual perfection in the *Génie*, especially in *Atala* and *René* which hints at a certain dissatisfaction with religion. There is a disconnect between the comfort which religion should ideally grant humanity and the inability of religion to actually provide that comfort in the face of real life circumstances.

While Mme de Staël argued that religion and reason can be compatible, the author of the *Génie du christianisme* attempts to champion Christianity as the preferable alternative to Enlightenment philosophy which he describes as fruitless and even destructive. Chateaubriand's *Lettre à M. de Fontanes sur la deuxième édition de l'ouvrage de Mme de Staël*, published in the *Mercure de France* in December 1800, criticizes Mme de Staël for approaching literature from a perspective that is not overtly Christian. He is particularly bothered that the author of *De la littérature* promotes the concept of *perfectibilité*, the idea that man is becoming more spiritually evolved from generation to generation. Chateaubriand refuses to concede to a spirituality that is not Christian and his approach to Mme de Staël's work denies that eloquence or "génie" could possibly exist outside the bounds of his own religion. He is baffled by Mme de Staël's attempt to harmonize religion and philosophy: "On peut remarquer, mon cher ami, d'un bout à l'autre de l'ouvrage de Mme de Staël, des contradictions singulières. Quelquefois elle paraît presque *chrétienne*, et je suis prête à me réjouir. Mais l'instant d'après, la *philosophie* reprend le dessus" (1271). He admits that some of her work contains truths but ultimately generalizes the text as "un mélange singulier de vérités et d'erreurs" – that is to say, a blend of things that he believes and does not believe (1271). In reality, Mme de Staël does not disagree that Christianity was a great source for morality but her focus is clearly on the conscience. Chateaubriand does not define morality in terms of good deeds toward humanity. Instead, he focuses on "génie," criticizing Staël for her style while largely ignoring the social intentions of her work (1277-8).

Despite his rejection of Mme de Staël's religious philosophy in general, Chateaubriand's Christianity shares a sentimental quality which is not altogether different from Mme de Staël's enthusiasm. His alleged conversion story, recounted in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, serves as a telling example of the ideal religious experience according to Chateaubriand. While his allegiance is to traditional Catholicism, he still manages to describe faith as springing from the heart and stresses the simplicity of his emotions which retain an air of innocence: "ma conviction est sorti du cœur: j'ai pleuré et j'ai cru" (Dupuis 59).

### Innocence, Ignorance, and Faith

Chateaubriand's response to *De la littérature* in the letter to Fontanes helps us understand a key point repeated throughout the *Génie du christianisme*: religious faith is contingent upon innocent ignorance and therefore philosophy must be excluded from religion. According to the book on philosophy in the second part of the *Génie*: "La vraie philosophie est l'innocence de la vieillesse des peuples, lorsqu'ils ont cessé d'avoir des vertus par instinct, et qu'ils n'en ont plus que par raison: cette seconde innocence est moins sûre que la première; mais, lorsqu'on peut y atteindre, elle est plus sublime" (803). Philosophy that falls outside of this narrow ideal of wisdom, however, is uniformly discarded as sophism. Early on in the *Génie*, Chateaubriand argues that mystery actually creates beauty and happiness. Ignorance is a virtue: "L'innocence, à son tour, qui n'est qu'une sainte ignorance, n'est-elle pas le plus ineffable des mystères? L'enfance n'est si heureuse que parce qu'elle ne sait rien, la

vieillesse si misérable, que parce qu'elle sait tout;..." (472). Chateaubriand glorifies the preservation of innocence and ignorance as a means for cultivating pure sentiment and virtue. He contrasts these states of purity with science and philosophy, arguing that certain things are meant to be left unknown. The chapters that follow are eloquent homages to the various mysteries and sacraments of Christianity. Man's inability to comprehend the divine is repeatedly cited as the reason for which he should not attempt to understand it. For example, in the case of the Holy Trinity, the author reinforces the idea that man is forever ignorant of the divine, thus philosophy is futile: "C'est une très méchante manière de raisonner que de rejeter ce qu'on ne peut comprendre. À partir des choses les plus simples dans la vie, il serait aisé de prouver que nous ignorons tout, et nous voulons pénétrer dans les *ruses* de la Sagesse!" (474). Regarding the Redemption, he concurs: "Ne le demandons pas à notre esprit, mais à notre cœur, nous tous faibles et coupables, comment un Dieu peut mourir" (480). As for the Incarnation, Chateaubriand focuses on the Virgin Mary's innocence as a vessel for the birth of the savior: "Marie est la divinité de l'innocence, de la faiblesse et du malheur. [...] et le cœur du nouveau-né qui ne comprend pas encore le Dieu du ciel, comprend déjà cette divine mère, qui tient un enfant dans ses bras" (487).

The glorification of innocence and ignorance goes hand-in-hand with the demonization of science and philosophy: "les siècles savants ont toujours touché aux siècles de destruction" (142). The third part of the *Génie* includes a chapter on

astronomy and mathematics in which Chateaubriand praises the spiritual merits of the beaux arts over the sciences:

En effet, plusieurs personnes ont pensé que la science entre les mains de l'homme dessèche le cœur, désenchanter la nature, même les esprits faibles à l'athéisme, et de l'athéisme au crime; que les beaux-arts, au contraire, rendent nos jours merveilleux, attendrissent nos âmes, nous font pleins de foi envers la Divinité, et conduisent par la religion à la pratique des vertus. (807)

Likening man to “the manifestation of God's thoughts” while associating nature with God's imagination “rendu sensible,” he implies that man's imperfections are due to his intellectual tendencies (558). Sciences “rendent compte de tout à l'esprit, sans rendre compte de rien au cœur” (553). True Christianity for Chateaubriand can only be found in the Church. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the *Génie* focuses not on the teachings of Jesus or the Catholic saints but rather on his own versions of the Old Testament creation story. In fact, the two short stories, *Atala* (1801) and *René* (1805), published in the *Génie*, reveal hints of dissatisfaction with the impotence of religion in the face of strong human sentiment and the inability of religion to restore man to his edenic state of happiness. Chateaubriand's depiction of Christianity is ultimately as a harsh and unforgiving religion but the sacrifices made to its God, the very misery that it inflicts on humankind, is the source of its beauty. Beauty and truth are intertwined: “Où est donc la beauté de la peinture? dans la vérité” (249). Although Chateaubriand criticizes Mme de Staël for alleged contradictions between religion and philosophy, the contrast between paradise (what Christianity promises) and life on Earth (what a Christian person actually experiences) is for Chateaubriand the very

essence of Christian aesthetics. In book two of the second part of the *Génie*, the author links the unrequited longings produced by Christianity to the artistic concept of the “*beau idéal*”: “Le cœur humain veut plus qu’il ne peut; il veut surtout admirer: il a en soi-même un élan vers une beauté inconnue, pour laquelle il fut créé dans son origine. La religion chrétienne est si heureusement formée, qu’elle est elle-même une sorte de poésie, puisqu’elle place les caractères dans le beau idéal...” (672).

### Primitive Man vs. Perfectibility

In contrast to Mme de Staël’s *perfectibilité*, Chateaubriand insists that man has undergone a process of moral degeneration since primitive times (534). He highlights the disharmony between reason and passion as proof of man’s moral erosion:

Quand il atteint au plus haut degré de civilisation, il est au dernier échelon de la morale: s’il est libre, il est grossier; s’il polit ses mœurs, il se forge des chaînes. [...] On dirait que le génie de l’homme, un flambeau à la main, vole incessamment autour de ce globe, au milieu de la nuit qui nous couvre; il se montre aux quatre parties de la terre, comme cet astre nocturne, qui, croissant et décroissant sans cesse, diminue à chaque pas pour un peuple la clarté qu’il augmente pour un autre. Il est donc raisonnable de soupçonner que l’homme, dans sa constitution primitive, ressemblait au reste de la création, et que cette constitution se formait du parfait accord du sentiment et de la pensée, de l’imagination et de l’entendement. (535)

Civilization and morality are, for Chateaubriand, in an antithetical relationship. This description of man, helplessly scrambling in the dark for knowledge he will never have, emphasizes man’s disharmony which contributes to his ongoing lack of stability. As his knowledge increases, his morality decreases. Man is doomed never to be whole, unlike primitive man who lived in a state of perfect balance between sentiment and reason. It follows that the cause of this process of degeneration was

original sin. God meant for humans to progress but Adam's mistake disrupted the progress that might have been:

Adam était à la fois le plus éclairé et le meilleur des hommes, le plus puissant en pensée et le plus puissant en amour. Mais tout ce qui est créé a nécessairement une marche progressive. Au lieu d'attendre la révolution des siècles des *connaissances* nouvelles, qu'il n'aurait reçues qu'avec des *sentiments* nouveaux, Adam voulut tout connaître à la fois. (535)

Here Chateaubriand appears to agree with Ballanche that progress must be made in due time. His description of Adam's trespass recalls Ballanche's warning that social change should not be forced before God has prepared people to accept such changes. An important difference between Ballanche and Chateaubriand, however, is that Ballanche still views the present as being part of God's plan and accepts even human errors as stepping stones to the future. Everything happens for a reason. For Chateaubriand, however, God's plan for progress was disrupted after the fall. He imagines an amazing world of what could have been if man had not been forced from Eden and refers to the fall as accidental, implying that it should never have happened and was not in God's plan: "Tel fut l'accident qui changea l'harmonieuse et immortelle constitution de l'homme" (536). Man's only hope is to have faith in Christianity as a portal to a lost state of perfection: "La religion chrétienne, bien entendue, n'est que la nature primitive lavée de la tache originelle" (599). Chateaubriand explains progress as a sort of illusion: the universe itself is not actually changing but its inhabitants change and therefore the static universe is reflected differently through the eyes of ever changing populations. Thus, God reunites "la durée absolue" of nature and "la durée progressive" of man (559). The "graces" of the

world are “always the same but renewed” (559). Therefore, it is no surprise that Chateaubriand interprets world religions as misconstrued glimpses of the one true religion.

Although he acknowledges in the *Génie* that world religions share some truths, Chateaubriand champions Christianity as the true religion because it is allegedly the most unified, the most harmonious. He compares religion to a painting: “Pour découvrir l’original d’un tableau au milieu d’une foule de copies, il faut chercher celui qui, dans son unité ou la perfection de ses parties, décèle le génie du maître. C’est ce que nous trouvons dans la Genèse, originale de ces peintures, reproduites dans les traditions des peuples” (529).

### Against Philosophy and Science

The third book of the *Génie* is dedicated to a study of the scriptures. Again, the author’s method is to compare world religions in an attempt to show that all religions contain some basic truths:

Il est impossible de croire qu’un mensonge absurde devienne une tradition universelle. Ouvrez les livres du second Zoroastre, les dialogues de Platon et ceux de Lucien, les traités moraux de Plutarque, les fastes des Chinois, la Bible des Hébreux, les Edda des Scandinaves; transportez-vous chez les nègres de l’Afrique, ou chez les savants prêtres de l’Inde: tous vous feront le récit des crimes du dieu du mal; tous vous peindront les temps trop courts du bonheur de l’homme, et les longues calamités qui suivirent la perte de son innocence. (526)

A similar argument is applied to scientists and philosophers. In book four of the first part, for example, Chateaubriand argues that the story of Moses was likely true since various learned men believed in it: "D'abord, il est un peu téméraire de vouloir nous persuader qu'Origène, Eusèbe, Bossuet, Pascal, Fénelon, Bacon, Newton, Leibniz, Huet, et tant d'autres étaient ou des ignorants, ou des simples, ou des pervers parlant contre leur conviction intime. Cependant ils ont cru à la vérité de l'histoire de Moïse" (538). Just pages later, however, Newton and Leibniz are accused of taking part in the downfall of the modern world as fathers of a movement towards science and against religion. Chateaubriand is careful to distinguish Copernicus, Tycho-Brahé, Kepler, and Leibniz as believers in God but depicts them as the last of their kind. The knowledge they uncovered inspired modern scientists to search for truth outside the bounds of Christianity: "leurs successeurs, par une fatalité inexplicable, s'imaginèrent tenir Dieu dans leurs creusets et dans leurs télescopes, parce qu'ils y voyaient quelques-uns des éléments sur lesquels l'Intelligence universelle a fondé les mondes" (550). Chateaubriand's simplified portrayal of scientists recalls the legend of Faust. Men began with good intentions but scientific achievement tempts them into thinking that humanity wields some power over God.

Chateaubriand likewise criticizes eighteenth century religious philosophers for allegedly pandering to the sophists. The enlightenment argument for Christianity, he explains, is that the religion was good because it came from God. For Chateaubriand, however, Christianity is inherently excellent and needs no apology. His reasoning is therefore the reverse. Christianity is excellent, therefore it must have come from God.

Assuming the religion itself to be good regardless of its origins removes any doubt of the Church's infallibility:

Les défenseurs des chrétiens tombèrent dans une faute qui les avait déjà perdues : ils ne s'aperçurent pas qu'il ne s'agissait plus de discuter tel ou tel dogme, puisqu'on rejetait absolument les bases. En partant de la mission de Jésus-Christ, en remontant de conséquence en conséquence, ils établissaient sans doute fort solidement les vérités de la foi ; mais cette manière d'argumenter, bonne au dix-septième siècle, lorsque le fond n'était pas contesté, ne valait plus rien de nos jours. Il fallait prendre la route contraire: passer de l'effet à la cause, ne pas prouver que le christianisme est excellent, parce qu'il vient de Dieu, mais qu'il vient de Dieu, parce qu'il est excellent.  
(469)

For Chateaubriand, the false path taken by eighteenth century religious philosophers seems to mirror Adam's sin. Once again, reason spoils faith and when one follows reasoning outside of the confines of dogma. It is dangerous to put the concept of God above the religion that represents him. Taking God out of context opens the doors to spiritual interpretation thereby mingling human error with the divine. Rather than seek a new personal connection with the divine, the *Génie du christianisme* aims to return to the foundations of religion: dogma and ritual. Evidently, Chateaubriand sees his work as a correction of theosophical errors which he believes derailed Christian thought in the eighteenth century.

Despite his warnings that individual religious interpretation risks tainting Christian wisdom, Chateaubriand takes the liberty of rewriting portions of the Old Testament so that the scriptures respond to recent scientific discrepancies with Christian

tradition. Chateaubriand essentially transforms God into a fictional character in order to elaborate on God's reasoning. Addressing, for example, the discovery of tropical animal remains in cold climates, the author explains: "il voulut imprimer sur ce globe des traces éternelles de son courroux" (554). Mountain ranges exist "pour marquer son triomphe sur les impies, comme un monarque plante un trophée dans le champ où il a défait ses ennemis" (554). Emphasizing man's ephemeral nature, the author writes that God is motivated to leave traces of his work on Earth because he knows how forgetful men can be: "sachant combien l'homme perd aisément la mémoire du malheur, il en multiplia les souvenirs dans sa demeure" (555). Although none of this is actually found in the Bible, Chateaubriand asserts his story as truth.

Throughout the entire second book of the first part of the *Génie*, devoted to "Vertus et lois morales," the author again takes liberties in re-writing biblical events. In the first chapter, he examines "vices et vertus selon la religion," attacking pride (*orgueil*) which he asserts is the number one vice according to the Church: "C'est le péché de Satan, c'est le premier péché du monde" (512). His version of the history of morality in the Christian world reads like scripture:

Avant Jésus-Christ, l'âme de l'homme était en chaos; le Verbe se fit entendre, aussitôt tout se débrouilla dans le monde intellectuel, comme à la même Parole, tout s'était jadis dans le monde physique: ce fut la création morale de l'univers. [...] Dès lors on vit s'établir une admirable balance entre les forces et les faiblesses; la religion dirigea ses foudres contre l'orgueil, vice qui se nourrit de vertus: elle le découvrit dans les replis de nos cœurs, elle le poursuivit dans ses métamorphoses; les sacrements marchèrent contre lui en une armée sainte, et l'Humilité, vêtue d'un sac, les reins ceints d'une corde, les pieds nus, le front couvert de cendre, les yeux baissés et en pleurs, devint une des premières vertus du fidèle. (514)

The biblical tone of Chateaubriand's writing adds a sense of religious authenticity to his message while the use of allegory provides a touch of wonderment. In the above passage, he insists upon the balance which supposedly existed in primitive times, a theme found throughout the *Génie*, usually in the context of "harmony." His personification of the sacraments as soldiers in defense of humility adds a sense of purpose to Catholic ritual. Moreover, the personification of humility as a martyr-like saint further glorifies Chateaubriand's stance against knowledge in favor of faith. In doing so, he praises humility as the path of the faithful and spurns activities outside the sphere of humility, such as the quest for knowledge.

#### Hope and Faith: External vs. Internal Spirituality

Chateaubriand contrasts faith and hope as external and internal phenomena, respectively:

La foi a son foyer hors de nous; elle nous vient d'un objet étranger; l'espérance, au contraire, naît au dedans de nous, pour se porter au dehors. On nous impose la première, notre propre désir fait naître la seconde; celle-là est une obéissance, celle-ci est un amour. Mais comme la foi engendre plus facilement les autres vertus, comme elle découle directement de Dieu, que par conséquent étant une émanation de l'Éternel, elle est plus belle que l'espérance! (516).

He argues that faith (which he deems external) is the more beautiful religious path because it comes directly from God to man whereas hope is born within man. This, he says, is why the Church values faith over hope. For Chateaubriand then, the

importance of faith over hope signals that religion is something that one ideally absorbs from the outside-in. This idea of external religion contrasts directly with Rousseau and Mme de Staël who argued that true spirituality comes from a voice inside the self, from the conscience. For Mme de Staël, hope would be the guiding light of the nation, inspiring the people to glimpse the possibilities of society beyond the challenges of the present. Hope, she says, would inspire morality through trust in fellow men rather than through the force of the law. While Chateaubriand is certainly concerned with morality, he diminishes the authority of the conscience by consistently insisting on the authority of external religious sources. The second chapter of part one, book six does address the conscience but Chateaubriand redefines the conscience within the framework of Christianity and asserts that the Church is a perfected external conscience meant to correct the internal conscience which man has lost: “Toujours prêt à avertir le pécheur, le Fils de Dieu avait établi sa religion comme une seconde conscience, pour le coupable qui aurait eu le malheur de perdre la conscience naturelle, conscience évangélique, pleine de pitié et de douceur, et à laquelle Jésus-Christ avait accordé le droit de faire grâce, que n’a pas la première” (607). He goes on to add that modern conscience is actually just a fear of the laws (which are also external), completely denying the possibility that man might have any internal source for morality.

In keeping with his rejection of internal spiritual pursuits, Chateaubriand cites his stance against solitude as one of his main reasons for writing *Atala* (1801) and *René* (1805), the two moral tales originally published in the *Génie*. In the original preface

to *Atala*, he makes a point of distancing himself from Rousseau, noting that he rejects Rousseau's admiration for pure nature (19). Given the painstakingly detailed descriptions of gorgeous wild nature scenes that follow in the story, it is difficult to believe that Chateaubriand genuinely finds nature to be so ugly. It is well known that as a young man, prior to the Revolution, Chateaubriand admired Rousseau and his spiritual philosophy was closer to Enlightenment deism (Berchet 154). With Chateaubriand's change in political affiliation, however, his spiritual philosophy also changed. The wild American landscapes in *René* and *Atala* hint at a preoccupation with the virgin Edenic setting. As Eric Gans points out, "Rousseau's nature was that of familiar lands; nor was it particularly individualized. (...) That of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was exotic, but it remained confined to the colonial island of Mauritius. Chateaubriand thus had the opportunity to raise the ante by exploring an exotic landscape foreign to him and to European civilization, one inhabited by savages" (569). Chateaubriand's virgin landscape provides an opportunity for man to begin again, free of the corruptions of contemporary society.

The negative aspect of nature for Chateaubriand is linked to nature's association with solitude and with the danger of unregulated passion. Although he praises nature for its harmony, the author depicts wild nature as a power dangerously unchecked by the limits of society. Solitude leads to philosophy which destroys religion. In his letter to M. de Fontanes, he asserts that in the language of native Americans, the word for "philosophy" is akin to the word for "solitude" which Chateaubriand associates with emptiness: "Le mot *philosophie*, dans le langage de l'Europe, me semble

correspondre au mot solitude, dans l’idiome des Sauvages. Or, comment la philosophie remplira-t-elle le vide de vos jours? Comble-t-on le désert avec le désert?” (1279). Establishing philosophy as useless, Chateaubriand advocates a return to religion as the only cure for the *mal du siècle*. Rather than move forward, he says, we must move backward to rediscover religion.

### Atala

In the prologue to *Atala*, Chateaubriand’s descriptions of America’s unspoiled wilderness often recall the Old Testament creation story. Amid the lush and fertile backdrop of the New World, this landscape is like a window into Earth’s idyllic past: “Une multitude d’animaux placés dans ces retraites par la main du Créateur, y répandent l’enchantement et la vie” (35). He further links the New World to Eden through a telling of a Native American version of the Fall and the great flood during a traditional ceremony, reinforcing the universality of the book of Genesis (52). Setting *Atala* and *René* in the New World allows the works to play out against vast, solitary, virgin spaces. The setting immediately pulls the reader away from Western society and the Church as if to begin by clearing out all preconceptions of Christianity. The new landscape is akin to the spiritual and political tabula rasa one might have perceived in the unknown future of religion in nineteenth century France.

Beginning with a simple tribal culture allows Chateaubriand to return to Eden and recreate the Fall himself. It also allows him to consider the role of religion on a basic

level, stripped of the political and economic complications of modern European society. Even in the wilderness, man is not truly alone. Society and ritual, the cornerstones of religion, are universally ever present. For example, when Chactas walks through the forest with Atala, the two are supposed to be alone, “l’âme de la solitude soupirait dans toute l’étendue du désert,” but the couple is actually surrounded by social rituals concerning love, mating, and fertility (46). The author recounts these rituals in a style reminiscent of the Song of Songs. It is as if Atala and Chactas are walking through a series of living Old Testament scenes being acted out around them. The people performing these rituals are ghost-like and do not interact with Atala and Chactas at all but the two are nevertheless enchanted by these external ceremonies that mirror their internal passions: “Déjà subjugués par notre propre cœur, nous fûmes accablés par ces images d’amour et de maternité, qui semblaient nous poursuivre dans ces solitudes enchantées” (47). Chactas refers to some of the players in this scene as “*Génies*,” linking these elements of nature and the native people with the divine: “Le Génie des airs secouait sa chevelure bleue [...] Nous aperçûmes à travers les arbres un jeune homme, qui, tenant à la main un flambeau, ressemblait au Génie du printemps, parcourant les forêts pour ranimer la nature” (46). These scenes, however, recreate an Old Testament atmosphere so that the author can reconstruct the circumstances of the fall of man using Chactas and Atala as his own Adam and Eve. In Chateaubriand’s version, however, Christianity steps in to prevent the fall: “Qui pouvait sauver Atala? Qui pouvait l’empêcher de succomber à la nature? Rien qu’un miracle, sans doute; et ce miracle fut fait! La fille de Simaghan eut recours au Dieu des chrétiens; elle se précipita sur la terre, et prononça une fervente oraison, adressée

à sa mère et à la reine des vierges” (48). Here we are reminded of his insistence in the *Génie* that the Fall was a preventable accident. This scene impresses upon Chactas the power of Christianity to control human passions. Chactas’ feelings of love for Atala transform into admiration for the religion which she represents. Rather than taste the fruit of knowledge, he basks in her innocent ignorance: “Ah! Qu’elle me parut divine, la simple Sauvage, l’ignorante Atala, qui à genoux devant un vieux pin tombé, comme au pied d’un autel, offrait à son Dieu des vœux pour un amant idolâtre!” (48). As the author explains in his 1826 preface to the *Essai sur les Révolutions*, by liberating man from his passions, Christianity becomes a source for freedom: “le christianisme porte pour moi deux preuves manifestes de sa céleste origine: par sa morale, il tend à nous délivrer des passions, par sa politique, il a aboli l’esclavage. C’est donc une religion de la liberté: c’est la mienne” (Dupuis 79).

As someone who has had little exposure to Christianity, Chactas serves as a narrator who is able to convey his experience with Christianity to the reader from a completely fresh perspective. In this way, Chateaubriand reacquaints readers with an otherwise all too familiar religious tradition and is able to manipulate their perception of it through comparisons with primitive society. Chactas is amazed by Father Aubrey's Christian charity which is unheard of among tribal societies. He is impressed that Christian charity falls equally on all people (64). Aubrey is a hermit, and so he too is a solitary figure, but unlike the other solitary characters he lives according to the external cult. For Aubrey, religion conquers all matters of the heart. He practices strict Catholicism with no hint of personal interpretation. In comparison

with Rousseau's *Vicaire Savoyard*, for example, Aubrey believes in Catholic law and ceremony and does not temper religion with personal philosophy. In the original preface to *Atala*, Chateaubriand makes a point of contrasting his fictional priest with the likes of a Vicaire Savoyard: “Quant au missionnaire, j’ai cru remarquer que ceux qui jusqu’à présent ont mis le prêtre en action, en ont fait ou un scélérat fanatique, ou un espèce de philosophe. Le père Aubrey n’est rien de tout cela. C’est un simple chrétien ... en un mot, c’est le prêtre tel qu’il est” (20). Although Aubrey allows the native people to keep their simple way of life, the religion he brings to them is standard interpretation. Father Aubrey is an example of the concept of the *imitation* of Christ. He lives not according to personal philosophy but in emulation of what he believes is perfection. His entire existence is ritualistic rather than philosophical. The priest does not engage with God, he does not question him. He simply admires God (67). Aubrey's communication with the people “blends God into all of his discourses” (70). While Aubrey is performing the mass, exterior objects in nature transform into ceremonial objects: a rock becomes the altar, wild grapes provide the sacrificial wine (71). The setting supports a passage which appears later in the *Génie* which asserts that Christian nature scenes, unlike those in polytheistic mythology, are occupied completely by “une Divinité immense” (720). In a chapter on Gothic churches, Chateaubriand adds: “Les forêts ont été les premiers temples de la Divinité” (801). Père Aubrey, as a representative of God on Earth, becomes the instrument of this transformation. The conquering of nature through ritual is equivalent to the conquering of human emotion through faith. Chactas is awestruck by the transformation: “O charme de la religion! O magnificence du culte chrétien! [...]”

J'admira le triomphe du Christianisme sur la vie sauvage..." (71). Christianity here has triumphed over nature. Religious law has suppressed instinct. Aubrey's success in converting the native people is in part due to the fact that he restricts their laws to the foundations of Christianity. He simply encourages them to love, pray, and, of course, participate in Christian ceremony (72). Father Aubrey's consistent following of Catholic doctrine leaves no room for actions inspired by human passions: "Qu'il est faible celui que les passions dominent! Qu'il est fort celui qui se repose en Dieu!" (73).

In accordance with Chateaubriand's condemnation of unchecked enthusiasm, Père Aubrey's lack of personal emotion counters Chactas who is completely driven by human passions. The priest informs Chactas that man has no right to judge God. Aubrey instead preaches hope to Chactas as an internal substitute for passion: "Chactas, c'est une religion bien divine que celle-là qui a fait une vertu de l'espérance" (76). Thus, even if hope is inferior to faith, one must have hope in order to cultivate faith. Speaking out against Atala's interpretation of Christianity and the influence of her mother and the missionary who guided them, Aubrey emphasizes the dangers of enthusiasm when it meddles with religion: "Vous offrez tous trois des dangers de l'enthousiasme, et du défaut des lumières en matière de religion" (81). For Mme de Staël, in contrast, enthusiasm was the most remarkable aspect of Christianity. Enthusiasm, however, is a creative power. For Chateaubriand, one does not create outside the boundaries of religious dogma.

Like Ballanche, Chateaubriand considers Christianity to be a regulator of sentiment. In the *Génie*, he describes Christianity as the ultimate source for harmony: “Il (L’Évangile) est à nos sentiments ce que le goût est aux arts” (599). Atala herself is a blend of “savage” society and Christian religious values. Consequently, her misguided spirituality prevents her from enjoying harmony. Her personality reflects this clash of conflicting influences. She is at once virtuous yet passionate, melancholic but with a divine smile (41). Although Atala professes to be a Christian, her distance from Christian society leads to misinterpretation of Christian doctrine. Christianity is supposed to unite people but in Atala's case, her religion separates her from her fellow man. As a Christian, she believes she is unable to unite with Chactas: “Ma religion me sépare de toi pour toujours...” (44). Atala's interpretation of her own religion is that it is sometimes more of a curse than a blessing. She refers to the vows that she made to her mother as a “*malédiction*” (75). Atala misinterprets Christianity because she does not share it with anyone. In the wilderness, she has no external cult. Forced to interpret Christianity as an individual, she cannot understand it. It is her misunderstanding of the religion that leads to her tragic end. Having inherited religion from her mother, she has additionally inherited a “feminine” Christianity driven by passions rather than by dogma. This is perhaps a negative interpretation of the “feminine” Christianity that we experience as a positive development in the works of Mme de Staël.

### **René**

*René*, first published in the 1805 edition of the *Génie du christianisme* as the sequel to *Atala*, revisits the theme of solitude. The introduction of a French main character allows Chateaubriand to specifically target the influence of solitude on European culture. An excess of passions and imagination<sup>8</sup> is blamed for the separation between modern man and his environment. The author begins the original preface to *René* with a passage from the *Génie* in which he stresses the dangers of a solitary existence: “On habite, avec un cœur plein, un monde vide; et sans avoir usé de rien, on a désabusé de tout” (112). He again attacks Rousseau for promoting solitude and adds Goethe to the list of culpable authors whose works have inspired a rash of suicides (114). It is notable that these two authors in particular are also mentioned in Mme de Staël’s *De la littérature* as perfect examples of sentimental literature.

As the story unfolds, however, Chateaubriand’s initial promise to demonstrate the usefulness of Christianity is arguably lost amid the title character’s overwhelming melancholy. As Maurice Regard points out in his introduction to the *Pléiade* edition, Chateaubriand himself admits in the *Mémoires d’outre-tombe* that *René* failed to deliver its intended impact on his contemporaries: “Si René n’existait pas, je ne l’écrirais plus; s’il m’était possible de le détruire, je le détruirais. Une famille de René poètes et de René prosateurs a pullulé: on n’a plus entendu que des phrases lamentables et décousues” (107). Whereas *Atala* more clearly counteracts solitude

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<sup>8</sup> Imagination and enthusiasm are again “feminine” qualities which we see depicted as positive creative powers according to Mme de Staël but which Chateaubriand shows to be destructive. Jules Michelet, who in no way agrees with a Christian agenda, nevertheless will agree with Chateaubriand on this point later on in the century. Michelet will however associate Christianity in general with feminization while Chateaubriand sees Christianity as a masculine power and femininity as a product of unchecked human emotions.

with religion, *René* combines solitude and religion through nostalgia. Both, however, require a step back in time. Describing his nostalgia for church bells, René's solitary meditations actually strengthen his bonds with his religion and his heritage: "Tout se trouve dans les rêveries enchantées où nous plonge le bruit de la cloche natale: religion, patrie, et le berceau et la tombe, et le passé et l'avenir" (120). René also describes monasteries as places where men go to escape life, a sort of living death in solitude that is completely contrary to Chateaubriand's anti-suicide stance. René envies those with religious vocations, not because they have found God but because they have escaped the trials of life: "Heureux ceux qui ont fini leur voyage sans avoir quitté le port" (121). Monasteries are described as places of complete solitude.

Moreover, Amélie's vow ceremony includes the Office of the Dead, emphasizing the parallels between suicide and religious vocation. According to the preface to *René*, religion is the antidote to suicidal melancholy, yet the story depicts religious life as a kind of suicide in itself. Amélie, lying on the altar, further strengthens this connection with her prayer: "Dieu de miséricorde, fais que je ne me relève jamais de cette couche funèbre, et comble de tes biens un frère qui n'a point partagé ma criminelle passion!" (139). Chateaubriand actually defends suicide in the *Génie*, in the case of *Paul et Virginie*, when it is an expression of Christian devotion and Amélie's self-sacrifice transforms her into a similar kind of martyr whose sin is cleansed through symbolic death (706).

In René's case, however, religion seems to provide him with very little comfort. The title character only succeeds in conquering his passion with stronger passions. His suicidal tendencies cease once he finally experiences true misery (141). René admits that the monastic atmosphere actually caused him pain: "Je ne sais comment toutes ces choses qui auraient dû nourrir mes peines, en émoussaient au contraire l'aiguillon" (142). Later in the *Génie*, Chateaubriand explains that there is a type of modern Christian who should have gone into the monastery but who instead has become consumed by worldly desires (715-16). Renée is perhaps a literary example of this problem. Amélie, in contrast, finds peace in her sacrifice and in the purity and routine of religious life (142). While Amélie's satisfaction with religious life does support the idea that the regulations of the external cult provide comfort, the fact that she has chosen a symbolic death which removes her from society brings into question Chateaubriand's distain for anti-social behavior. In response to this evident contradiction, Chateaubriand adds a scene with the scornful Father Souël who warns: "La solitude est mauvaise à celui qui n'y vit pas avec Dieu" but even then, the author cannot help but betray Souël's hard line by adding that the priest does not show his true compassion for René: "Il portait en secret un coeur compatissant, mais il montrait au-dehors un caractère inflexible" (144). The priest suppresses his internal sentiments and externally only expresses the stance of the church. As for Amélie, the "burning chastity" that she experiences is a similar act of repression (142). Ceremony allows her to channel sinful passions into religious zeal. Christianity thereby allows emotion to flourish within the limits of its framework. Amélie's zeal recalls other passionate, often female, mystics such as Teresa of Avila, who used Christian adoration as a

means for channeling passion into religion. As Chateaubriand explains in the *Génie*, “la religion chrétienne est elle-même une sorte de passion qui a ses transports, ses ardeurs, ses soupirs, ses joies, ses larmes, ses amours du monde et du désert” (707).

Rather than completely dissuade readers from embracing a solitary lifestyle, *Atala* and *René* show that solitude is only productive when it is carried out as part of a religious commitment. Chateaubriand does not choose to include examples of how religion might enhance normal daily life. He chooses instead to show how lack of religion can render a person unhappy and how misunderstanding of religion (or religious ideas interpreted outside of the guidance of the Church) can lead to tragedy. Religion serves as an escape from daily life in these stories – not as a way of living. Despite his intentions to glorify Christianity, the author communicates a mixed message alternately sympathizing with and condemning the solitary figure. Moreover, Chateaubriand fails to illustrate the importance of sentiment in Christianity since he focuses more on the damnation of enthusiasm than he does on the development of Christian sentimentality. Christianity is not depicted as a religion of compassion but rather as a religion of rules to be followed – not in harmony with one’s feelings but despite them.

Unlike Rousseau and Mme de Staël who promote the “inner voice” as a source for divine truth, René's comparable “murmurs” from within are simply a product of his “sensations fugitives” and the effect is confusion, not truth (129). He even describes himself as being possessed by the “demon” of his heart (130). Comfort comes from

outside the self: “une voix du ciel semblait me dire: 'Homme, la saison de ta migration n'est pas encore venue” (130). René, perhaps like the eighteenth century philosophers that Chateaubriand condemns, knows religion without feeling it. He claims that his heart loved God but his feelings, thoughts, and actions prove contradictory to the religion he professes: “J'étais plein de religion, et je raisonnais en impie; mon cœur aimait Dieu, et mon esprit le méconnaissait” (131). Although Atala's Father Aubrey was able to triumph over the “vie sauvage,” René's modern intellectual melancholy holds out against faith since he remains steeped in individualism. Even after realizing his fault, René does not turn to Christianity as a source of healing. He confesses but never repents.

Although religion seems to remain as the only reliable source of comfort for mankind in *René*, Chateaubriand does not describe Christianity as a warm and loving religion but rather as a power which inspires awe. Both René and Amélie waiver with the weight of human sentiment as they enter Amélie's vow ceremony but religion “triumphs” over them. Reminiscent of Chactas' admiration for Atala's celestial transformation, René is won over by the great beauty he sees in his sister at the very moment when she becomes inaccessible to him (138). It is this conflict between great joy and great sorrow that makes Christianity so beautiful according to Chateaubriand: “Formée pour nos misères et pour nos besoins, la religion chrétienne nous offre sans cesse le double tableau des chagrins de la terre et des joies célestes; et, par ce moyen, elle fait dans le cœur une source de maux présents et d'espérances lointaines, d'où découlent d'inépuisables rêveries” (715). René echoes this sort of Christian sublime

when he exclaims in reference to the ceremony: “O joies de la religion, que vous êtes grandes mais que vous êtes terribles!” (139). Throughout the vow ceremony, references to joy and sorrow intertwine. If Chateaubriand had truly intended to glorify Christianity as a unifier of humanity, this ceremony might have provided the perfect moment to demonstrate that religion can soothe pain and produce joy through spiritual bonds. Instead, the passage focuses on the sensational ceremonial details which turn morbidly cult-like with the descriptions of the darker elements of the ceremony such as torches, veils and the funeral altar. Even when the ceremony overtakes his senses, René is not so much conquered by religion as he is charmed by the effect it has on his sister. His outburst at the close of the ceremony implies that the separation between heaven and Earth makes Christianity divisive, not harmonious: “Chaste épouse de Jésus-Christ, reçois mes derniers embrassements à travers les glaces du trépas et les profondeurs de l'éternité, qui te séparent déjà de ton frère!” (140).

Reinforcing the idea that man's spiritual path to harmony must lead backward, René reveals that his voyage to the New World was a search for poet-prophets and the elements of the harmonious religious ideals that would have characterized primitive times: “Je recherchai surtout dans mes voyages les artistes et ces hommes divins qui chantent les dieux sur la lyre, et la fidélité des peuples qui honorent les lois, la religion et les tombeaux” (123). In the end, however, René's yearning for truth is never satisfied. Something more is left to be discovered: “Cependant qu'avais-je appris jusqu'alors avec tant de fatigue? Rien de certain parmi les anciens, rien de beau parmi les modernes ” (124). He longs for the aesthetic perfection of the ancients to

enhance modern reason. René's perception of the Revolution is that it lost the beauty of genius, religion, and morality: "De la hauteur du génie, du respect pour la religion, de la gravité des mœurs, tout était subitement descendu à la souplesse de l'esprit, à l'impiété, à la corruption" (126). Thought won out over sentiment. He describes himself as feeling "isolated" in his own country and church as a place where people, especially the impoverished, come to be healed and to find serenity (126-7). Nevertheless, there is ultimately a haunting separation between René and his religion. It is his religion after all that separates him from his sister Amélie, his feminine ideal. The love of his very own "Eve" was, after all, the only thing he asked of God (130).

### Conclusion

Chateaubriand, like Ballanche, denies in his *Génie du christianisme* that any enlightenment or genius could possibly be derived from non-Christian religions. For Chateaubriand, Christianity's greatest achievement is aesthetic rather than moral. His criticism of Mme de Staël's *De la littérature* shows that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, he is more preoccupied with the question of art in society than he is with the conscience or morality. Chateaubriand, like Ballanche and de Maistre, associates religious faith with innocence which often leads to a glorification of ignorance as the path to salvation. From this point of view, philosophy poses a threat to faith. Chateaubriand extends this fear of knowledge to scientists who he believes have encouraged a culture of atheism. Chateaubriand ultimately seeks to distance Christianity from recent philosophy and return to dogma and ritual as the foundations

of religion. Chateaubriand takes liberties in his own writing which at times give the impression that he is rewriting biblical passages to support his point of view, using God as a fictional character in order to illustrate his power through hypothetical scenarios.

Chateaubriand privileges faith above hope because, he says, faith comes from God while hope comes from man. Unlike Rousseau and Mme de Staël, Chateaubriand denies the authority of the conscience. He argues instead that Christianity provides an external conscience which replaces an internal conscience forever lost to man since primitive times. Philosophy and solitary meditation are deemed “empty.” Christianity, for Chateaubriand, is the only solution for the looming malaise of his era.

*Atala* and *René* allow the author to express his stance against solitude and conscience-based religion through the intimate details described through fiction. In *Atala*, Chateaubriand reimagines Genesis-like scenes, presenting Chactas and Atala as his own Adam and Eve. Atala, unlike Mme de Staël’s sage Corinne, is closer to the divine thanks to her innocent ignorance. At the same time, Chateaubriand’s portrayal of Chactas serves as a means for rediscovering Christianity through the eyes of a newcomer, from a completely fresh perspective. The author especially highlights the benefits of living according to the external cult which he portrays as charitable and constructive through the personage of the good Père Aubrey. He also uses Aubrey as a means for stressing the idea that external religion serves as an antidote to internal conflict. Religion in *René* combats destructive human emotions. Father Aubrey’s

presence is a reminder that Christianity ideally suppresses nature and combats or absorbs dangerous passions.

*René* continues the condemnation of solitude also found in *Atala*. Solitude is described as dangerous and incongruent with leading a stable life. Solitude is only acceptable in the text when it is complimented by external religion as a regulator of life, as in the case of René's sister, Amélie. Christianity is presented as a necessary framework within which passions can be expressed and controlled in a limited and organized forum. Ultimately, however, the author fails to provide practical positive examples of religion which are readily applicable to normal daily life. Even Amélie, who is comforted by her religious routine, is nevertheless unable to survive. From the start, the monastic lifestyle is depicted as symbolic suicide since it isolates the penitent from loved ones and society in general. In the end, Chateaubriand sends a mixed message to his readers about Christianity. In the *Génie*, he presents Christianity as the unique path to personal salvation but in *Atala* and especially in *René*, Catholicism is depicted as contrary to human sentiments which the author renders too beautiful and sympathetic to be unequivocally condemned.

Chateaubriand's Christianity is not a personal religion but rather an awe-inspiring power to be obeyed. If anything, René's inability to make peace with his sister makes the laws of Christian society seem divisive, not harmonious. Both Ballanche and Chateaubriand share a sense of pity for the wicked and of hope for salvation. In the following chapter, we will see that Joseph de Maistre, who shares these authors'

opinions on Christian supremacy, rejects any notion of sentiment in his portrayal of merciless divine justice.

## Chapter 7: Injustice as God's Will in Joseph de Maistre's *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*

In 1821, under the Bourbon Restoration, Joseph de Maistre's *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* revives the turn of the century conservative argument that society must be anchored in a strong Catholic monarchy. De Maistre's work, in line with earlier anti-Enlightenment philosophers such as Herder and Burke, seeks to diminish man's importance as an individual in favor of constructing a worldview in which humanity is subjected to the higher law of an absolute God (Sternhell 247-8). De Maistre attacks science and philosophy as sources of human degeneration since they turn men away from God. For him, the Grand Siècle of Louis XIV made France great because there was a balance of "la religion, la valeur et la science" (Tome V, 18-19). The Age of Reason, however, toppled this delicate balance. Eighteenth century philosophy allegedly attempted to "detach" man from God by discouraging prayer and encouraging critical thinking (Tome V, 282). De Maistre agrees with Ballanche and Chateaubriand that reason and religion cannot be in harmony: "Dès que l'homme s'appuie que sur sa raison, il cesse de prier, en quoi il a toujours confessé" (Tome IV, 310). Furthermore, as in Ballanche's *Essai*, the only legitimate prayer according to de Maistre is the prayer that asks for God's will to be done (Tome IV, 314). Prayer therefore cannot alter the course of the universe which is directed by God's will, unknown to and unchangeable by man. For de Maistre, man must not only passively accept the fate that befalls him, he must also actively encourage God to deliver that fate regardless of the consequences. De Maistre ultimately employs this line of reasoning as a means for denying human rights which he argues are contradictory to

society. Human unity, he says, cannot occur through any written constitution. From this point of view, human unity is only possible when Christianity imposes itself as universal law (Tome IV, 127). By replacing human law with divine law, de Maistre constructs a worldview in which humans are destined to be powerless against their sovereign rulers, free thought is blasphemy, and the concept of justice is replaced by blind faith in providential grace.

*Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* takes the form of a series of conversations between three men over the course of eleven evenings. The main character, simply referred to as *le Comte*, is a thinly veiled representation of de Maistre himself. His companions, a Russian *Sénateur* and a young French *Chevalier*, engage the Count in conversation centered mostly on the intersection of religion and society. The three men seem to represent a microcosm of high society composed of noblemen, lawmakers and military officers. Throughout the dialogues, the Senator and the Chevalier take on subordinate roles in the conversation centered mainly on the Count's philosophy. Enjoying a perfect evening in the grand setting of Saint Petersburg, the Chevalier wonders if "un de ces hommes pervers, nés pour le malheur de la société" would appreciate this moment as much as he and his friends (5-6). This question, which simultaneously targets the morality and aesthetics of progressive thinkers, serves as the foundation for the conversations to follow. One's ability to appreciate beauty is assumed to be influenced by his religious beliefs. Starting from this simple statement, de Maistre builds a divisive formula which follows throughout the conversations, consistently characterizing Enlightenment philosophers and scientists as enemies of

religion. Following this line of reasoning, progress is assumed to be a menace to society.

*Defending the Doctrine of Original Sin*

Since Rousseau's *Vicaire savoyard*, the Catholic doctrine of original sin remained of central concern to religious thought. The concept of the Right of Man rests on the idea that men are created equal. The very notion of inalienable rights for mankind seems to nullify the idea that man is born cursed. De Maistre defends the doctrine of original sin as a means of refuting what he sees as one of the foundations of Enlightenment atheism: the idea that if God exists, he is unreasonable or unjust. In order to prove the verity of original sin, the Count endeavors to show that humans have degenerated since primitive times. Ballanche had previously made a comparable argument centered around the origins of language. As we saw in the last chapter, Chateaubriand denies perfectibility but, in contrast to de Maistre, did not insist on distinguishing between "primitive man" and "savages" in his fiction which romanticized America's indigenous landscape and people as edenic. He first examines Jean-Jacques Rousseau's assumption that "*sauvages*" (understood in the text as referring to indigenous American people) are analogous to primitive man. For the Count, primitive people and "savages" are actually opposites. The so-called "savage" is completely detached from civilization but primitive man was born into civilization by God's will. Rousseau "a constamment pris le sauvage pour l'homme primitif, tandis qu'il n'est et ne peut être que le descendant d'un homme détaché du grand arbre de la civilisation par une prévarication quelconque, mais d'un genre qui

ne peut plus être répété, autant qu'il m'est permis d'en juger; car je doute qu'il se forme de nouveaux sauvages" (63).

Rather than view primitive man as the originator of an unfinished human race which would improve over time (recall Mme de Staël's theory of *perfectibilité*), de Maistre insists that man began as a more perfect being whose proximity to God granted him a special comprehension of universal truths. Since primitive times, man has therefore progressively degraded as a result of some "accident" or "crime" (63-6). According to this presumption, the sciences too were supposedly at their peak in primitive times and knowledge has since faded (75). This "accident" was the original sin. For de Maistre, one must accept the idea of transmission of sin in order to have faith in God because man "ne peut pas être méchant sans être mauvais, ni mauvais sans être dégradé, ni dégradé sans être puni, ni puni sans être coupable" (71). Original sin conveniently renders all men "guilty" and therefore potentially worthy of any punishment or malady that befalls them at the hand of God. Original sin, according to the Count, is the most universal concept known to humanity (71).

The interpretation of native cultures in the *Soirées* is therefore markedly less sympathetic and more overtly racist compared to the portrayals of Native Americans in Chateaubriand's works. Chateaubriand, in contrast to de Maistre, makes clear parallels between primitive and "savage" people, showing "savages" to be close to universal traditions, possessing a certain amount of wisdom despite what Chateaubriand saw as misguided spiritual beliefs and social practices. De Maistre, however, denies that "savage" people are human. In a warped look back on history, the Count describes missionary priests as having been too charitable to Native

Americans. In order to avoid violence, he claims, the priests made the natives seem human: “Le prêtre miséricordieux les exaltait pour les rendre précieux; il atténuait le mal, il exagérait le bien” (83). For de Maistre, the “savage” is evil by nature whereas the European is a degenerated ancestor of primitive man who was naturally good (84-5).

#### *God as the Origin of Language and Thought*

De Maistre uses the presumed inferiority of “savage” native people as a means for emphasizing the supposed superiority of primitive people. Modern man is so inferior to primitive man that modern man is like a savage in comparison (85). Like Ballanche, de Maistre places a great deal of importance on language and on proving the existence of God through the “miracle” of language. Although de Maistre consistently upholds that man could not have invented language, he does assert that primitive man succeeded in inventing words (95). According to the Count, the fact that man now borrows words rather than inventing them is an indication of modern man’s inferiority (95). He describes languages as being almost like living beings in themselves, declaring war on other languages in order to take over their words (103). He further posits that the origin of ideas is the same as that of language: “...*la question de l’origine des idées est la même que celle de l’origine de la parole; car la pensée et la parole ne sont que deux magnifiques synonymes; l’intelligence ne pouvant penser sans savoir qu’elle pense, ni savoir qu’elle pense sans parler, puisqu’il faut qu’elle dise: je sais*” (120). Thus, if language came from God and language is synonymous with thought, humans would owe their intelligence to God. From this

point of view, human intelligence would therefore necessarily be inferior to God's intelligence.

*Human Justice versus Divine Justice*

De Maistre maintains that man is intellectually inferior to God as a means for refuting Enlightenment concepts of justice which, despite their diversity, shared a "reliance on reasoning and the invoking of the demands of public discussions" (Sen xvii). By denying man's intelligence, de Maistre attempts to nullify human reasoning and the right to participate in government. He goes to great lengths, for example, to dispute John Locke's *On Human Understanding*. Most of the sixth dialogue is devoted to refuting Locke whose protestant upbringing is the foundation for his errors according to de Maistre: "le protestantisme avait aplati cette tête" (Tome IV, 330). Locke is an obvious target for de Maistre's criticism since, as with Rousseau, attacking Locke also assails the ideas that became the foundation for the human rights he opposes. He portrays Locke as the dupe of his own misguided reasoning: "Si Locke, qui était un très-honnête homme, revenait au monde, il pleurerait amèrement en voyant ses erreurs, aiguës par la méthode française, devenir la honte et le malheur d'une génération entière" (368).

Like Chateaubriand, de Maistre discounts the concept of justice altogether by reaffirming that providence holds to a principle of justice that mortals are incapable of understanding (160). Even babies may be judged for crimes rooted in original sin (160). Although de Maistre never mentions predestination in the *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, one can infer from his comments on providential justice and original sin

that certain people are simply destined to be punished, regardless of their actions on Earth:

La seule différence qu'il y ait entre les deux justices, c'est que la nôtre laisse échapper des coupables par impuissance ou par corruption, tandis que si l'autre *paraît* quelquefois ne pas apercevoir les crimes, elle ne suspend ses coups que par des motifs adorables qui ne sont pas, à beaucoup près, hors de la portée de notre intelligence. (Tome IV, 160)

Additionally, de Maistre claims that men have no real definition for what they call virtue since perception of virtue is determined by “la passion du moment” (167). Man is furthermore described as being devoid of a conscience. For de Maistre, humans are driven solely by pleasure and shame (187). Chateaubriand, too, depicted man as ruled by emotions but his portrayal of those emotions through his characters was notably charitable. Chateaubriand clearly sympathizes with the plight of being human. Both arguments nevertheless lead to the idea that man is incapable of self-governance. One apparently needs religion as a regulator of personal behavior. Arguing that man lacks the internal mechanism for self-regulation makes the concept of liberty seem not only unnecessary but foolish. By completely denying man’s individual potential to better himself and by upholding the image of an all-knowing God versus an ever-ignorant human population, de Maistre creates a need for both religious and political spheres to be controlled by external powers, the Church and the Monarchy.

### *Denial of Human Compassion through an Unsympathetic Absolute God*

De Maistre’s refutation of both human justice and conscience rationalizes a complete lack of compassion for individuals. Because man cannot understand God’s justice system, the severity of its punishments must go unchallenged: “car le domestique qui

est pendu pour avoir volé un écu à son maître n'est pas du tout *innocent*" (189).

Arguing against Voltaire, the Count claims that the victims of the 1755 Lisbon earthquake must have somehow deserved their fate (224). He ends the third dialogue with a model for human acceptance of God's law. The Count tells the story of a girl with cancer who continues to worship God with perfect love and obedience (192).

Reminiscent of Chateaubriand's *Génie*, de Maistre depicts innocence as the ultimate wisdom. The girl receives her strength from her simplemindedness<sup>9</sup>. While the girl's courage is certainly inspiring, de Maistre exploits the story as a stratagem to promote unwavering faith and discourage any sort of reflection or free thought that might put religious dogma into question. Concluding the story, he seizes the opportunity to promote blind faith and reprimand philosophers who dare to think independently from Christian tradition:

Or, ce que nous voyons ici on l'a toujours vu, et on le verra jusqu'à la fin des siècles. Plus l'homme s'approchera de cet état de justice dont la perfection n'appartient pas à notre faible nature, et plus vous le trouverez aimant et résigné jusque dans les situations les plus cruelles de la vie. [...] Qui donc a donné à ces téméraires le droit de prendre la parole au nom de la vertu qui les désavoue avec horreur, et d'interrompre par d'insolents blasphèmes les prières, les offrandes et les sacrifices volontaires de l'amour? (Tome I, 193)

De Maistre teaches that Christians should have pity in their hearts but not allow sentiment to influence philosophy: "Au reste, la pitié est sans doute un des plus nobles sentiments qui honorent l'homme, et il faut bien se garder de l'éteindre, de l'affaiblir même dans les cœurs; cependant lorsqu'on traite des sujets philosophiques,

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<sup>9</sup> In realist and naturalist works by authors like Flaubert and Zola, such characters are portrayed later in the century to be naïve at best and sometimes even intellectually stunted.

on doit éviter soigneusement toute espèce de poésie, et ne voir dans les choses que les choses mêmes” (229). Conveniently ignoring the human connection embedded in a religion whose savior is represented as human, de Maistre argues that Christianity cannot share human emotion because it does not come from humans – Christianity is undisputable, “*immuable*” (231). In some ways, Chateaubriand already suggested the unsympathetic nature of Christianity when he too claimed that man is incapable of understanding God’s logic and portrayed priests as following Church dogma despite their personal feelings. De Maistre’s assertion, however, seems to go one step further by deemphasizing emotional connections with providence. In Chateaubriand, sentiment still serves as a connection with the invisible world and in *Atala* the priest insists that the heavens have mercy on the souls of well-intentioned people despite their actions. De Maistre makes no such exceptions. Humans deserve the misfortunes that befall them, creating a relationship with God in which they are bound to adore a God who acts as an adversary (231). One can only be eligible for grace in the afterlife by obediently suffering through God’s enigmatic justice system (237).

The Count explains his theory of “réversibilité” in an attempt to justify man’s otherwise unjust suffering through a glorification of self-sacrifice: “Le juste, en souffrant volontairement, ne satisfait pas seulement pour lui, mais pour le coupable par voie de réversibilité” (Tome IV, 90). According to de Maistre’s notion of “reversibility,” God’s justice includes the sacrifice of the innocent as a means of atonement for the sins of humanity. In his *Éclaircissement sur les sacrifices*, de Maistre explains that “l’histoire nous montre l’homme persuadé dans tous les temps de cette effrayante vérité: Qu’il vivait sous la main d’une puissance irritée, et que

cette puissance ne pouvait être apaisée que par des sacrifices” (284). While perpetuating the image a fire and brimstone angry God scenario, de Maistre still maintains that a just God acting in an unjust way is absurd. He reiterates that the solution to the unexplainable actions of God must lie in human inability to understand higher reasoning (Tome V, 105). Following this line of reasoning, one must continue to pray to God even if God seems unjust. The Count goes so far as to suggest that one should actually pray *more* to a God who seems unjust in order to receive grace (Tome V, 105). Requiring the adoration of an unsympathetic God demands the self-sacrifice of the faithful.

*Blind Faith: Divine Right and Sacrifice*

According to the Count’s dialogue, criticism of God’s justice is a relatively new phenomenon. He asserts that philosophers crafted the concept of an unjust God in order to draw people away from religion (Tome V, 107). He criticizes learned men for pushing society towards science and stepping in to teach morality, claiming that they were not qualified to do so. According to de Maistre, it is the government, not the savants, who is tasked with moralizing the people:

...il faut avoir perdu l’esprit pour croire que Dieu ait chargé les académies de nous apprendre ce qu’il est et ce que nous lui devons. Il appartient aux prélats, aux nobles, aux grands officiers de l’état d’être les dépositaires et les gardiens des vérités conservatrices; d’apprendre aux nations ce qui est mal et ce qui est bien; ce qui est vrai et ce qui est faux dans l’ordre moral et spirituel: les autres n’ont pas droit de raisonner sur ces sortes de matières [...] Quant à celui qui parle ou écrit pour ôter un dogme national au peuple, il doit être pendu comme un voleur domestique (Tome II, 108).

Reminiscent of Chateaubriand, de Maistre charges the philosophes with the sin of “orgueil” for attempting to raise their place in society and assert new ideas in the public arena (Tome II, 108).

As a royalist, de Maistre asserts that sovereignty is not determined by the will of the people: “La souveraineté est toujours *prise*, jamais *donnée*” (Tome II, 116).

According to the ninth dialogue, the best governments are those with the fewest laws and, moreover, any written constitution is rejected as illegitimate (Tome II, 116). De Maistre’s idea of sacrifice supports the sacrifice of the few for the good of the many (Tome II, 120). The innocent suffer for their fellow men:

Lors donc que le coupable nous demandera pourquoi l’innocence souffre dans ce monde, nous ne manquerons pas de réponses, comme vous l’avez vu; mais nous pouvons en choisir une plus directe et une plus touchante peut-être que toutes les autres. – Nous pouvons répondre: Elle souffre pour vous, si vous voulez. (Tome II, 213)

The Count admits that Christian scripture does not explain why this sacrifice is necessary but again resorts to the idea that some things are not meant to be known: “ce silence est sage” (Tome II, 122). He indicates that a variety of nations throughout time have accepted the idea of the sacrifice of the innocent and concludes that this idea was put into man’s head by God himself (Tome II, 125). Following de Maistre’s reasoning that God’s justice cannot be understood by humans, “innocent” seems to be yet another term that is indefinable by men. God knows people from the inside: “Mais Dieu qui voit tout, Dieu qui connaît nos inclinations et nos pensées les plus intimes bien mieux que les hommes ne se connaissent matériellement les uns les autres, emploie le châtiment comme manière de remède, et frappe cet homme qui nous paraît

sain pour extirper le mal avant le paroxysme” (Tome V, 131). Such a God knows if people are wicked even if they have not performed a bad deed and has the authority to punish people not according to what they have done but according to who they are and what they have the potential to do (Tome II, 131). God punishes as a remedy and as a precaution (Tome II, 131). He does not bother punishing hopeless cases, thereby explaining away why some of the worst crimes go unpunished (Tome II, 131).

For de Maistre, the secret laws of spirituality are never meant to be investigated:

“Parcourez le cercle des sciences, vous verrez qu’elles commencent toutes par un mystère. (...) Il n’y a donc aucune loi sensible qui n’ait *derrière elle* ... une loi spirituelle dont la première n’est que l’expression visible; et voilà pourquoi toute explication de cause par la matière ne contentera jamais un bon esprit” (Tome II, 179-80). De Maistre insists that all of the best scientists were religious and “le scepticisme irrégieux” is fruitless (Tome II, 181). From his perspective, religion is the “mother” of science and the only good science is that which is based on religion (Tome II, 186). He claims that science either turns men evil or renders them useless (Tome II, 187). According to the Count, the term *illuminé* refers specifically to those who seek to destroy Christianity through science or philosophy (Tome II, 228-9). God’s attitude towards humans is described as that of a father to an ignorant child: he puts certain concepts out of reach because they are too dangerous for humans to handle (Tome II, 188). All of this adds up to an argument favoring the general intellectual and emotional repression of human beings: “La conclusion légitime est qu’il faut subordonner toutes nos connaissances à la religion” (Tome II, 189).

### Conclusion

Joseph de Maistre's *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* reinforces the conservative criticism of progress expressed by Ballanche and Chateaubriand, notably the concept as God's will as supreme and a refusal of perfectibility. De Maistre sets himself apart from his fellow ultramontanes, however, by focusing squarely on a defense of original sin which flagrantly denies human rights. Whereas Ballanche and Chateaubriand still recognized the power of sentiment in their works and associated religion with heart and soul, de Maistre's doctrine is a cold calculation. God, for him, is an unwavering judge of man.

De Maistre begins his argument in support of original sin by first distinguishing "primitive man" from the "savage." Primitive man, he says, was perfect before the Fall. Original sin then rendered all men guilty, he says, and brought on the unrelenting punishment of man by God. For de Maistre, original sin is a "universal" concept. He unifies humanity not by promoting any harmonious brotherhood but rather by asserting that humans are universally subject to the whims of God. This does not, however, make men equal from his point of view. De Maistre dismisses "savages," or indigenous non-European peoples, as lesser men. He asserts that some races are naturally evil while others are simply degenerated relatives of primitive man. This assertion, which he does not support with any biblical evidence, makes universal brotherhood impossible and completely negates de Maistre's theory that original sin must apply to all people.

Like Ballanche, de Maistre insists on God as the creator of human language and thought. Humans, he says, owe their intelligence to God and thus are inferior to the divine intelligence that is God. De Maistre thus completely discounts the possibility

that man might hope to understand God's reasoning. The author employs this assail against human intelligence to discount modern concepts of human justice. De Maistre's portrayal of modern man as devoid of a conscience and ruled solely by pleasure and shame supports the idea that humans are incapable of self-governance. The philosophy espoused by the Count of the *Soirées* creates a need for society to be controlled by external powers, the Church and the Monarchy. The author's refusal to recognize the authority of human justice and his denial of the human conscience culminates in support for a divine justice system which sanctions harsh punishments delivered by God's unquestionable law. The Count's anecdotal evidence glorifies the innocent ignorance promoted by Chateaubriand. De Maistre praises innocent ignorance in an effort to encourage blind faith and discourage doubt. De Maistre, unlike Chateaubriand, shows no sympathy for human intentions. God's judgment is described as pitiless and the author urges men to follow his example.

De Maistre takes original sin one step further with his concept of "reversibility" which asserts that God's justice sanctions the sacrifice of the innocent to atone for the sins of humanity. Again, the author uses the supposed human inability to comprehend God's reasoning as support for the idea that God actually is just despite the fact that his justice is perceived as unjust by humankind. In the same way that man cannot understand God's justice, he explains, it is also useless for him to attempt to understand the universe through science when it is not based on religion. In an age of exciting scientific discoveries, however, de Maistre's stance against secular science was attempting to buck the trend towards progress. More liberal thinkers, such as Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon and his followers, would take a completely different

approach to reconciling science and religion by basing religion on science rather than basing science on religion.

## Chapter 8: Religion, Education and Social Order in Saint-Simon's *Nouveau Christianisme*

Although philosophers and poets began the conversation on religion's role in society, industrialist Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon would arguably make one of the most lasting impressions on nineteenth century religious thought. Saint-Simon's *Nouveau Christianisme* offered a model for a progressive religion which placed fraternity at the center of society's moral obligations and championed the concept of harmonizing religious beliefs with science, industry and the arts. In short, he sought to bring religion in step with modern progress in order to preserve morality and advance intellectual development, thus creating an environment in which men could conceivably live peacefully together in liberty. The *Nouveau Christianisme* was the inspiration for later Saint-Simonians who, under the authority of Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin, would develop a short-lived organized religion based on Saint-Simon's theory of class structure. In this dissertation, I chose to focus on Saint-Simon's *Nouveau Christianisme* rather than Enfantin's writings since the *Nouveau Christianisme* continued to serve as the most fundamental text for Enfantin's followers.

Mme de Staël had already suggested the idea that the arts could strengthen religious sentiment and reduce superstitions by supporting truth, beauty and virtue in *De la littérature*. Saint-Simon's 1825 *Nouveau Christianisme, Dialogues entre un conservateur et un novateur* also sought to quell superstition by recommending a Christianity free of mysticism, focused solely on efforts to improve living conditions for the working classes. He hoped to achieve this end through modernization of

Christian thought. His method was to first look to Christianity's past as a reminder that the Gospel existed before the Church and that the Church is a manmade institution subject to various faults which he says grew in time. Saint-Simon was, according to Sainte-Beuve, influenced by Ballanche's concept that Christianity evolves with the times (Reardon 598). Saint-Simon, however, asserts that the Church is an imperfect institution. He thus separates the philosophy of Christianity from the Church which represents it. Concentrating his focus on what he believes to be the one true message of primitive Christian teachings – "love thy neighbor" – Saint-Simon's vision for the future is to restore the message of fraternal love as the one and only Christian doctrine. He proposes education in the sciences and arts as the means for freeing humanity from theology which he believes has polluted the human imagination with unnecessary superstitions, pitting religious ritual and ceremony against the essential message of brotherhood.

### A New Social System

As early as 1803, Saint-Simon proposed a reorganization of the French social system in his *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*. In the *Lettres*, he recommends that especially talented men, "hommes de génie," should guide the government and be given complete liberty to cultivate knowledge (129). His system divides society into three classes with liberal intellectuals and artists as the most powerful citizens, followed by the bourgeoisie and finally the working class. The author of the *Lettres* proposes that the classes support each other in order to stabilize society and improve the overall quality of living for all of humanity. Saint-Simon suggests for example that business

owners support knowledge through financial sacrifices which would benefit intellectuals and artists. He urges business owners to consider themselves as “les régulateurs de la marche de l’esprit humain” (143). In 1825, Saint-Simon would propose religious reforms in his *Nouveau christianisme* which would serve to improve the living conditions of the lower classes, ostensibly in an effort to restore Christianity to its original objective. In 1803, however, his reasons for social organization are clearly more practical. His argument to the *propriétaires* is that social reorganization will safeguard the nation against revolution: “tôt ou tard les savants, les artistes et les hommes ayant des idées libérales, réunis aux non-propriétaires, vous feraient faire de force; souscrivez tous, c’est le seul moyen que vous ayez pour prévenir les maux dont je vous vois menacés” (143). Addressing the working classes, he argues that supporting artists and intellectuals will create more opportunities for education and ultimately a better quality of life for all (144).

*Lettres d’un habitant de Genève* envisions society as a physiological system, ordered by concrete laws and dominated by positive science:

Mes amis, nous sommes des corps organisés; c’est en considérant comme phénomènes physiologiques nos relations sociales que j’ai conçu le projet que je vous présente, et c’est par des considérations puisées dans le système que j’emploie pour lier les faits physiologiques que je vais vous démontrer la bonté du projet que je vous présente. (148)

The author asserts that subjective influences on the sciences, which are to become the guiding force for society, should be removed: “il faut que les physiologistes chassent de leur société les *philosophes*, les *moralistes* et les *métaphysiciens*, comme les astronomes ont chassé les astrologues, comme les chimistes ont chassé les alchimistes” (148). Saint-Simon groups philosophers, moralists, and metaphysicians

together into the same category of useless influences. Thus far, we have seen that Mme de Staël sought to harmonize religion and philosophy while the ultras insisted upon the superiority of Christian doctrine over secular philosophy. Saint-Simon, in contrast, rejects both theology and philosophy in favor of science. Faith and reason are trumped by positive research.

### Science and Prophecy

In both the *Lettres* and in *Nouveau christianisme*, Saint-Simon insists on limiting humanity's aspirations to one single goal. The statement of this goal, however, changes from 1803 to 1825. For the author of the *Lettres*, scientific progress is clearly the one principle goal of humanity: "Enfin vous n'avez pas encore bien remarqué qu'il n'existe qu'un seul intérêt commun à tous les hommes, celui du progrès des sciences" (43). His *Nouveau christianisme*, however, leaves no doubt that religion's sole task in society is to improve the quality of life of the working classes. The two goals are not necessarily disconnected. A large part of Saint-Simon's message to religious leaders revolves around the idea that religion should remove unnecessary mysticism and acknowledge scientific progress. Despite his scientific convictions, one of the letters from 1803 attempts a prophetic approach to the idea of religious reform to support the proposed social order. The author of the letter, claiming to have heard the voice of God, recounts divine proclamations which include a renouncement of the Roman Catholic Church and God's plan to take religious power out of the hands of incompetent men:

Tous ceux qui ont établi des religions en avaient reçu de moi le pouvoir; mais ils n'ont pas bien compris les instructions que je leur avais données; ils ont tous cru que je leur avais confié ma divine science; ... ils ont tous négligé la partie la plus

essentielle de leur mission, celle de fonder un établissement qui fit suivre à l'intelligence humaine la route la plus courte pour se rapprocher indéfiniment de ma divine prévoyance; ils ont tous oublié de prévenir les ministres de mes autels que je leur retirerais le pouvoir de parler en mon nom quand ils cesseraient d'être plus savants que le troupeau qu'ils conduiraient, et qu'ils se laisseraient dominer par le pouvoir temporel" (155).

Saint-Simon's God reproaches religion for speaking in his name, implying that this is the authentic voice of the almighty. God's solution, according to the letter, is to place Isaac Newton in charge of "la direction de la lumière et le commandement des habitants de toutes les planètes" (155). God chooses science to represent him on earth proclaiming "le conseil de Newton me représentera sur la terre" (155). Saint-Simon's image of the scientist, then, is a far cry from Chateaubriand's depiction of Faustian researchers trying to capture God in their microscopes. Rather than demystify religion in order to embrace science, Saint-Simon's early approach seems to be a sanctification of science itself in an attempt to imitate the grandeur of religion. Scientists become the new priests with Newton as their messiah.

In the forward to *Nouveau christianisme*, Saint-Simon sets his work apart from the extraordinary prophecies in the *Lettres* by simply explaining his conviction that "l'espèce humaine n'est point condamnée à l'imitation" (104). "Imitation" has long been a staple of Catholic doctrine<sup>10</sup>. For Saint-Simon, religion can reach beyond tradition. The purpose of new Christianity for Saint-Simon in 1825 is solely to protect the underprivileged working classes from exploitation and injustice. In essence, Saint-Simon chooses to frame a secular problem (social inequality) in a religious context in

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<sup>10</sup> The *Imitation of Christ*, published in 1418 and attributed to Thomas À Kempis, is according to the Catholic Encyclopedia "[w]ith the exception of the Bible, ... perhaps the most widely read spiritual book in the world." "Its purpose is to instruct the soul in Christian perfection with Christ as the Divine Model."

an effort to emphasize the moral dilemma in the social strata and prove that organized religion has not fulfilled a useful social function. He perceives social inequality as a problem which has been perpetuated by the Church which he believes promotes banal ceremony over moral reflection. Rather than argue for a purely secular scientific reasoning, Saint-Simon opts to reform the focus of Christianity. He suggests that the clergy concentrate solely on the Christian promise to “love thy neighbor,” alleging that Christianity has degraded since the first century and proposing that the faithful return to charity as the one and only religious truth.

### A New Christianity for the Nineteenth Century

Saint-Simon’s *avant-propos* to *Le Nouveau christianisme* reminds readers of the timeliness of the Saint-Simonian movement. The author begins by highlighting the political situation in 1825 France, most notably the “lois de sacrilège” recently implemented by the Charles X monarchy<sup>11</sup>. Saint-Simon also situates his essay amidst an era of religious multiplicity. He explains that the nineteenth century had already seen a proliferation of protestant denominations but none have succeeded in capturing the true moral message of Christianity, despite their good intentions. The author establishes his audience as “tous ceux qui... regardent la religion comme ayant pour objet essentiel la moral” and those who seek to perfect morality and spread it to all social classes “en lui conservant un caractère religieux” as well as those who recognize the sublime and the divine in early Christianity, “la supériorité de la morale sur tout le reste de la loi” (102-3). Morality thus emerges as the most important focus

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<sup>11</sup> The law defined sacrilege as “an attack upon the consecrated host used in the celebration of the mass and made this a capital crime” (Hartman 22). According to Mary S. Hartman, a number of conservatives, including Bonald and Chateaubriand, opposed the bill to due its use of the death penalty. The law was amended and the death penalty was removed from it before it passed in 1825.

of religion, setting the stage to dismiss religious traditions which do not directly support this fundamental objective. The choice to focus on morality is interesting given the fact that the voice of “God” in the *Lettres* expressed disapproval of religion’s fixation on “une ligne de démarcation entre le bien et le mal dans les actions les plus minutieuses de la vie de l’homme” (155). *Nouveau christianisme* insists that the cult and the dogma must serve “divine morality” (103). Saint-Simon is thereby able to redefine morality outside of existing manmade perimeters, refuting philosophers and theologians alike. Divine morality functions according to God’s laws rather than according to man’s laws. In this case, God’s law is defined as a message of love towards men. Saint-Simon’s divine morality is in some ways recalls de Maistre’s divine justice. While the two philosophies are extreme opposites, both invalidate man-made laws in favor of divine law.

The essay itself is structured as a dialogue between “un conservateur et un novateur.” Establishing that the “novateur” believes in God, and that Christianity is a religion of divine origin, the “conservateur” begins by attacking the concept of the perfectibility of religion since the divine is inherently perfect (107-8). The “novateur” agrees that God’s works are not perfectible but maintains that the clergy can improve their understanding of God’s message. According to the “novateur,” early Christian doctrine was incomplete and cannot be considered definitive religious law (113). Theology, like any science, requires research and experimentation: “La théorie de la théologie a besoin d’être renouvelée à certaines époques, de même que celle de la physique, de la chimie et de la psychologie” (108).

*Nouveau christianisme* aims to prove that an effort to support the poor would benefit the whole of society (115). New Christianity, he says, will unite all institutions under this one principle:

La nouvelle organisation chrétienne déduira les institutions temporelles, ainsi que les institutions spirituelles, du principe que tous les hommes doivent se conduire à l'égard les uns des autres comme des frères. Elle dirigera toutes les institutions, de quelque nature qu'elles soient, vers l'accroissement du bien-être de la classe la plus pauvre. (113)

For Saint-Simon, the role of the clergy should be strictly limited to the propagation of this message: “La religion doit diriger la société vers le grand but de l'amélioration la plus rapide possible du sort de la classe la plus pauvre” (117). Any religion that does not work solely to help the poor is labeled as heresy (118). Saint-Simon's “novateur” interprets the history of the Roman Catholic Church in order to conclude that the Church remains in power through ruse rather than through legitimate divine sanction. He concludes that Roman Catholicism is a degeneration of the true Church. Although the accusation of degeneration recalls similar allegations charged by protestant reformers, Saint-Simon's argument in the context of the early nineteenth century religious debate is notable because ultramontane writers such as Chateaubriand and de Maistre used the argument of degeneration to challenge those who promoted perfectibility. They upheld that man's moral degeneration has made him incapable of ruling himself freely and that man is dependent on religion as a moral guide. Saint-Simon turns the tables on the degeneration/perfectibility argument by asserting that it is not man who has degenerated but the Church itself. He shifts the focus of religion from being Church-centered to being human-centered and establishes the idea that if man has not progressed, it is because religious superstitions have held him back.

Saint-Simon structures the innovator's argument as a series of accusations against both the Catholic and protestant Churches. At the heart of these accusations is the idea that religious leaders are not sufficiently educated and are therefore ill equipped to lead their people.

### Catholic Heresies

The “novateur” in the *Nouveau Christianisme* first accuses the Pope and his Church of heresy on the basis that it does not guide the people to the true Christian path (121). All aspects of religion, the dogma and the cult, should be focused on improving the living conditions of the lower classes (122). He critiques Catholic doctrine for being too vague, alleging that the Church places too much emphasis on mysticism and not enough on moral principles. On the subject of works written on the doctrine by theologians he comments:

...les idées de morale se trouvent en petit nombre dans ces écrits, et elle ne forme point corps de doctrine; elles sont clairsemées dans cette immense quantité de volumes qui se composent essentiellement des répétitions fastidieuses de quelques conceptions mystiques; conceptions qui ne peuvent nullement servir de guide, et qui sont au contraire de nature à faire perdre de vue les principes de la sublime morale du Christ. (123)

Saint-Simon faults the Catholic system for teaching people that they cannot progress spiritually without following a clergy which, he says, is no more enlightened than its congregation (124).

His second overarching accusation is that the Pope and the Church improperly educate the clergy (124). He notes that theology is the only science taught in seminaries and that the focus on theology distracts people from the message of charity which ought to be the goal of Christianity (125). Again referencing Catholic

history, Saint-Simon's "novateur" cites the reign of sixteenth century Pope Leo X (the same Pope who ruled during Martin Luther's protestant reformation) as a defining moment in the Church's degeneration (126). Interestingly, Saint-Simon's criticism here is not uniquely centered on morality. He chooses to concentrate again on education. Under Leo X, in the heart of the renaissance, the clergy "n'a plus cultivé que la théologie" and lay scholars and artists surpassed religious leaders "dans les beaux-arts, dans les sciences exactes, et sous le rapport de la capacité industrielle" (126).

His third accusation against the Pope is that he upholds governmental actions which are more destructive to the lower classes than those of any monarch. Saint-Simon blames this partly on insufficient education of the clergy (127). The concept of charity in this unenlightened system, he says, has backfired on the poor. Rather than create opportunities to permanently improve their standard of living, the Church has been content to give insufficient handouts:

Les pauvres, étant nourris par charité, sont mal nourris; ainsi leur existence est malheureuse sous le rapport physique. Ils sont encore plus malheureux sous le rapport moral, puisqu'ils vivent dans l'oisiveté, qui est la mère de tous les vices et de tous les brigandages dont ce malheureux pays est infesté. (129)

The novateur's final accusation against the Church charges that both the creation of the Inquisition and the Jesuit order are contrary to the spirit of Christianity. For Saint-Simon, the true values of the Church are kindness, goodness, charity and loyalty (129). He notes that heresies punished by the Church generally targeted trespasses against the dogma or the cult, which, compared to the moral obligations of the Church, ought to be considered as "fautes légères" (130-1). Concerning the Jesuits,

who have traditionally taken charge of matters of education in the Catholic system, Saint-Simon charges the religious order with overemphasizing cult and dogma over morality (131). He literally demonizes the Jesuits in order to communicate the depth of his disapproval: “Les missionnaires actuels sont de véritables antéchrists, puisqu’ils prêchent une morale absolument opposée à celle de l’Évangile” (132). Lamennais will later launch a comparable demonization of Catholic officials in his *Paroles d’un croyant*.

For Saint-Simon, lay people played the most prominent roles in promoting progress in modern times since the fifteenth century. He cites innovative men from Christopher Columbus to Raphaël, Michelangelo, Newton and Kepler, spanning a variety of arts and sciences to emphasize the scope of their influence on humanity (132-3). His conclusion, graced with the weight of such legendary figures, is a strong argument in favor of progress through secular thought:

Les laïques avaient donc acquis une supériorité positive sur les ecclésiastiques, en même temps que les sciences réputées profanes avaient dépassé les limites dans lesquelles se trouvaient renfermées les conséquences tirées par l’Église des principes de morale divine fondés par Jésus. Le pape et les cardinaux ne possédaient plus la capacité suffisante pour diriger le clergé chrétien, et le clergé chrétien ne se trouvait plus en état de conduire la masse des fidèles. (133)

### Protestant Heresies

Not content to simply critique Roman Catholicism, the second half of Saint-Simon’s religious dialogue accuses protestant leaders of heresy as well, setting his own ideology apart from potential comparisons with other reformers. Again reaching back into Catholic history in an attempt to explain Martin Luther’s intentions, he reiterates

the idea that Catholic politics became mundane at the end of the fourteenth century rendering the Church useless to society (134). As Lamennais would later also claim in his *Paroles d'un croyant*, Saint-Simon exposes an alleged “pacte impie” between the Church and the European monarchies to use religion as an arbitrary power to support the interests of wealthy aristocrats (135). One of the major changes made in Church policy, he says, was the shift in support of “l’aristocratie de la naissance” to the detriment of “l’aristocratie des talents” (137). Returning to his criticism of Pope Leo X as the root of Catholic moral demise, he emphasizes Leo’s aristocratic background, alleging that the pope valued his noble birth over his clerical position (137-8). Saint-Simon concedes that the Renaissance pope did protect artists and scholars but that he protected them for the wrong reasons – as a prince, not as a pope (138). According to the dialogue, arts and sciences under Leo X were cultivated for personal pleasure and egotistical pomp (138).

Un véritable pape aurait profité de l’essor que l’esprit européen prenait à cette époque dans toutes les directions importantes, pour combiner les efforts des savants, des artistes et des chefs des grandes entreprises industrielles, avec les intérêts du clergé et avec ceux des pauvres, contre les prétentions héréditaires du pouvoir temporel, dont l’origine est impie, ainsi que je l’ai dit plus haut, puisque ses droits primitifs ont été fondés sur le droit de conquête, c’est-à-dire sur la loi du plus fort. (138-9)

Saint-Simon respectfully recognizes Martin Luther’s reformation as a two-part process: a critique of “la religion papale” and the establishment of a religion which would be distinctly different from Roman Catholicism (140). The problem with protestant Christianity, he says, is that the second goal was never achieved. Protestant religion, he says, continues to commit comparable heresies against New Christianity’s one true doctrine, the improvement of the working classes. For Saint-Simon, one of

the gravest mistakes made by Luther was the decision to remove the influence of the *beaux arts* on religion. Reminiscent of Mme de Staël, the *novateur* expresses the conviction that art enriches religious sentiment (142). Saint-Simon contends that without a focus on the poor, protestant dogma remains incomplete (142). His first accusation against protestant leaders is “d’avoir adopté une morale qui est très inférieure à celle qui peut convenir aux chrétiens dans l’état actuel de leur civilisation” (142). A truly reformed religion would embrace progress and, ultimately, foster the evolution of religious thought beyond the boundaries of primitive Christian gospel.

In the context of the protestant reformation, Saint-Simon proceeds with an analysis of religious history which centers on social organization (143). For Saint-Simon, religion serves a practical social purpose as the source for moral authority. His argument is in opposition to Chateaubriand, who argued for the preservation of Catholicism in order to conserve the arts and feed the imagination through the perpetuation of innocent ignorance. Yet, while his *Nouveau Christianisme* shares Mme de Staël’s vision that the arts should provoke religious sentiment and that religion should become compatible with reason, the *Nouveau Christianisme* does not suggest (as Mme de Staël does) that religion should influence the arts in return in any sort of mystical sense. He limits religion to strict moral practicality, distancing it from the romantic concept of spiritual sentiment.

Saint-Simon returns to a discussion on early Christianity in order to critique protestant misconceptions of the early Christian doctrine that serves as a foundation for their faith. Repeating his insistence on Jesus’ one true mission to aid the poor, the

“novateur” establishes that first century society was divided simply into two classes, masters and slaves and the master class was further divided into patricians and plebeians (144). According to Saint-Simon, Jesus’ mission was primarily to reorganize society. This point of view removes all mysticism from the Christian religious mission, transforming Jesus into a sort of industrial manager not unlike Saint-Simon himself. The “novateur” attributes the lack of religious and moral system to the existence of too much diversity in religious beliefs in Biblical times, recalling nineteenth century religious plurality: “Il n’existait pas encore de système religieux, puisque toutes les croyances publiques admettaient une multitude de dieux, qui inspiraient aux hommes des sentiments différents, et même opposés les uns aux autres” (144). Religion, according to Saint-Simon, needed to be simplified into one concept. Saint-Simon asserts that morality as we know it had not yet even been invented before the first century A.D. He describes patriotic feelings as the precursor to philanthropy, which was non-existent before Christianity (145). Similarly, science remained in a primitive stage since the dimensions of the planet had yet to be revealed (145). “En un mot, le Christianisme, sa morale, son culte et son dogme, ses partisans et ses ministres, ont commencé par se trouver complètement en dehors de l’organisation sociale, ainsi que des usages et des mœurs de la société” (145). Christianity’s purpose then, according to Saint-Simon, was put society into order. His new Christianity proposes to once again reorder society in the modern era as a continuation of Jesus’ first attempt.

For Saint-Simon, Luther’s reformation missed the mark because he did not acknowledge the fact that significant progress had been made in the development of

Christian doctrine by the sixteenth century. Saint-Simon takes advantage of the opportunity to correct Luther, using *what Luther should have said* as a forum for explaining *Nouveau christianisme*. The “novateur” tells his opponent that Luther’s reformation was incomplete. If Luther was to truly reform Christianity, he would have acknowledged that Christian theory had been sufficiently developed and that the Church should focus its efforts on applying the doctrine on earth: “Le véritable Christianisme doit rendre les hommes heureux, non-seulement dans le ciel, mais sur la terre” (147-8). Happiness thus emerges as a more specific goal of the New Christianity. The “novateur” goes on to reveal the political component of his message: that a true reformer would require the Church to use its power to positively influence kings, declaring that their royalty is only legitimate when the institution supports the well-being of the poor against the wealthy (149). He also includes a message of peace. The Church, according to *Nouveau christianisme*, has a responsibility to hinder wars and to promote social strength through unity, (151). This united effort, he repeats, is again the rehabilitation of the impoverished (152). He adds that the promise of heaven as a recompense for good deeds has proven insufficient for modern clergy and the paths which lead to heaven (mainly rituals and ceremonies) are useless and arbitrary because they do not serve morality in the present (152).

Finally, the “novateur” insists that Luther might have pointed out that the Catholic Church failed to recognize a “grande crise intellectuelle” (154). Religion might have been preserved by working with instead of against innovation. He warns that policies which continue to promote mysticism at the expense of progress in government and

in the arts and sciences as well as in industry will eventually backlash as educated people are bound to turn against an uninformed religion. Religion must therefore join the progress which inevitably advances in step with society. Religion, according to Saint-Simon cannot be removed from the social context. Unlike Ballanche, however, he asserts that social action can and must be taken in order to move humanity forward. Luther's major fault was that he chose regression over progression as the path to truth. According to the dialogue, Luther attempted to establish a religion which was outside of the social context of the times. He focused too much on the past and not enough on the present and future, creating a dangerous disharmony: "au lieu de prendre les mesures pour accroître l'importance sociale de la religion chrétienne, il (Luther) a fait rétrograder cette religion jusqu'à son point de départ; il l'a replacée en dehors de l'organisation sociale..." (15).

Saint-Simon's second accusation against protestants is simply "d'avoir adopté un mauvais culte" (158). According to the "novateur," Luther's religion relied too heavily on fear as a moral regulator and not enough on the promise of pleasure (160). Ever the industrialist, Saint-Simon asserts that social improvements encourage advancement in intellectual and manual work (159). Arguing that the beaux arts are a necessary tool for stimulating people, he details the ways in which poets, painters, musicians, and architects can cultivate religious sentiment in the people (160). Luther, he reasons, could not move the people because he did not support the arts (160). He further accuses Protestants of having adopted a corrupt dogma (165). Modern religion should promote philanthropy and nothing else. The dogma, then, would ideally be

considered as “une collection de commentaires” which exists to help followers apply religion to their daily lives (166). Again, religion is limited to that which is useful. Saint-Simon clinches his opposition to Lutheran Christianity by reiterating the idea that religion is like a science which must continue to be developed. He compares Luther’s insistence on strictly following the Bible to the idea that mathematicians or scientists would limit their studies to early works. What Jesus gave his apostles, according to Saint-Simon, was “le germe du Christianisme,” the potential to develop a religion (168). From this perspective, Christianity was never meant to be a static and infallible institution (168). The innovator sees protestant fixation on the Bible as distracting from the moral mission of religion in society. He alleges that Biblical studies promote metaphorical ideas over positive ideas, compromise the purity of one’s imagination with stories of vice (such as bestiality and incest) and promote an unrealizable concept of equality (169-70). As in the *Lettres d’un habitant de Genève*, he asserts once again that the government should be led by those who are most capable in the sciences and the arts (170). Associations distributing the Bible should be putting their efforts into the development of philanthropy instead (170). The *novateur* brings the dialogue to a close with the idea that *Nouveau christianisme* will “rajeunir le Christianisme,” bringing people to a state of morality which they cultivate and protect themselves – not one that is forced upon them by an institution (178-9). New Christianity unites artists, intellectuals and industrial leaders with the people by emphasizing that they are all united as working class citizens (180).

### Conclusion

Beginning with his 1803 *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*, Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon proposes a reorganization of the social system supposedly supported by religious revelation. Society would be divided into three classes: artists and intellectuals, business owners, and the working class. In his vision of a harmonious society, the three classes are mutually beneficial to each other and function as one body with each organ dependent upon the other. The *Lettres* stresses the importance of pursuing progress in the sciences. He casts philosophers, moralists, and metaphysicians out of society in order to make room for progressive scientific thinking. In the *Lettres*, Saint-Simon blends religion and science in revelatory passages in which God presents a new spiritual order, declaring Isaac Newton his representative on Earth.

In his 1825 *Nouveau Christianisme*, the author continues his effort to reorganize society, this time with an enhanced focus on improving lower class living conditions. The purpose of "New Christianity" is to protect the lower classes from injustice. Saint-Simon readjusts Christianity's focus, insisting upon "love thy neighbor" as its central doctrine. For Saint-Simon, Christianity has degenerated over the centuries. He proposes a return to charity as the unique religious truth.

The *Nouveau Christianisme* is certainly concerned with morality but Saint-Simon carefully distances his concept of morality from traditional Christian moral philosophies by redefining morality as "divine morality." By invalidating man-made moral laws, Saint-Simon is able to claim love as the supreme universal law. The "novateur" in the dialogues of the *Nouveau Christianisme* emphasizes the idea that theology is a science and it follows that, like all sciences, it must be constantly

refined. New Christianity refines the religion by narrowing its focus such that the unique goal of Christianity is to cultivate fraternity among men. He proposes to accomplish this goal through charity towards the impoverished classes. For Saint-Simon, the Catholic Church's failure to provide lasting support for the poor is proof that it has strayed from Christianity's ultimate goal. The Church is thus considered to be a degeneration of the early Christian Church. This point of view on degeneration contrasts with Chateaubriand and de Maistre who decried the degeneration of man but upheld infallibility of the Church. Saint-Simon targets insufficient education of clergy as a major obstacle in the Church's ability to properly lead the people.

The "novateur" establishes Catholics as heretics who have sinned against the true purpose of Christianity. They too, he says, have failed to improve the living conditions of the lower classes. He criticizes Catholic doctrine for focusing too heavily on mysticism and not enough on the true divine moral principle. He also cites insufficient education of the clergy as a major flaw in the Church. The Church's anti-progress stance has backfired such that lay scientists, scholars, and artists have surpassed the Church in their abilities. He also charges that the pope upholds government actions contrary to Christianity's mission to support the poor. Finally, he alleges that the creation of the Inquisition and the Jesuit order are contrary to the spirit of Christianity whose values are kindness, goodness, charity, and loyalty. Saint-Simon contrasts the ineffectiveness of the clergy with the advancements in the arts and sciences made by lay people in recent times.

While Saint-Simon recognizes Martin Luther's reformation as well-intentioned, he criticizes protestant Christianity for never having established a religion which would

be distinctly different to Roman Catholicism. Protestant Christianity, like Catholicism, fails to concentrate on the one true doctrine according to New Christianity: the improvement of working class conditions. Protestants also removed the beaux-arts from Christianity. For Saint-Simon, the arts serve as a vital tool for provoking religious inspiration. Saint-Simon is especially disappointed that Protestants do not embrace the concept of religious evolution. He criticizes protestant misconceptions of early Christian doctrine which he says have served to build a false foundation for their faith. Most notably, he cites the protestant failure to recognize Jesus as a social innovator. Christianity's purpose, he says, was to reorder a disordered world by limiting religion to one simple concept based upon fraternity. New Christianity is presented as a continuation of this original Christian mission. For Saint-Simon, religion should serve the purpose of making people happy in the present on Earth rather than perpetuating vague promises of happiness in the afterlife. Ultimately, people will want to be moral under the influence of *Nouveau Christianisme*. He suggests that when religion is centered on the needs of the people, there is no need for moral laws to be enforced by a religious institution. Following Saint-Simon's death, however, his writings would inspire the Saint-Simonian movement led by Prosper Enfantin. The Saint-Simonians would transform the *Nouveau Christianisme* message of love into a veritable religion and a powerful influence on intellectual circles in 1830s France. As Claire Moses has shown in *Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism*, the Saint-Simonian emphasis on love coupled with an insistence on the separation of social classes is especially notable for having inspired an 1830s feminist movement based on difference rather than on

equality. These feminists promoted the popular romantic stereotype of the sentimental female to their advantage (22). Moses sums up their reasoning with a powerful quote from the Saint-Simonian publication, the *Tribune*: “In a religion that is completely about love, the most loving becomes the most capable” (29). George Sand’s *Spiridion*, which we will address in a later chapter, echoes the Saint-Simonian idea that humanity was entering a new phase of Christianity which would be less focused on doctrine and more focused on feeling. Saint-Simonians expected that this “phase of sentiment” would usher in a “reign of peace and love” (Moses 22).

## Chapter 9: Between History and Progress: Lamennais from *De la religion* to *Paroles d'un croyant*

Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais was among the most reactionary conservatives of the 1820s fighting to fully restore France's connection with the Roman Catholic Church. His early writings assert that a stable society must be built on a solid foundation of history, traditional social hierarchy, and complete obedience to the Church. Upon Louis XVIII's restoration to the throne in 1814 and throughout the reign of Charles X, Lamennais called for Church intervention in French politics as a means for stabilizing France and reestablishing a true Catholic monarchy under the Vatican's control.

By the 1830s, however, Lamennais was inspired to propose a spiritual renovation of the Church itself. His 1830 journal *L'Avenir* was founded on the idea that Church and State should be separated in order to preserve the liberty of the clergy (Le Guillot 407). Ballanche had already expressed a similar view in favor of the separation of church and state in his 1818 *Essai sur les institutions sociales*. Lamennais' personal correspondence from August 1830 confirms his new mission:

On doit souhaiter et demander une émancipation complète [*sic*] ; plus d'intervention civile dans la nomination des évêques et des curés, dans l'éducation ecclésiastique, en un mot dans rien de ce qui intéresse directement la religion. L'Église ne payera jamais trop cher ces libertés indispensables à la conservation de la foi. (Le Guillot 408)

Lamennais furthermore recognized that republican politics would be the future of France and that Catholicism must learn to coexist with republican principles if faith is to be preserved :

En politique il est évident que, sous une forme ou une autre, la république seule est aujourd’hui possible. Le nom n’y fait rien. On doit donc pencher pour tout ce qui tend à l’établir avec le moins de secousses possibles, et pour tout ce qui est conforme à son esprit, afin de ne pas provoquer inutilement des luttes terribles et des passions violentes. Surtout qu’on oublie les Bourbons; leurs plus chauds amis n’ont rien à faire de mieux que de les abandonner à la Providence. (Le Guillot 408)

Cooperation from the Vatican never came, however, and two papal encyclicals<sup>12</sup> were specifically written as warnings to Lamennais, expressing disapproval of the veneration of humanity in *l’Avenir*. The first, *Mirari vos* (1832), does not name Lamennais specifically but sternly reminds authors that the Church resists innovation : “Indeed these authors of novelties consider that a ‘foundation may be laid of a new human institution,’ and what Cyprian<sup>13</sup> detested may come to pass, that what was a divine thing ‘may become a human church’” (*Mirari vos*). Lamennais, who likewise once feared that sacredness might diminish under lay influence, increasingly sought to humanize the Church. *Paroles d’un croyant* would finally propose a religion for and by the people. In 1834, *Singulari nos* specifically targets Lamennais in the subtitle “On the Errors of Lamennais.” *Singulari nos* openly acknowledges Lamennais’ break with Church doctrine: “We have learned of the pamphlet written in

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<sup>12</sup> *Mirari vos*, Pope Gregory XVI, August 15, 1832 and *Singulari nos*, Pope Gregory XVI, July 25, 1834

<sup>13</sup> Pope Gregory XVI is referring to third century martyred bishop, Saint Cyprian of Carthus. In a letter criticizing the schismatic “antipope,” Novatian, Cyprian wrote that this bishop “in spite of God’s tradition, in spite of the combined and everywhere compacted unity of the [Catholic Church](#), is endeavouring to make a [human](#) church, and is sending his new [apostles](#) through very many cities, that he may establish some new foundations of his own appointment”(“To Antonianus about Cornelius and Novatian.”Web. 03 March 2013. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050651.htm>>). The reference implies that Lamennais will spark a Church schism.

French under the title *Paroles d'un croyant*, for it has been printed by this man and disseminated everywhere. [...] Though small in size, it is enormous in wickedness” (Singulari nos).

Lamennais’ transformation from ultramontane activist to religious visionary is a dramatic illustration of the changing spiritual climate in France during the Restoration. In the writings of this one man, we can observe an intellectual shift from the conservative doctrines of Chateaubriand, Ballanche, and de Maistre to the spiritual innovations and utopian manifestos of Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte. As R.L. White points out in her study of Lamennais’ 1830 journal *L’Avenir*, Lamennais’ shift in political and religious sympathies has all too often been dismissed as simply a result of mental instability (11). A closer analysis of his thought process, however, reveals that his principal goal is constant: to preserve religion despite politics and to fortify society through a common faith (White 11). Though attitudes towards religion were evolving as the population increasingly rejected superstition and embraced positivism, religion continued to be recognized as a necessary component to a morally sound society. The challenge was to adapt religion in such a way that it would retain its moral code while synchronizing with social and political trends. For Lamennais, the common thread between his early and later writings is a desire to peacefully unify the nation through shared religious beliefs. This chapter will examine two essays which capture the essence of Lamennais’ conflicting stances on religion in society. *De la religion considérée dans ses rapports avec l’ordre politique et civil* (1825) captures the conservative ideals of *le premier Lamennais* while *Paroles*

*d'un croyant* (1833) summarizes the main objectives of the author's religio-political renovation.

*Unity through the Church in De la religion*

Throughout *De la religion*, the present is characterized by "le dogmatisme individuel" and "le scepticisme social" which contribute to the disunity of humanity (68).

Lamennais criticizes eighteenth century philosophy for tearing down the old regime without offering an alternative doctrine on which a new regime could be built (109).

A present dominated by individualism seemed to prevent a universal view of society which would incorporate ancestors and offspring. In order for unity to exist, he

reasoned that the past, present, and future must be in harmony. In the first chapter of

*De la religion*, Lamennais begins by reminding the public of the traditional role of religion under the ancien régime. He explains that, since ancient times, religion has

been the cornerstone of human law: "Les anciens législateurs voyaient en elle la loi commune, source des autres lois; la base, l'appui, le principe régulateur des Etats

constitués selon la nature ou la volonté de l'Intelligence suprême" (1). For

Lamennais, a Christian foundation made the monarchy infallible (4). He therefore

considered the Constitutional monarchy established by Louis XVIII as a degeneration of the monarchy's former perfection because it gave power to the people in matters

which he considered to be divine. Although the Restoration allegedly reestablished

the traditional social order, Lamennais was dissatisfied with the *Charte* and the power

wielded by parliament. Parliament, for Lamennais, lacks not only religious authority

but also the centralization and the historical heft necessary to a successful government

(17). From the conservative viewpoint, Ruins are all that is left of society: “Des gens ont imaginé de démolir la maison de leur père pour rebâtir dans les nues, et ils s'étonnent d'être entourés de ruines” (243). Using the king as a figurehead, he says, provides only the illusion of historical legitimacy: “Le roi est un souvenir vénérable du passé; l'inscription d'un temple ancien, qu'on a placée sur le fronton d'un autre édifice tout moderne” (17). Although the *Charte* declared France to be a Catholic nation, Lamennais laments the added promise of freedom of religion (32). His fear of protestant religions goes hand in hand with his fear of individualism. While an absolute Catholic monarchy provides only one unified truth, the protestant system allows individuals to define truth according to individual interpretation, “chaque individu crée la vérité ou la détermine selon son jugement,” resulting in “vérités contradictoires” (42).

For Lamennais, the Church historically provided a valuable point of centralization for Christian nations. He argues that it was actually Jesus himself who established the bond between Christianity and the monarchy (125-6). From this point of view, the monarchy, established in the Church, must serve the Church through obedience to its sovereign Pope: “Si donc Jésus-Christ a établi le régime monarchique dans l'Église, si le pape y est souverain, attaquer son autorité, limiter son pouvoir, c'est détruire l'Église; c'est essayer de substituer un gouvernement humain, un gouvernement arbitraire, à celui qu'elle a reçu de Jésus-Christ” (125).

As an individual who is one with the Church, the Pope represents Christian unification: “Point de pape, point d'Eglise” (122). Throughout *De la religion*, the author repeats that the Church was meant to be “une, universelle, perpétuelle” (141,

160). Lamennais' argument to reinstate the authority of the Church is likewise a plea to restore the value of European history. Catholic society, he claims, has "Des liens que l'homme n'a point formés, et qu'il ne peut rompre" (85). Divine bonds cannot be broken whereas human bonds are subject to human passions and opinions. Lamennais also asserts that it is impossible to teach morality without religion. He criticizes attempts to adopt a secular moral code lacking traditional religious clout, "comme si bien croire n'était pas le fondement de bien vivre" (92). *De la religion* allows no room for religious freedom because Lamennais believed at the time that multiplicity of religions and personal interpretation were doomed to weaken the Church's strong central organization. Like de Maistre and Chateaubriand, early Lamennais sought to create harmony not through acceptance but through exception. *De la religion* predicts that religious tolerance will be the downfall of Christianity: "Et ce sera sous le prétexte des libertés religieuses qu'on essaiera de nous faire un nouveau christianisme" (97). He argues that social collapse would soon follow: "Point de christianisme, point de religion, ..., et par conséquence point de société" (141). Individualism and democracy are akin to each other in *De la religion* in that both are subject to the whims of the present and neither is grounded in the eternal. Lamennais laments individualism in modern spirituality. He specifically addresses the concept of religion as a personal feeling: "on réduit la religion à un sentiment indéfinissable qui, suivant les temps et les pays, se manifeste sous différentes formes" (136). *De la religion* consistently categorizes democracy as unstable and associates it with the ephemeral whims of the public as impressionable, passion-driven individuals: "Le caractère de la démocratie est une mobilité continuelle; tout sans cesse y est en

mouvement; tout y change; avec une rapidité effrayante, au gré des passions et des opinions” (17). As a system created by man, he argues that democracy can only be as stable or as perfect as its necessarily imperfect mortal creators. The monarchy, in contrast, is a system created by the Supreme Being and therefore is perfectly stable and everlasting. Lamennais depicts democracy as a system riddled with human error, especially pride, and insists that mediocrity rather than talent reigns over a democratic nation (18). The democratic nation is therefore assumed to be a nation of instability while the monarchical nation, in contrast, is anchored by both a divine blessing and the test of time: “pour opérer les grandes choses, le temps est indispensable” (18). For example, the recent rise of the bourgeoisie opens society to the corrupting influence of money. Greed encourages men to live exclusively in the present, severed from the traditions of the past and the future of humanity. For Lamennais, an overemphasis on the present negatively affects family bonds, the traditional foundation of society: “Nulle prévoyance pour les siens, nulle pensée de l’avenir; le présent est tout pour l’homme concentré dans l’abjection des sentiments personnels, et les lois et les mœurs tendent de concert à l’anéantissement de la famille” (20).

*De la religion* rejects any law sanctioned solely by the state. Civil marriage, for example, is dismissed as “concubinage légal, une véritable prostitution” (51).

Historically, the Church connected major life events to the eternal through ceremonies and sacraments. Lamennais worries that secularization will limit people to a strictly positivist analysis of life events. Literal interpretations of birth, marriage, and death are, for Lamennais, stripped of all beauty and hope:

Jamais avant le dix-huitième siècle, il n’existait de société  
publique systématiquement athée, de législation qui se

combattît elle-même en renversant la base des devoirs; qui, dépouillant l'homme de sa grandeur, et le ravalant au rang des brutes, ne lui montrât dans la naissance qu'un accroissement de l'espèce, dans le mariage qu'un bail à la vie, dans la mort que le néant. (51-2)

Religion adds a layer of meaning to ordinary life and strengthens spiritual bonds, uniting the people through mysticism. For Lamennais, religion is the only social element which promotes reflection beyond the physical: "la religion, fondement des devoirs, est aussi l'unique source des idées spirituelles, et de tout ce qui élève au-dessus des sens" (59). Religious ceremonies and sacraments traditionally linked the present to the eternal. Lamennais explains that this link disappears when the Church ceases to reign. He uses England as an example:

En cessant de reconnaître l'autorité suprême, et même toute autorité réelle dans l'ordre religieux, le peuple avait perdu la notion de la souveraineté dans l'ordre temporel. Il ne pouvait plus comprendre ce que c'est qu'un monarque, il ne pouvait surtout plus souffrir un pouvoir au-dessus du sien. Le trône, pour lui, ce fut un fauteuil, comme l'autel n'était plus qu'une table. (7)

For Lamennais, the Revolution disrupted not only the French government system but natural law since the beginning of time: "la révolution qu'on a confondue et que l'on continue de confondre avec ce qui n'en fut qu'une horrible circonstance, n'est en réalité que le renversement des doctrines qui, depuis l'origine du monde, ont été le fondement des sociétés humaines" (71-2). He expresses fear that French Catholicism will end up being forced to conform to the state rather than conforming the State to the Church (74). Again, he cites the novelty of doubt as a main point of weakness: "qu'un peuple rejette systématiquement de ses lois tout principe spirituel... c'est un phénomène nouveau sur la terre" (75). Without religion, Lamennais foresees a

fruitless generation which is “agitée, tourmentée,” lifelessly wandering, “ces ombres errantes qui cherchent un tombeau” (258). For him, some form of spiritual regeneration is necessary to the survival of humanity.

Lamennais ends with the implication that any society which resolves to lose faith is likewise inflicting a sort of mass suicide: “ils ont résolu de mourir” (301). In an ultimate profession of faith in the Church, Lamennais expresses confidence that no government or society can survive without the Church’s guidance. He predicts that the Church will rise again – even if primitive society must begin anew, restarting time with a fresh generation of mankind. Rather than believe that society might be evolving, Lamennais sees social change as a road to destruction. Like the great flood in the Old Testament, God’s plan to renew the Earth would be in spite of humanity. Man is depicted as a bystander in God’s plan. Humanity is powerless once it strays from the divine path – and seemingly worthless in the eyes of Lamennais’ angry God who would sacrifice humanity for the unity of the Church:

Que si les gouvernements aveuglés sans retour persistent à se perdre, s’ils ont résolu de mourir, l’Eglise gémera sans doute, mais elle n’hésitera pas sur le parti qu’elle doit prendre: se retirer du mouvement de la société humaine, resserrer les liens de son unité, maintenir dans son sein, par un libre et courageux exercice de son autorité divine, et l’ordre de la vie, ne rien craindre des hommes, n’en rien espérer, attendre en patience et en paix ce que Dieu décidera du monde. (301)

Yet, Lamennais’ imminent spiritual evolution is glimpsed in a short passage in the conclusion to *De la religion*. He reveals that religion’s strength is dependent upon the faith of its believers. Several times throughout the essay, Lamennais mentions that society cannot exist without the support of religion. Here, he further posits that

religion cannot exist without the support of society. Religion exists only when people believe in it:

On ne change point en quelques années l'esprit des peuples, c'est l'œuvre du temps; et jusqu'à ce que cet esprit ait changé, il est impossible que la société chrétienne renaisse. Elle est le fruit, non de la violence, mais de la conviction; sa base est la foi et non pas l'épée. Elle existe quand on y croit, elle cesse d'être quand on cesse d'y croire, et jamais les lois ne la recréeront qu'en aidant à la rétablir dans la pensée et dans la conscience. (299)

*Humanity Unified Against the Church in Paroles d'un croyant*

In the years following *De la religion*, Lamennais would gradually develop the concept that belief is central to the survival of religion. By 1828, Lamennais began to recognize that Church officials could conceivably abuse their “infallible” authority (White 23). At around the same time, he came to realize that the triumph of liberalism is inevitable. Letters dating from 1829 reveal Lamennais ultimate resolution: “rendez le libéralisme chrétien” (White 24). By 1833, Lamennais repeatedly embraces hope and love as the true path to progress in *Paroles d'un croyant*: “Espérez et aimez. L'espérance adoucit tout, et l'amour rend toutes choses possibles” (Paroles vi). In *Paroles d'un croyant*, order is not forced on society through existing structures. Rather, everything is said to happen for a reason according to a divine plan, including the reign of evil before the reign of God (10-11). In this way, hope can be salvaged despite distressing circumstances. Lamennais' concept of a divine plan is similar to Ballanche's but his message is ultimately completely contrary to that of the *Essai sur les institutions* which depicted activism as contrary to God's intended timing. The rather brief chapters of *Paroles d'un croyant* include sections written as prophecies,

parables and some persuasive essays. Although the styles vary, the work as a whole is noticeably more intimate than *De la religion*. Rather than presenting readers with received information in an authoritarian tone as he did in *De la religion*, *Paroles d'un croyant* shows the author to be one of the people, experiencing their trials with them. Some of the prophecies allow for personal testimony to be presented as sentimental inspiration. The author moves out of the realm of dogma and into the realm of feeling. In the following passage, for example, Lamennais captivates the reader by acknowledging common human fears as he recounts a prophetic dream:

Et je tressaillis, non de crainte ni de joie, mais comme d'un sentiment qui serait un mélange inexprimable de l'une et de l'autre.  
Et l'Esprit me dit: Pourquoi es-tu triste?  
Et je répondis en pleurant: Oh! Voyez les maux qui sont sur la terre. (42)

With this, Lamennais echoes the general plight of his countrymen, acknowledging that common experience and common sentiment bind them as human beings.

Lamennais' new concept of religion in *Paroles d'un croyant* approaches the spiritual models of Rousseau and Mme de Staël. The source of religion can be found inside the self and through generous acts of human bonding rather than through rigid Church doctrine. Nevertheless, Lamennais makes an effort to preserve the mysticism he previously admired in the Church. Instead of removing religion, he alters its source and its history while retaining the purpose of unifying, moralizing, and strengthening human bonds with the eternal. In place of a clear external religion, *Paroles d'un croyant* describes a hidden, internal religion. The world that one sees with his eyes is not real: "Le monde réel est voilé pour vous" (111). Introversion is the key to lifting the veil: "Celui qui se retire au fond de lui-même, l'y entrevoit comme dans le

lointain” (111). By allowing individuals to take control of their religious beliefs, Lamennais shifts the source of religious authority from the unified Church and State to the unified people. The people, he notes, were the original supporters of Christ (113). His interpretation of Christianity consequently becomes gentler. Faith must be felt, not forced: “La foi est la fille du Verbe: elle pénètre dans les cœurs avec la parole, et non avec le poignard” (118).

Much of *Paroles d'un croyant* is written as a prophecy, detailing the poet's visions of the past and the future. For Lamennais, history remains an important foundation for truth. Lamennais alters his previous historical assertions in order to support his new agenda. A prophetic writing style allows the author to claim a historical foundation for new ideas and subsequently link those ideas directly to divine authority. His approach alters the perception of the present, allowing Lamennais to reverse his previous stance on change as destructively regressive and embrace innovation as divinely progressive. Lamennais guides the reader on a voyage through time in an effort to reveal new truths: “Et je fus transporté en esprit dans les temps anciens, et la terre était belle, et riche, et féconde; et ses habitants vivaient heureux, parce qu'ils vivaient en frères” (8). By beginning with a new interpretation of Genesis, Lamennais is able to restart time and adjust history in order to directly link fraternity to the divine and the monarchy to the root of all evil: “Et je vis le serpent... Et après avoir écouté la parole du serpent, ils se levèrent et dirent: Nous sommes rois” (8). The monarchy is thus born of a pact with evil, not with the divine as Lamennais had supposed in *De la religion*. A voice reveals to the poet that the reign of the serpent will be followed by the reign of God, therefore the end of the monarchy will mark the beginning of a new

truly Christian era: “Et je compris qu’il devait y avoir un règne de Satan avant le règne de Dieu. Et je pleurai, et j’espérai” (10). This new era would be a rebirth of humanity:

Et la vision que je vis était vraie, car le règne de Satan s’est accompli, et le règne de Dieu s’accomplira aussi; et ceux qui ont dit: Nous sommes rois, seront à leur tour renfermés dans la caverne avec le Serpent, et la race humaine en sortira; et ce sera pour elle comme une autre naissance, comme le passage de la mort à la vie. Ainsi soit-il. (11)

History remained important to Lamennais as the foundation for future social and religious institutions but *Paroles d’un croyant* would need to somehow alter the historical assertions made in *De la religion* in order to support the author’s revised agenda. Lamennais revisits the concept of a second creation, for example, but completely reverses his prior stance on Church authority. At the end of *De la religion*, the author predicts a second creation will occur which will save the Church and condemn humanity. In *Paroles d’un croyant*, the second creation has the opposite purpose. In *De la religion*, humanity has allegedly degenerated due to a detour from the divine plan. In *Paroles d’un croyant*, this same social evolution actually becomes the divine plan. Amazingly, Lamennais shifts from a degenerative view of humanity in accordance with de Maistre to a completely opposite progressive theory not unlike Mme de Staël’s “perfectibilité.” In *De la religion*, the author accuses the people of dissidence:

...des erreurs et des passions, diverses selon les époques, mais qui toujours tendaient à rompre l’unité politique en ébranlant l’unité religieuse, altèrent peu à peu l’esprit de la société européenne, la détournèrent de sa direction, et en arrêtaient les progrès avant qu’elle eût atteint son parfait développement. (*De la religion* 4)

*Paroles d'un croyant* reverses the charges, acquitting the people and accusing religious and political leaders of manipulating the people through false doctrines. Revolution is now part of God's plan: "Quelque chose que nous ne savons pas se remue dans le monde: il y a là un travail de Dieu" (3). For Lamennais in 1833, Christianity will live on forever but the Church is destined to fall. The second coming of Christ, according to *Paroles d'un croyant*, will not be to save the Church from the people but rather to save the people from an ever more corrupt Church.

From chapter thirteen, *Paroles d'un croyant* endeavors to reinterpret the history of Catholic monarchies. The prophetic vision exposes kings as devil worshippers who set out to dupe the people, spreading false Christianity as a means for destroying true Christianity (52-3). The seven crowned men, as founders of monarchies, curse the Christian doctrine of liberty as they perform satanic rituals complete with an upside-down cross and a blasphemous communion, drinking blood from a human skull. Together they vow to abolish Christianity, science, and thought which make up a sort of trinity of truth (53). Here, it is notable that Lamennais asserts that religion is actually supported by science and philosophy.

Despite major adjustments to his religious philosophy, unity would remain just as imperative to the success of the new nation in *Paroles d'un croyant* as it did in *De la religion*. Unity is not only achieved through human equality but also through equal consideration of the past, present, and future. Prophecy allows the author to make assertions on all three stages of time and unify them through his visions. Lamennais recounts a prophetic dream allegedly sent to him by God in which a divine being telepathically communicates prophecy to him (41). He describes a vision in which he

could simultaneously observe the past, present, and future in unison (42). Similarly, humanity also appeared to him as a whole, as one unified being: “Et la race humaine me paraissait comme un seul homme” (42).

In *Paroles* unity leads to liberty, “Le jour donc où vous serez unis sera le jour de votre délivrance” (124). In Lamennais’ reinterpretation of human history, Jesus’ greatest accomplishment was the granting of liberty to the people. The monarchs curse Christ because the path of faith and thought taught by true Christian doctrine leads to the liberty they oppose: “La foi et la pensée ont brisé les chaînes des peuples...” (63). Whereas Lamennais had previously argued that kings must have been appointed to their thrones by divine privilege and that people have no right to choose their leader, *Paroles d’un croyant* insists: “ce sont les peuples qui font les rois, et les peuples ne sont pas faits pour les rois” (82). Liberty allows the people to unify against tyranny.

The unity that Lamennais formerly proposed depended upon a social hierarchy headed by the Church. In 1825, Lamennais considered democracy and social evolution as exclusively incompatible with national unity: “Ce sont deux principes qui se combattent sans relâche dans l’État: un principe d’unité et de stabilité, un principe de division et de changement perpétuel” (De la religion 19). *De la religion* depicts the pope as the ultimate unifier:

[l’Église] n’est pas *une*, s’il n’existe point de centre d’unité, si la souveraineté ne réside point immuablement dans un *seul*; elle n’est pas universelle, si ce souverain, ce pouvoir *un* n’est pas universel puisque là où le pouvoir s’arrête, là s’arrête la société; elle n’est pas perpétuelle si ce pouvoir *un* et universel n’est pas perpétuel aussi, puisque là où le pouvoir finit, là finit la société. (131)

*Paroles d'un croyant* reverses the previous social structure, usurping the pope's role as unifier and establishing universal equality as the foundation for unity. *De la religion* warns against egalitarianism, claiming that the erasure of class distinctions would lead to financially motivated immorality (De la religion 19-20). *Paroles d'un croyant* continues to warn against the danger of the "insatiable desire to acquire and possess" material goods but the link between greed and social equality is erased (Paroles d'un croyant 122). Justice and charity replace social hierarchy as the means for preserving society against greed (Paroles d'un croyant 122). The monarchs divide their people to inhibit communication and seek to inspire obedience through tyranny (53). In Lamennais' altered historical revelation, monarchs ruled by inspiring "une justice inexorable," not through divine right (57). For Lamennais in 1833, there are no class distinctions and men interact as equals, as brothers: "chacun s'aimera dans son frère" (104). His vision is not just one of French unity but of world unity: "Et chacun s'aimera sans son frère, et se tiendra heureux de le servir; et il n'y aura ni petits, ni grands, à cause de l'amour qui égale tout, et toutes les familles ne seront qu'une famille, et toutes les nations qu'une nation" (104). Because of his emphasis on unity, Lamennais' condemnation of individualism is also among the few themes that remain constant between 1825 and 1833 (14). *De la religion* envisioned a society unified through service to the Church. *Paroles d'un croyant* sees men unified in service to each other in accordance with God's will: "La loi de Dieu est une loi d'amour, et l'amour ne s'élève point au-dessus des autres, mais il se sacrifie aux autres" (19). *Paroles d'un croyant* highlights the sacred origins of work according to Christian tradition. Lamennais asserts that work is a part of God's plan for man. Those who do

not work are judged to be sinners. When the hardest working people are placed at the top of the social hierarchy, aristocrats fall in rank. As exploiters of good working people, the bourgeoisie are at the very bottom. Here, Lamennais differs from Saint-Simon who placed sentimental people at the top of the social hierarchy but otherwise maintained a traditional class structure with the working class at the bottom.

Reminiscent of Rousseau, Lamennais attacks the leisurely ruling class as a source for social vice: “les vices les dévorent, et si ce ne sont les vices, c’est l’ennui” (28).

Working people benefit from a moral “treasure.” Generosity and compassion are likewise elevated to the most honorable traits in humankind (28). In later chapters, we will see that work remained important later in the century to writers such as Ernest Renan and Jules Michelet who argued that work ethic must be preserved in a positive, masculine religion.

Ultimately, *Paroles d’un croyant* moves toward a reconsideration of the meaning of the word “patrie,” or fatherland. The monarch father figure is replaced by God.

Lamennais moves from an idyllic history of Christian Europe in *De la religion* to an almost fantastical ideal vision of a future heaven on Earth in *Paroles d’un croyant*.

“La cité de Dieu<sup>14</sup>” distinguishes itself from “la cité de Satan” because it is a place where brotherhood reigns: “chacun aime ses frères comme soi-même” (154).

According to the poet’s vision, Satan reversed human understanding of values by inventing war and glorifying personal honor, fidelity to royalty and obedience to the law (157). Honor, Fidelity, and Obedience were invented by Satan as idols for misleading the people. Lamennais claims that obedience to authority thereby falsely

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<sup>14</sup> *The City of God* is likely a reference to Saint Augustine’s work by the same title in which rejected the authority of corrupt kings embracing God as the one true ruler. (“The City of God.” Web. 03 March 2013. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050651.htm>>).

replaced love of humanity (157). Justice and charity are the cornerstones of the true religion:

Le règne de Dieu, je vous le dis encore, c'est le règne de la justice dans les esprits et de la charité dans les cœurs: et il a sur la terre son fondement dans la foi en Dieu et la foi au Christ, qui a promulgué la loi de Dieu, la loi de charité et la loi de justice. (169)

Distracted by the illusion of the physical world, man is a wanderer on Earth searching for a homeland that cannot be found in this world: “La patrie n'est point ici-bas; l'homme vainement l'y cherche” (181)<sup>15</sup>. Lamennais' final vision in *Paroles* reveals the true nature of the universe as the poet glimpses man's veritable homeland. He sees three oceans, one of “force,” one of “lumière,” and one of “vie” (186). They are all three simultaneously separate but unified: “une même unité, indivisible, absolue, éternelle” (186). These three oceans correspond to the trinity, “le Père, le Fils, l'Esprit” (186). The Father is infinite, “au dedans de l'infini, un avec elle” (187). The Son is described as “une parole,” the word which defines the infinite being (187). The Spirit is the feeling shared between the Father and the Son: “l'amour, l'effusion, l'aspiration mutuelle du Père et du Fils” (187). For Lamennais, God's creation is like an island in the ocean of the great Infinite Being (188). “La patrie” is brotherhood with humanity creating harmony with the supreme being that envelops it. The poet leaves readers with the hopeful prophecy that man's true homeland lies outside the borders of politics and dogma in a heavenly state of peaceful harmony: “Et je sentais ce que c'est que la patrie: et je m'enivrais de lumière, et mon âme emportée par des

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, this is reminiscent of the Indian concept of “maya” which basically views the physical world as an illusion.

flots d'harmonie, s'endormait sur les ondes célestes, dans une extase inénarrable” (189).

### Conclusion

Although Lamennais' early writings established him as an ultramontane in agreement with the likes of Bonald, Ballanche, and de Maistre, his later writings envision a renovation of the Church which would include separation of church and state as well as encouraging Church cooperation with French republicans. By 1833, Lamennais completely broke free from Church dogma and proposed his own type of “new” Christianity (reminiscent of Saint-Simon's) with a focus on fraternity in *Paroles d'un croyant*.

In *De la religion*, Lamennais asserts that enlightenment philosophy promoted individualism and focused too heavily on the present. From his point of view, this focus on the self and on the present prevented people from unifying with the past and future, with their ancestors and offspring. In order to unify humanity, Lamennais reasons that the past, present, and future must be equally represented in religion. Lamennais sees Christianity as historically foundational for European society. The Catholic priest was scandalized by Louis XVIII's constitutional monarchy because it violated traditional barriers between the mundane and the divine. Lamennais, like Ballanche, also feared the freedom of religion established in the Charter. Lamennais' harsh rejection of Protestantism in *De la religion* seems related to his rejection of individualism. One of his main criticisms of Protestantism is that it allows individuals to interpret religion for themselves. *De la religion* focuses on the pope as the only hope for the unification of all Christian nations.

*De la religion* likewise associates democracy with individualism because both are supposedly rooted in man's desires in the present and detached from past traditions. Democracy is thus the opposite of the eternal. Following this line of reasoning, democracy is assumed to be less stable than the monarchy which rests on the foundation of eternal religion. *De la religion* insists that religion bonds people together in a way that secular ceremonies cannot because they lack the weight of mysticism. For Lamennais, faith is necessary to life and widespread loss of faith is equivalent to mass suicide.

The author concludes *De la religion* with the conviction that the Church will rise again to reclaim control over humanity. At this time, Lamennais rejected social change as destructive. He compares the nineteenth century to the era preceding the Old Testament's great flood. Nevertheless, a short passage in the conclusion of *De la religion* alludes to the idea that religion can only exist when it has followers, suggesting that perhaps the people do have some control over their own religion and foreshadowing Lamennais' spiritual evolution in *Paroles d'un croyant*.

*Paroles d'un croyant*, in dramatic contrast to *De la religion*, recognizes that Church officials could potentially abuse their power and considers liberalism as an inevitable force in society. For Lamennais in 1833, social change is a part of a divine plan. He uses personal testimony to support claims that sentiment is central to religion.

Lamennais embraces internal conscience-based religion over ritual and Church doctrine. In opposition to his previous rejection of individual religious interpretation, *Paroles d'un croyant* encourages a shift in authority from the iron rule of the Church to the strength of the people unified through their hearts.

Lamennais adopts a prophetic writing style in *Paroles* in order to support his new ideas with some semblance of divine authority. He uses revelation to expose previously unknown divine “truths” which conveniently reverse his previous ultraconservative agenda in *De la religion*. Lamennais shifts, for example, from a degenerative theory of humanity to a progressive theory comparable to Mme de Staël’s “perfectibility.” *Paroles d’un croyant* blames Church officials for the degeneration of Christianity and demonizes them as devil worshippers. He associates the true spirit of Christianity with liberty, science, and philosophy - all liberal ideals. Despite their differences, *Paroles d’un croyant* and *De la religion* both concur that unity is central to the success of a new nation. In *De la religion*, Lamennais is preoccupied with the unity of time and generations of humanity. In *Paroles d’un croyant*, the unity of humanity is intertwined with the concept of liberty. Liberty allows the people to unify against tyranny and unification, in turn, preserves liberty. A certain condemnation of individualism is thus upheld in the *Paroles* even though the philosophy behind it differs significantly from the anti-individualism expressed in *De la religion*. Whereas *De la religion* thought of humanity as ideally unified through the Church, *Paroles d’un croyant* sees humans as unified through devotion to one another. A “law of love,” again reminiscent of Saint-Simon, trumps all other doctrine. This law extends to a work ethic in which individuals do their part to support humanity as a whole. Lamennais ultimately associates Christianity with justice and charity, rejecting the popular social values, honor, fidelity, and obedience, as inventions of Satan. In the closing pages of *Paroles d’un croyant*, Lamennais strives to redefine the meaning of “patrie” to include the entire universe. His final revelation

envisions creation as floating within God. The divine is not limited to the Church. Rather, it is all around us. Lamennais' insistence on unity, liberty, charity and sentiment in religion are themes which reverberate throughout the romantic movement.

## Chapter 10: Fallen Angels in Restoration France: The Case for Compassion in *Éloa*, *Ahasvérus* and *Cédar ou la chute d'un ange*

Alfred de Vigny's 1824 poem, *Éloa*; Edgar Quinet's 1833 drama *Ahasvérus*; and Alphonse de Lamartine's 1838 poem *La Chute d'un ange* each depict the fall of an angel who connects with another non-angelic being through the temptation of sentiment. Influenced by the various concept of sentiment as defined by writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mme de Staël, Chateaubriand and Pierre-Simon Ballanche as well as the *Nouveau Christianisme* of Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, a new wave of poets in the 1820s and 1830s dreamed of a God who would be more in touch with the changing needs of humanity and somehow refute an ancient dogma that was increasingly inconsistent with modern realities. For Vigny, Quinet and Lamartine, who all lived through the fall of the Empire and the various phases of the Restoration from Louis XVIII to Louis-Philippe, a lack of human compassion seemed to blame for the misfortunes suffered by various groups of people under the changing regimes. A moral foundation seemed necessary to any sustainable society but modern France was in need of a new more compassionate kind of religion that would go hand in hand with a new more compassionate kind of government. Examining the faults that they perceived in nineteenth century French society, each of these authors chooses to use a biblical setting as the background for reconsidering an individual's connection with the divine and also with society.

In *Éloa*, *Ahasvérus* and *Cédar ou la chute d'un ange*, the figure of the fallen angel allows the authors to critique religious beliefs that have traditionally been held as

God's laws and weigh them against the value of compassion for humankind. Before the fall, all three of these angels might be categorized as guardian angels whose work includes the safeguarding of humanity. The guardian angel in particular "may be seen as an attempt to overcome the remoteness and impersonality of God" (Grosso 128). Through the experience of the fall, the angel has a chance to begin a new existence outside of the heavenly kingdom in cooperation with humanity. Rousseau's Savoyard priest had already taught that without virtue man, "like the angels," would not have the satisfaction of earning his faith (118). In these tales, the angels seek to be like man so that they too can experience the glory of sacrifice. As we will see, God is overwhelmingly depicted as an absent father. In contrast, the figure of the fallen angel in these three works is distinguished by a noble sense of compassion, self-sacrifice and the desire for companionship.

### Éloa

Labeled a "mystère" in the subtitle and introduced by a quote from Genesis<sup>16</sup>, Alfred de Vigny's *Éloa ou la sœur des anges* begins with the birth of the angel on Earth in the time when Jesus, "le Médiateur," "sauvait ses habitants" (23). Vigny's use of the distant past as a setting for the poem is not unique. As we will see in Quinet and Lamartine, the use of the past allows Vigny to situate his poem outside of the realm of modern society. Their choice to confront a mythical past in order to build a better future was a part of a general movement on the part of intellectuals at this time to confront the abandonment of French history after the revolution (Crossley).

Éloa is the product of a tear shed by Jesus for Lazarus, the famous moment in John 11 when "Jesus wept." In Vigny's poem, the Holy Spirit then breathed life into the tear

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<sup>16</sup> "C'est le serpent, dit-elle, je l'ai écouté, et il m'a trompée."

in order to form an angel. She is therefore part human and part holy. The description of Éloa emphasizes this half human and half divine nature. She has a physical body that is draped in angelic clothing, implying that her sensual mortality lurks beneath the surface of a divine beauty that is seemingly perfect. Like Jesus, she is a medium between the divine and the terrestrial. Vigny extends her dual nature to the conflict between her being and her gender: “C’est une femme aussi, c’est une Ange charmante” (25).

The circumstances of Éloa’s birth link her to the origins of Christianity which focused on charity and pity. A return to the origins of Christian belief was a much debated topic in the 1820s and 1830s, especially in the context of supporting the lower classes in an industrial society. Though the liberals under the Restoration were by no means a homogenous group, liberals generally believed in equality as defined by the Declaration of the Rights of Man (Jardin 79). Notable theorists like Saint-Simon and Fourier would extend this theme to the idea of civilizations based on love and compassion for fellow men. Though Vigny may not have been directly associated with these movements, their popularity demonstrates the general intellectual current toward a compassionate society circa 1824 that may have influenced Vigny’s preoccupation with the concept of pity. In his forward to *Journal d’un poète*, Louis Ratisbonne asserts that Vigny’s “muse” was “la pitié.” Ratisbonne considered Éloa to be the incarnation of this muse and adds “et il faut avouer qu’aucun poème ne renferme, sous le vêtement diaphane des chastes vers, un plus bel idéal d’amour et de la pitié” (13). Given the feminine form that Vigny used to express pity, however, how can he reconcile it with his “mâle religion de l’honneur”? Vigny’s journal suggests

that he wanted to make pity an honorable trait, thereby adding masculine power to it. The weak are not those who offer pity but rather those who receive it<sup>17</sup>. Though we may agree with Ratisbonne's interpretation of Éloa as a creature who offers pity, Vigny also portrays her as someone who has made a mistake in a moment of weakness and who could be the object of pity for some higher power. An honorable God might have had mercy on Éloa's feminine weakness for Lucifer. Throughout the 1830s, Vigny's journal shows that he continued to develop the integration of sentiment and honor that he began in *Éloa*. In 1835, he comments "J'aime humanité. J'ai pitié d'elle" (97) and in 1836 his plan for *Daphné* reveals that he sought to "Diviniser la conscience" (107). An entry written shortly thereafter concerning a conversation with fellow romantic author, Adolphe Dittmer, explains: "Dittmer vient me voir. [...] Il pense comme moi que l'honneur est la conscience exaltée, et que c'est la seule religion vivante aujourd'hui dans les cœurs mâles et sincères. Mon opinion porte ses fruits" (107). Éloa is completely driven by her conscience, by an inner power that propels her to act on how she feels rather than acting on what she is expected to do according to the angelic "society." This active aspect of her character is perhaps the "male" aspect, linked to her connection with Jesus and her role as an angel, a being that is typically masculine in the Bible.

Born of Jesus' own struggle between faith in the divine and human emotion, Éloa seems destined to feel pity and spread consolation. Lucifer, as the most miserable of creatures in the universe, is naturally the creature to whom she is most attracted to as a benefactor of the gift of consolation. She gives him consolation perhaps because he

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<sup>17</sup> In an 1824 entry in the *Journal* he writes: "Tous les crimes et les vices viennent de faiblesse. Ils ne méritent donc que la pitié!" (32).

needs it the most. Éloa is above all a feeling being. One of the worst parts about Lucifer's damnation is that he becomes an unfeeling being, unable to experience joy or sorrow. *Éloa's* Satan is in the Old Testament tradition in which Satan "has no private reasons for tempting man, nor special joy in causing his fall" (Jung 25). Satan is essentially still living in an Old Testament world where pity does not affect celestial law and consolation is not God's mission. As a being who was created from Jesus' compassion, Éloa enters Satan's realm as a representative of Christian principles. Just as Jesus offered charity to social outcasts, Éloa too feels pity rather than disdain when she hears of Lucifer's story.

Et l'on crut qu'Éloa le maudirait; mais non,  
L'effroi n'altéra point son paisible visage,  
Et ce fut pour le Ciel un alarmant présage.  
Son premier mouvement ne fut pas de frémir,  
Mais plutôt d'approcher comme pour secourir;  
La tristesse apparut sur la lèvre glacée  
Aussitôt qu'un malheur s'offrit à sa pensée ;  
Elle apprit à rêver, et son front innocent  
De ce trouble inconnu rougit en s'abaissant ;  
Une larme brillait auprès de sa paupière.  
Heureux ceux dont le cœur verse ainsi la première ! (27)

Lucifer's role as tempter, however, is to inspire desire in others primarily through manipulating their emotions through reveries. Éloa first experiences temptation as an awareness of a desire that is foreign to the heavenly environment. Like a poet affected by ennui, she loses the ability to be moved by pleasures appealing to the senses such as perfume, spices and even music "car rien n'y répondait à son âme attendrie" (27). Paradise is described as a land of beautiful structure, not unlike the classical aesthetic of the *Ancien Régime*. Éloa, when faced with the choice to conform to this restrictive perfection or float freely in search of something new, chooses individual freedom

over conformity. The angel ventures out of the heavens hoping to become a consolation to others and indeed her closeness to Earth is described as having a healing power on the world that is capable of reversing human misery. Vigny emphasizes the fact that Éloa is unique in her willingness to approach the boundaries of heaven: “Jamais les purs Esprits, enfants de la lumière,/ De ces trois régions n’atteignent la dernière./ Et jamais ne s’égare aucun beau Séraphin/ Sur ces degrés confus dont l’Enfer est la fin.” The majority of the angels specifically fear the possibility of disobeying God by having pity on Satan : “Et même en lui prêtant une oreille attendrie,/ Il (an angel) pourrait oublier la céleste patrie...[...]/ Voilà pourquoi, toujours prudents et toujours sages,/ Les Anges de ces lieux redoutent les passages” (30).

Éloa is distinguished by an unusual willingness to risk her own salvation, reminding us of Vigny’s preoccupation with the magnanimity of self-sacrifice. In Vigny’s *Journal d’un poète*, the plans for several works include the continual reworking of the idea that man is greater than God in the sense that he is capable of sacrificing his life for a principle (*Journal* 165, 250). Although Éloa’s motivation is chiefly described as curiosity (perhaps reflecting the nineteenth century spirit of experimentation), she does end up having an effect on the worlds she approaches and is surprised to learn that she has power over mortals. Her presence has a positive effect:

S’il arrivait aussi qu’en ses routes nouvelles  
 Elle touchât l’un d’eux des plumes de ses ailes,  
 Alors tous les chagrins s’y taisaient un moment,  
 Les rivaux s’embrassaient avec étonnement ;  
 Tous les poignards tombaient oubliés par la haine ;  
 Le captif souriant marchait seul et sans chaîne ;  
 Le criminel rentrait au temple de la loi ;

Le proscrit s'asseyait au palais de son Roi ;  
L'inquiète Insomnie abandonnait sa proie ;  
Les pleurs cessaient partout, hors les pleurs de la joie ;  
Et surpris d'un bonheur rare chez les mortels,  
Les amants séparés s'unissaient aux autels. (31)

As the angel moves farther and farther out into unknown realms of the universe, it seems to her that there is more to the universe than the heavens she knows: “Telle, au fond du Chaos qu’observaient ses beaux yeux,/ La vierge, en se penchant, croyait voir d’autres Cieux” (32). In her solitude, she contemplates these strange new places and finds them to be harmonious. It is in this moment of contemplation that Lucifer appears to “la Vierge Éloa.” Lucifer’s temptation is above all an emotional seduction that takes advantage of the virgin’s excess of sentiment which leaves her vulnerable to dreamy idealism. Describing himself, Lucifer remarks: “Je suis celui qu’on aime et qu’on ne connaît pas” (35). His very being is a recipe for ennui in that he defines himself as the essence of unfulfilled longing. Although he admits that his temptations are made of illusion, the demon sees his role as that of a “consolateur” who charms people into forgetting their real world troubles (38). Between Satan and Éloa, then, Vigny describes two kinds of consolation. There is the consolation produced by Éloa, emanating from her sentimental power of compassion and made possible through sacrifice. Satan’s escapist diversions console man not through the spirit but through the imagination. Éloa’s form of consolation might be seen as occurring thanks to a closer rapport with humanity and universal truths while Satan consoles man temporarily by separating him from unpleasant truths.

According to the text, Éloa's sin begins when she allows her initial feelings of pity for the fallen angel to be eclipsed by feelings of desire which are chiefly motivated by the pride resulting from flattery. Her weakness is tied to her femininity. At the beginning of the last section of the poem, *La chute*, "Pudeur" is considered the first step toward evil. Vigny depicts *Pudeur* as a product of the fall from Eden, a replacement for true Innocence. Innocence was something personal that came from within whereas *pudeur* was a rule enforced by God. Her true sin in this moment is not her association with Satan but rather the fact that she gives up her natural internal innocence and replaces it with the art of modesty :

D'où venez-vous, Pudeur, noble crainte, ô Mystère  
Qu'au temps de son enfance a vu naître la terre,  
[...]  
Au charme des vertus votre charme est égal,  
Mais vous êtes aussi le premier pas du mal ;  
D'un chaste vêtement votre sein se décore,  
Ève avant le serpent n'en avait pas encore ;  
Et si le voile pur orne votre maintien,  
C'est un voile toujours, et le crime a le sien ;  
Tout vous trouble, un regard blesse votre paupière,  
Mais l'enfant ne craint rien et cherche la lumière.  
Sous ce pouvoir nouveau, la Vierge fléchissait,  
Elle tombait déjà, car elle rougissait ; (38)

Another key factor in the Angel's fall is that she falls willingly. In the above passage it is clear that Éloa acts as an individual relying on her own senses rather than on dogma for guidance. Knowing that she is going against God's will, she proclaims to Lucifer "Je suis à toi" (38). Éloa's act of defiance might also be seen as a protest against God's unwillingness to forgive Lucifer. God's kingdom is an absolute monarchy and God's lack of pity on his subjects suggests a sort of spiritual tyranny. As Maurice Descotes points out, Vigny was especially troubled by the tyranny he

recognized in Napoléon's reign despite his obsession with military glory. Vigny's disappointment in the fall of the Empire he fervently supported as a young man caused him to reevaluate his idol (Descotes 137). Though Vigny would not develop Napoleon as a personage in fiction until *Servitude et grandeur militaires* (1835), *Éloa* develops the theme that a hero is someone who has compassion. Discussing Vigny's reconsideration of Napoléon, Descotes explains: "Le tyran est insensible à la pitié – cette vertu si chère à Vigny. [...] Qui n'a pas de coeur reste insensible au code de l'honneur – autre thème de prédilection de Vigny" (139).

Lucifer (who has already established himself as the unknowable ideal) proclaims that *Éloa* is his ideal: "Toi seule me parus ce qu'on cherche toujours... Il me fut révélé que je pouvais aimer" (39). Lucifer adds that he feels her presence in nature (his own accomplice in illusion inflicted on others) and proceeds to compare her to God. *Éloa* does not recoil but is instead seduced by flattery. Tainted by "pudeur," she blushes, contemplates her "immortel amant" with pride and proceeds to lift her veil.

Furthermore, *Éloa* confuses beauty and goodness.

Puisque vous êtes beau, vous êtes bon, sans doute;  
Car sitôt que des Cieux une âme prend la route,  
Comme un saint vêtement, nous voyons sa bonté  
Lui donner en entrant l'éternelle beauté. (41)

Near the end of the poem, Lucifer expresses his own vulnerability as he mourns the memory of his angelic existence which is now impossible to regain. In particular, he implies that the ability to sympathize with humans might save him:

Le Tentateur lui-même était Presque charmé,  
Il avait oublié son art et sa victime,  
Et son cœur un moment se reposa du crime.  
Il répétait tout bas, et le front dans ses mains:  
"Si je vous connaissais, ô larmes des humains!" (43)

Lucifer nearly repents and the text asserts that he might have been saved if only Éloa would have heard him. Does she not hear him because modesty has separated her from her natural instincts? In any case, the moment is too brief and Lucifer returns to his artful ways which continue to contrast directly with the natural spontaneity of sincere emotion. Éloa finally agrees in the last stanzas to “exile” herself from heaven in order to follow her lover. It is only after she completely gives herself to him that Lucifer shows his true face as Satan. Still, her last concern is if she makes him happy. She remains above all the consoler, even if her efforts are in vain.

In Vigny’s unfinished sequel to *Éloa*, entitled *Satan sauvé*, Éloa and Satan experience the end of the world as a happy moment because it releases Satan from Hell.

According to God, Satan’s ability to feel love for Éloa allows him to enter heaven:

“Tu as été punis pendant le temps; tu as assez souffert, puisque tu fus l’ange du mal.

Tu as aimé une fois: entre dans mon éternité. Le mal n’existe plus” (*Journal* 260).

Despite the hopelessness felt at the end of *Éloa*, then, Vigny did imagine that sentiment might be sacred in some alternate version of Christianity existing outside of the boundaries of time. As we will see in *Ahasvérus*, to a generation who saw multiple regimes and ideologies swept away in time, the challenge was to find something enduring on which to build a new society. In an 1833 journal entry, Vigny concurs:

Plus je vais, plus je m’aperçois que la seule chose essentielle pour les hommes, c’est de *tuer le temps*. Dans cette vie dont nous chantons la brièveté sur tous les tons, notre plus grand ennemi, c’est le *temps*, don’t nous avons toujours trop. A peine avons-nous un Bonheur, ou l’*amour*, ou la *gloire*, ou la science, ou l’émotion d’un spectacle, ou celle de la lecture, qu’il nous

faut passer à un autre. Car *que faire?* C'est là le grand mot.  
(74)

Vigny envisioned his religion of honor to be one in which God would not fade away with a changing regime but would remain present in man through his conscience: "La religion de l'honneur a son dieu toujours présent dans notre cœur" (93).

### **Rachel in *Ahasvérus***

Edgar Quinet's *Ahasvérus* likewise highlights the lack of pity and consolation in modern Christianity. Ahasvérus travels the world for centuries as the Wandering Jew, seeking to repent to a God he cannot find. Quinet, like Vigny, shows God to be absent and through God's conspicuous absence the characters inevitably cultivate doubt. Moreover, as a historian Quinet uses the passage of time to emphasize the idea that no one regime can remain in power forever. Time drives humanity toward renewal and regrowth. All symbols and ideologies are subject to it. Reading *Ahasvérus*, it is difficult not to think of Jouffroy's 1825 *Comment les dogmes finissent* as Quinet narrates the fall of regimes and cults through the ages. Ahasvérus' world is one of pitiless evolution. The one being who offers pity to Ahasvérus is Rachel, an archangel. The tear she sheds for Ahasvérus, however, causes her fall. Thus, we are reminded of de Maistre's unjust and unfeeling God whose kingdom is more of a pitiless bureaucracy than a compassionate human family. Rachel's role in *Ahasvérus* is to bring pity and consolation through her companionship and, as Simone Bernard-Griffiths points out, to transform pointless wandering into a pilgrimage (100).

In his *Histoire de mes idées*, Quinet describes himself as feeling like a lone wanderer after the fall of the Empire left him without an emotional link to society:

Quelle fatale découverte pour moi! Je compris que je marchais seul. Quelque chose s'était brisé entre le peuple et moi. J'entrai dans la jeunesse en rompant avec les masses et cette communauté primitive de sentiments populaires qui avait fait la force de mes premières années. Était-ce la faute des masses? Était-ce la mienne? Et qu'importe? il est certain qu'il avait fallu se séparer pour avancer. (140)

This sense of separation is ironically the very thing that Quinet finally recognizes as a part of a common experience shared with his countrymen. Just as in the case of Ahasvérus, the youth of the Restoration required a separation and an individualized internal journey to come to grips with the Empire's fall. Nevertheless, the common experience of human nature brings society back together:

Combien de fois faudra-t-il rompre ainsi avec ses propres racines ? Je sentis que la voie serait douloureuse.  
J'ai insisté sur cette histoire intérieure, parce qu'il me semble que beaucoup de nos contemporains y retrouveront la leur. Je ne comprends guère le plaisir de répéter à satiété :  
« Voyez ! admirez ! je suis le seul de mon espèce ! »  
Au contraire, mon vrai bonheur, ma force est de retrouver en moi à chaque pas la bonne vieille nature humaine.  
(*Histoire* 141)

By joining with Ahasvérus to become the new Adam and Eve in a rebirth of humanity, Rachel is this glimmer of hope that some compassionate link remains among people after their institutions and ideologies have fallen away.

The prologue to *Ahasvérus* establishes the drama as a *mystère* produced by God to explain the story of the universe with which he became disillusioned. In the case of Ahasvérus, it is God who is afflicted with the desire for the ideal. His own creation becomes his victim in the quest for perfection. The epic is introduced as a “spectacle”

ordered by God to illustrate the 6,000 years of Earth's existence. Quinet's premise, like Vigny's, allows the author to create his own fictionalized past regarding the origins of man in a time when political and religious debates centered on the future of humanity. Speaking to a group of Catholic saints, *Le Père Éternel* explains in the *Prologue*:

C'est une longue histoire qui m'opprime moi-même. Mes Séraphins vont célébrer devant vous ce terrible mystère... Venez, troupe d'élus, comme l'herbe fauchée, vous entasser autour de moi ; penchez-vous sans rien craindre chacun sur vos nuages, regardez dans l'abîme et soyez attentifs ; le spectacle va durer approchant six mille ans. (5)

From the prologue, *Ahasvérus* is set in a universe in which God's detachment from his creation is such that human suffering is a source of entertainment. No pity or consolation is offered directly by God for the sufferings of mankind.

*L'Ange Rachel* first appears as an angel of consolation at the birth of Christ. She is playing a viola with three "silver cords." She explains to the Christ Child that "la première est pour lui dans la nue," "la seconde est pour votre mère sous son voile" and "la troisième est pour vous chanter un Noël dans votre crèche" (58). The chief purpose of Rachel's visit, however, is to make the child stop crying. She implores him to dream instead, encouraging illusion as a form of consolation: "rêvez doucement que votre étable est une nef toute d'or" (58).

Whereas in Vigny's *Éloa* it is Satan who creates illusion as consolation, Quinet shows illusion to be the work of an angel. Rachel's consolation is necessary because God is already the absent father. The Christ Child does not see his heavenly father. Turning to the Virgin Mary, he inquires: "Ma mère, êtes-vous seule? Où est donc allé mon père? Je ne l'ai encore jamais vu" (61).

Given Ahasvérus' role as an inverted double of Christ, Rachel's pity for Ahasvérus seems inevitable but pity (though presumably a Christian value) is transformed into blasphemy when the object of pity is one who is cursed by God. In pitying Ahasvérus and forgetting Christ for a moment, Rachel doubts the absolute authority of God. Her pity on the judged is a critique of God's judgment. Rachel's choice to follow her sentiment rather than coldly follow the rules of the heavens is a moment of truth. For Quinet, truth is "le seul bien desirable" (Histoire 132). Having experienced his own fall from what he describes as "ma religion pour Napoléon," Quinet understood the growing pains involved in an individual's shift from idolatry to reason. In his *Histoire de mes idées*, he describes himself as a young man under the Restoration struggling to come to terms with his growing liberal sympathies:

D'abord, je ne voulus rien céder de mon héros. Ce qu'il avait fait, il avait dû faire; je niais, je m'obstinais; tout ce que l'on racontait n'était qu'inventions de *chouans*. Cependant, même en débattant, je recevais l'impression des choses. Pour la première fois, je sentis un violent combat intérieur, lorsque, pressé par des autorités que ma raison reconnaissaient, je dus me poser cette question: comment concilier ma religion pour Napoléon avec ce ferment d'idées libérales qui m'arrivaient de tous côtés, et que j'étais bien décidé à ne pas abandonner? (138)

Rachel's character experiences a comparable interior struggle. While still espousing Christian rhetoric, the fallen angel is no longer internally in touch with God. She has replaced God with Ahasvérus. In the scene where she is attempting to pray for example, her mental concentration on prayer cannot change what she feels in her heart: "Oh! Cela est sûr. Je suis trop distraite à présent. Il n'y a que mes lèvres qui prient, mais mon esprit est ailleurs. Ma bouche prononce des mots; mon cœur en dit d'autres. Cela ne peut pas durer ainsi" (180).

Rachel's punishment shows that there is little room for individualized thoughts or feelings in Christianity. An angel, being a messenger of and attendant to God, only exists to express his will. Furthermore, though Christianity is touted as the religion of pity, Quinet creates a world where very little pity is expressed by the Christian God for humans, thereby emphasizing the lack of pity for humanity in Christian society. Whereas Éloa seemed to gain her penchant for compassion from Jesus, the Jesus in *Ahasvérus* becomes just as unfeeling and vengeful as the Old Testament God. He also becomes nearly as elusive. When Christ curses Ahasvérus, he explains: "Toi, tu n'auras plus ni siège, ni sommeil. C'est toi qui ira me demander de temple en temple, sans jamais me rencontrer" (91). Ahasvérus' mission to constantly search for the Christ he never encounters is not unlike the fate of any man who strives to believe in a religion that offers no positive proof of its legitimacy: one is bound to lose faith. Quinet believed that France's regime changes were steps in a process of enlightenment through which humanity would ultimately achieve unity through reason (Crossley 155). Ahasvérus' journey is a comparable process. The love he receives from the fallen angel Rachel is the beginning of the end of this journey. As Charles Magnin explains in his 1833 article in response to *Ahasvérus*:

... si Rachel déchue n'est plus la foi céleste, elle est sur la terre l'amour idéal, la foi éternelle, le complément d'Ahasvérus. Ceci n'est pas seulement la vie ; il est la matière, le doute, la douleur ; Rachel est l'espoir qui console, l'amour qui guérit : il fallait ces deux éléments pour compléter l'humanité ; Rachel est une âme d'ange exilée dans un corps de femme ; c'est un de ces êtres tombés tout exprès d'en haut pour la réhabilitation de l'homme ; une essence presque divine, qui doit passer par l'amour humain avant de remonter à son premier séjour. (XL)

The details surrounding the exact moment of Rachel's fall are left unexplained. After the fall, Rachel has become a servant to Mob, an old woman who personifies the angel of death. Rachel's moment of doubt has permanently exiled her from heaven. According to Mob, this transformation goes hand in hand with the intellectual and spiritual changes that accompany the fall. She reveals to Rachel that there is no point in praying because it is not only her wings that she has lost: "ton cœur aussi n'est plus ce qu'il était" (148). Mob views Rachel's exit from heaven as a shift from fantasy to reality. "Tu ne rentreras plus dans ce monde des rêves. [...] La vie réelle, ma chère, est un peu différente de ces fantaisies de jeune fille" (147). Rachel has exited the aloof world of the heavens and joined humanity on earth. Mob also reveals that Rachel is now a woman and subject to human emotions linked to the flesh: "Tu es femme, et ton sein tremble comme le sein des femmes" (148). Rachel has thus exited the idealistic Christianity of the Church and joined the people.

Mob's prediction foreshadows a love relationship that blooms between Rachel and Ahasvérus who she does not recognize and who introduces himself as "Joseph." The cultivation of a love relationship in the context of a critique on religions allows Quinet to add the cult of romantic love to his list of unsustainable religions.

Ahasvérus' divinisation of Rachel is not unlike the mystical rhetoric of romantic literature that often combined religious imagery with passion love themes. Ahasvérus, for example, refers to Rachel on numerous occasions as "mon ange," a term which she rejects. In fact, shortly after entering into the romantic pursuit of Rachel, Ahasvérus becomes a caricature of the romantic poet. The Wandering Jew reveals to Mob that he has tried poetry as a means for curing the empty feeling in his soul (188-

9). Mob enthusiastically approves this pastime of beautiful illusions but Ahasvérus responds that he is in search of something “more real” (189). Achieving a solid sense of reality – discovering Truth – becomes the goal of the wanderer’s quest. In his *Histoire de mes idées*, Quinet reveals that the pursuit of truth was also his personal life quest. For Quinet, truth was the ultimate possession: “La vérité m’a toujours paru le seul bien desirable” (*Histoire* 132). Quinet’s personal experience living through multiple regime changes in France influenced his thinking from an early age but he also highlights love as being one of the necessary disillusionments in life.

Comment finirent de si belles amours? Elles ne pouvaient augmenter ; elles ne devaient pas finir ; elles m’accompagnèrent dans les deux premières années d’un apprentissage douloureux de la vie ; elles semèrent sous mes pas des fleurs mêlées de larmes. Aujourd’hui quand je me représente notre doux, ineffable printemps de Certines, avec son parfum de mauves et de seigles en fleurs, je vois encore errante au fond de quelque taillis, comme le bon génie du lieu, cette figure bocagère qui sourit et qui passe. (128)

Having lived through so many disappointments, Ahasvérus concludes that what he needs, what he is now searching for, is a new religion (195). Mob suggests love as this new religion: “Si, à toute force, il vous faut une religion, l’amour, quand il est pur, en est une à sa façon” (196). Later, in the “Intermède de la troisième journée,” Quinet even adds dialogue between a poet and a Greek-style chorus on the topic of love. The poet affirms romantic clichés on eternal love that echo Ahasvérus relationship with Rachel : “Éternellement nous nous chercherons à l’endroit où tout renaît, sans jamais nous reconnaître” (260).

Rachel’s inability to remember the circumstances surrounding her fall is the source of various misunderstandings throughout the drama. The fallen angel’s separation from

her past recalls the post-Revolution estrangement from France's past. Rachel remembers that she was an angel and remembers bits and pieces of her life in heaven, such as songs that the angels used to sing. She does not however grasp the gravity of her offense and is unaware that God has essentially abandoned her on Earth. In the absence of God on Earth, Rachel must rely on faith as her guide. As a beacon of faith, she is incapable of criticizing God. Ahasvérus, in contrast, remains hyper aware of his punishment. Furthermore, Rachel realizes that she and her lover are inseparable but is too naïve to see that it is because of God's curse on them and not his blessing that they must be together. Rachel recognizes Ahasvérus as her savior while, ironically, he is the reason for her fall: "Qu'étais-je sans lui? Avant lui? Dis-moi. Le ciel, je le regardais sans amour, et la terre sans désir... À présent, au contraire, je prie avec délice pour lui; il y a des moments, pendant que l'orgue joue, où c'est le ciel qui m'entourne" (208). Clearly, Rachel sees Ahasvérus as someone who brings her closer to God. More specifically, her concern and devotion for another is something she believes is holy. Rachel has faith in her conscience believing that it is in tune with God. Rachel's blind faith (in both her lover and her God) causes her to grossly misinterpret Ahasvérus' behavior toward Christ as devotional passion rather than see it as the frustrated anguish it really is. She eventually reveals that her love for Ahasvérus is greater than her love for God. Ahasvérus has replaced God in her heart. Rachel shows to what extent humans create their faith based on feeling. Logic never determines her beliefs. Nevertheless, the development of internal connections to the conscience is the eventual path to reason. Despite all of the intellectual

misunderstandings she suffers along the way, the compassion she offers is not misplaced and is justified by the couple's union in the end.

In the last part of the mystery, *la Quatrième journée*, the reality of religion begins to unravel. The people Ahasvérus meets along the way now no longer believe in gods but rather in nothingness, *le néant*. The ocean has been abandoned by humanity since their kings have fallen. In scene VII, Rachel offers to sacrifice everything – even her belief in God and Christ – to live peacefully for eternity with Ahasvérus (who she still refers to as “Joseph”) in a deserted valley (323). She understands, however, that even Ahasvérus' love for her has passed in time. Ahasvérus is still haunted by unknown desires proclaiming:

Le mal ne vient pas de moi, sois-en sûr; mais, ici, je ne peux pas guérir. Quand je suis le plus à toi, et que je sens mon cœur respirer dans ton cœur, c'est précisément alors que mes oreilles tintent, et qu'il y a une voix qui me crie: Plus loin! plus loin! va-t'en jusqu'à ma mer d'amour... C'est là la maladie de mon âme... et, quand je te presse sur mon sein, mon sein me dit: Pourquoi n'est-ce pas la vierge infinie qui demeure au ciel?  
(324-5)

Like the nineteenth century *poète maudit*, Ahasvérus' true curse is thus revealed to be an obsession with the *beau idéal* that makes him unable to enjoy earthly realities or live in the moment. Ahasvérus concludes that it must be divine love that he is searching for and proposes a double suicide. Rachel argues that he should follow Christ with her and that he will never want for anything again. Ahasvérus' desperation for an absence of desire becomes his motivation to finally find Christ. Towards the end of the judgment day, after Ahasvérus has been shunned by Rome, Babylon, Athens and even the mountain, the forest and the rivers, the wanderer briefly rejoins his family among the dead. His brother Joel notices Rachel and

recognizes her role in the life of any man: “Une femme vous suit, comme un esprit suit pas à pas chaque homme dans sa vie” (370). As the couple travels on, Rachel encourages Ahasvérus to look up in the sky where she sees angels who take pity on them (371). Ahasvérus, however, only sees traces of the suffering Christ. Where Rachel sees the divine ideal, Ahasvérus sees only mortal suffering in the form of Christ. Still, Rachel’s value as a companion is one of the few things that endure at the end of the drama. Ahasvérus and Rachel are the beginning of something new after the fall of all of the universe’s religions and institutions. Though the details of this new direction are not explained in the text, it is clear that no one man can create the future alone. Rachel is the second Eve just as Ahasvérus is the second Adam. She balances the universe (personified in the story) who concludes that: “Une femme m’a perdu, une femme m’a sauvé” (379). In Ahasvérus’ new voyage, which he takes on willingly “au bout de l’infini et à des cieux meilleurs,” Christ proclaims Rachel to be “L’ange qui t’accompagne et ne te quitte pas” (380). Ahasvérus’ enduring gift from heaven is companionship born of compassion.

Despite the ephemeral nature of institutions and ideologies, Ahasvérus and Rachel show some glimmer of hope as the only survivors in a tabula rasa universe. Rachel and Ahasvérus conquered their individualism and became proactive in the future of society. In the 1820s, Quinet too dreamed of conquering his own solitude while helping to heal France.

La France allait renaître, je n’en pouvais douter. Et qui nous empêchait de servir à cette renaissance ? Pourquoi, moi aussi, n’y porterais-je pas mon grain de sable ? A peine cette idée m’avait-elle apparu, je me sentais transformé. Quelle force pour tout endurer ! quel aiguillon ! Dans ces instants, je me croyais et j’étais vraiment capable de quelque chose. Je voyais

comme accompli ce que je désirais avec tant de ferveur.  
(*Histoire* 179)

### Cédar

Lamartine's 1838 *La Chute d'un Ange*, like *Éloa* and *Ahasvérus*, is structured as a sort of sacred literature. The *Récit* preceding the story establishes the tale as a series of "visions" experienced by a prophet. Lamartine seems to view the fall as a process, as a challenge orchestrated by God and necessary to the angel's spiritual growth. In his *Avertissement*, Lamartine explains that the poet, presumably like the angel cannot simply pass his time in a divine stupor ignoring the reality of the world around him.

In modern times, there must be a blending of art and life:

Je porte envie à ces natures contemplatives à qui Dieu n'a donné que des ailes, et qui peuvent planer toujours dans des régions éthérées, portées sur leurs rêves immortels, sans ressentir le contre-coup des choses d'ici-bas, qui tremblent sous nos pieds. Ce ne sont plus là des hommes, ce sont des êtres privilégiés qui n'ont de l'humanité que les sens qui jouissent, qui chantent ou qui prient: ce sont les solitaires ascétiques de la pensée. Gloire, paix et bonheur à eux! Mais ces natures ont-elles bien leur place dans notre temps? l'époque n'est-elle pas essentiellement laborieuse? Tout le monde n'a-t-il pas besoin de tout le monde? Ne s'opère-t-il pas une triple transformation dans le monde des idées, dans le monde de la politique, dans le monde de l'art? (4-5)

Lamartine's language in the above passage clearly likens aloof artists to those angels who remain disconnected from Earth and show no pity on humanity. The fallen angel is special because he noticed the suffering outside of heaven, he felt compassion and he sacrificed himself for another. Just as Mme de Staël had proposed in her *De la littérature*, for Lamartine, the time has come for a religion that is with the people rather than being above the people.

Lamartine envisions that various social roles were previously in harmony with each other in the idealized past of *les anciens* and should be again:

Philosophes, politiques, poètes, citoyens, tous vivaient du même aliment; et de cette nourriture plus substantielle et plus forte se formaient ces grands génies et ces grands caractères, qui touchaient d'une main à l'idée, de l'autre à l'action, et qui ne se dégradèrent point en s'inclinant vers d'humbles devoirs. (6)

Despite being cursed by God, the fallen angel in Lamartine, then, is actually a positive role model for man since he falls from his divine but indulgently aloof state of grace in order to come to the aid of another being. In order to avoid falling into another tyrannical political regime like the Empire, sentiment was a necessary foundation. For Lamartine, Napoléon's reign oppressed compassion in favor of exact sciences resulting in the demoralization of the nation (Descotes 118-28). His correspondence in the 1830s traces his disillusion with the restoration government as well. In an 1834 letter to le comte de Virieu, Lamartine confirms "Ma devise est conscience du pays" (39). The fictionalized biblical setting allows Lamartine to introduce compassion as a founding principle of ancient religion that was lost in the course of time and that should be reincorporated into the rebirth of society.

In the *Avertissement* to his second edition, Lamartine responds to religious critics who have accused him of pantheism and atheism. In doing so, he reveals his own philosophies on religion that are not strictly in line with traditional Christian thought. In particular, Lamartine outlines a monotheistic belief system in which man possesses "liberté morale." God would communicate with man not through clergy or the Bible but rather through his own conscience: "Je crois à la liberté morale de l'homme, mystérieux phénomène dont Dieu seul a le secret, mais dont la conscience est le

témoin, et dont la vertu est l'évidence" (13). The author goes on to explain that he believes in humanity "comme être collectif" and furthermore that man is in a process of gradual spiritual perfection and the creation of a new kind of religion, "ce grand mouvement organique de l'homme vers une connaissance plus compétente de son Créateur et vers un culte plus spiritualisé" (13). Above all, Lamartine's second *Avertissement* proposes that only a balance between faith and reason will produce truth. He shows faith and reason to be dependent on one another, ideally keeping each other in check to create a balanced society: "vouloir que la raison soit religieuse et que la religion soit rationnelle, est-ce là attaquer le christianisme, ou n'est-ce pas plutôt lui préparer un règne plus unanime et plus absolu?" (18).

The first lines of the poem's "Première vision" establish God's role as that of "le souverain Juge," reminiscent of the judging God championed by the ultramontanes (43). Cédar's God, like the Gods in *Éloa* and *Ahasvérus*, is unfeeling in the tradition of the Old Testament but also reminiscent of a monarch who is out of touch with his people. The choice to portray God as a judge rather than as a protector immediately removes him from the sentimental sphere. A judge makes decisions based on the law and cannot be swayed by compassion or pity. In contrast, the angels' most distinguishing emotion is pity – the only emotion that they share with their human "brothers."

De ces esprits divins dont sont peuplés les cieux,  
Les anges étaient ceux qui nous aimaient le mieux.  
Créés du même jour, enfants du même père,  
Que l'homme en les nommant peut appeler mon frère ;  
Mais frères plus heureux dont la sainte amitié  
De tous nos sentiments n'a pris que la pitié ; (47)

The angels here, like in *Éloa*, are described as travelling in groups and their primary activity is to praise God (54). Cédar, again like Éloa, wanders from the angel group to pursue an interest that is unrelated to God. Cédar believes that heaven is not a place in the sky but rather the state of sentiment caused by contact with his beloved: “Il n’est plus pour mes yeux de ciel où tu n’es pas!” (57).

Lamartine’s Cédar is perhaps the fallen angel with the most freedom of choice in his fall compared to Éloa and Rachel. While the female angels trespass against God almost accidentally by being carried away in an emotional moment, Cédar’s fall might be judged as more “pre-meditated” in legal terms. Cédar, unlike the other two angels, explicitly wishes to become mortal (58). He consciously chooses a physical existence (in which the individual must bond with another individual through love to become whole) over a purely spiritual existence (in which the being is automatically whole without need for love or attachment to others besides God). Choosing a physical existence is choosing to join humanity :

Mais aimer, être aimé, d’un mutual retour!  
Ah ! l’ange ne sait pas ce que c’est que l’amour !  
Être unique et parfait qui suffit à soi-même,  
Non, il ne connaît pas la volupté suprême  
De chercher dans un autre un but autre que lui,  
Et de ne vivre entier qu’en vivant en autrui ! (58)

The angel goes on to describe the heavens as “mon ciel solitaire,” emphasizing the loneliness caused by the inability to feel and the separation from humanity that would make him whole. In *Éloa*, as we mentioned earlier, the inability to feel is the same problem plaguing Lucifer *after* his fall. It is interesting that Lamartine’s Cédar expresses the same frustration in heaven that Vigny’s Satan feels in Hell. In Cédar’s

case, there is no mention of God's love being returned to the angels. Even in heaven, God does not seem to be accessible.

At the actual moment of Cédar's fall, the innocent Daïdha receives no sign of aid from God. God, as usual, is absent. Cédar therefore takes on the role of protector that would be carried out by the heavenly "father" if he were indeed using his power for the good of humanity. God's absence in Daïdha's time of need is in large part what forces Cédar to sacrifice himself. Here, Cédar demonstrates a "courage of conscience" that Lamartine wished to see integrated into French society. In an 1835 letter, he explains: "Le courage de conscience est ce qui manqué le plus en ce triste et beau pays. On brave une batterie de canons, mais on meurt devant une raillerie de journal" (86). Lamartine supports following one's conscience against the tide of popular opinion but the unforgiving laws of heaven do not recognize the authority of the conscience. The pitiless heavens explain to Cédar as he falls that an irreversible judgment has been passed:

Il avait dans son âme entendu retentir  
Ce cri : « L'arrêt divin n'a point de repentir  
Tombe, tombe à jamais, créature éclipsée !  
Périsse ta splendeur jusque dans ta pensée !  
Savoure jusqu'au sang le bonheur des humains ;  
Tu déchires ta gloire avec tes propres mains ;  
Ta vie au fond du cœur n'aura pas l'espérance ;  
Tu n'auras pas comme eux la mort pour délivrance ;  
Au lieu d'une ici-bas tu subiras cent morts ;  
Dieu te rendra ta vie et la terre ton corps,  
Tant que tu n'auras pas racheté goutte à goutte  
Cette immortalité qu'une femme te coûte ! » (75)

Repentance is explicitly out of the question. Moreover, the first effect of his new mortal status is that the fallen angel forgets his divine origins, including the

circumstances of his fall. Like Rachel in *Ahasvérus*, Cédar is cursed without knowing why and so he could not repent even if repentance were an option.

Truth, in Lamarine's "liberté morale," is not established by laws but by conscience. The conscience is regulated internally by sentiment, not externally by laws imposed by a higher power. According to the poem, the tribal laws (in the primitive times in which the story is set) are based on instinct and the poet implies that these instincts are close to the divine truth : "Les lois n'étaient alors que ces instincts sublimes" (82).

Women are shown to possess more of this instinct than men. When the men want to follow man-made laws and kill Cédar because he is a stranger, the women instinctually know that this would be wrong and that God would punish them for killing (86). Cédar in an ultimate sacrifice allows himself to be chained and turned into a slave because he loves Daïdha (89-90). Unlike God, the fallen angel proves his love through actions by continually coming to Daïdha's aid and making sacrifices for her. The couple's decision to stay together despite the laws of Daïdha's tribe also show that the lovers, through their sentiment for each other, rightfully reject man-made laws that conflict with an inner truth that they instinctively know is right. Based on feeling, the couple decides that their love is sacred. Daïdha proclaims "Nous irons nous aimer dans le ciel des amants!" and Cédar finds paradise uniquely in his lover : "Cheveux de Daïdha, soyez mes seules plantes !/ De mon terrestre Éden vous ombragez la fleur !" (137-9).

Lamartine further uses sentiment as a way of approaching truth through his insistence on the superiority of nonverbal language between lovers. Throughout the poem he continually insists on the couple's ability to communicate without words, "un muet

language” that is implied to be more pure than human language which has been tainted by exterior influences. Cédar, who is naturally capable of communicating nonverbally with Daïdha (by making his presence known as her ideal even before the fall, for example), must be taught to speak human language which is described as somewhat vulgar in comparison to heavenly language. True communication is achieved through feeling rather than through words. The idea that human language is imperfect was certainly not new. Ballanche had already used the argument for the divine origins of language as the basis for his argument supporting society as a divine institution<sup>18</sup>. The inability to express emotions through words is a common theme in romantic literature, implying that sentiment is actually the original divine language. A similar idea can be found in the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg whose works were well-known in 1830s France. Writing on angels, Swedenborg explains :

In the other life, especially in the heavens, all thought and hence all speech are carried on in an impersonal sense, and therefore thought and speech there are universal, and are relatively without limit; for so far as thought and speech are associated with persons and their specific qualities, and with names, and also words, so far they become less universal, and are associated with the actual thing, and there abide. On the other hand in so far as they are not associated with persons and what is connected with them, but with realities abstracted from them, so far they are dissociated from the actual thing, and are extended beyond themselves, and the mental view becomes higher and consequently more universal. (104)

Lamartine seems to agree with Swedenborg that communication through words separates people whereas a more internal communication through mutual compassion brings them together. The beginning of the end for Cédar and Daïdha is the loss of

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<sup>18</sup> See *La Théorie du langage de Pierre-Simon Ballanche* by Alan J. L. Busst.

their ability to communicate nonverbally. Miscommunication weakens the bond with the other and creates doubt. Doubt is, in the end, what dooms the couple to failure as they carry out their last moments together in the desert: “Sur chacun de leurs pas le doute retombait;/ Sans cesse un repentir ramenait en arrière/ Leurs pieds, dont les erreurs centuplaient la carrière” (411). The need for another person in order to feel whole and connect with the divine is crucial. In their delirium, the couple’s nonverbal communication no longer works. They had been communicating through their eyes.

En vain des plus doux noms conjurant ce délire,  
Cédar cherchait ses yeux, leur parlait du sourire;  
Ses plus tendres regards n’inspiraient que terreur,  
Elle n’avait pour lui que geste et cri d’horreur!  
[...]  
Mais n’être plus connu de cet œil fixe et somber,  
Du seul point lumineux qui restât dans son ombre!  
Ne pouvoir rappeler du regard, de la voix,  
Ce rayon dont l’amour l’inondait autrefois!  
Frapper de sa parole une Oreille de pierre,  
Ne trouver qu’un abîme au fond de sa paupière!  
Que dis-je? Être soudain devenu pour ses yeux  
L’objet le plus étrange et le plus odieux! (445)

Unable to bond with Daïdha, Cédar loses his internal connection to the divine: “A l’horrible lueur de ce torment supreme,/ Cédar douta de lui, d’elle, de Dieu lui-même;/ Comme un homme qui sent finir tout sentiment, Son âme eut du néant l’évanouissement” (416). Knowledge of the divine on earth is thus shown to be directly linked to mutual compassion between human beings.

When Cédar and Daïdha meet the elderly pre-Christian prophet, Adoni, the holy man describes the most damning quality of the people in the neighboring society to be their indulgence of the senses leading to a decadent numbing of the natural capacity

to feel (206-7). The prophet claims to possess spiritual truths in a book that has been handed down to him by his mother. According to his mother, the book was dictated by God to a mortal man: “C’est le germe enfoui de toute vérité” (215). This concept of a holy book or doctrine which is constantly reworked throughout the generations recalls the *évangile éternel* in George Sand’s *Spiridion* and it not unlike the palingenesis theories put forward by Ballanche and Saint-Simon. Lamartine uses the holy book scenario to create a religion where reason and faith are in harmony. In the *Huitième vision*, “Fragment du livre primitive,” a portion of the holy book is revealed to the reader. The holy book reveals that evil does not actually exist because everything is in God’s plan which cannot be understood by man (not unlike Quinet’s ideas that all historical events have value because they allow for the evolution of society): “Et le sage comprit que le mal n’était pas,/ Et dans l’œuvre de Dieu ne se voit que d’en bas!” (228). Reminiscent of Saint-Simonianism, the chosen people are those who “sentent le plus”: “Les enfants, les vieillards, les maladies, les femmes” (233). The book is even complete with a list of commandments like those handed down to Moses. The list is a mix of laws meant to promote harmony between man and nature and also harmony among men. The last and most important commandment speaks of man’s obligation to show mercy to his fellow man:

En retour du pardon que le ciel nous accorde  
Le plus beau don de l’homme est la miséricorde:  
Il la doit à son père, à soi-même, à celui  
Qui seul a droit de juge et de vengeur sur lui;  
La vengeance ou l’erreur inventa le supplice:  
Ce monde vit de grâce, et non pas de justice. (248)

Perhaps the most striking revelation in the holy book, however, is that God communicates directly with man through his inner voices of reason. Lamartine uses the book to present the concept of “la liberté morale” in which man’s conscience and the inner voices that he uses to reason are in fact more in tune with God than any other laws.

Le seul livre divin dans lequel il écrit  
Son nom toujours croissant, homme, c’est ton esprit !  
C’est ta raison, miroir de la raison suprême,  
Où se peint dans ta nuit quelque ombre de lui-même.  
Il nous parle, ô mortel, mais c’est par ce seul sens !  
Toute bouche de chair altère ses accents.  
L’intelligence en nous, hors de nous la nature,  
Voilà les voix de Dieu, le reste est imposture ! (221-2)

Faith does still play an important role in Cédar and Daïdha’s existence but the meaning of faith is adjusted to mean faith in one’s own conscience. The faith that lends strength to the couple throughout their journey is not faith in an absent God but rather faith in their feelings for each other.

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The use of the fallen angel in a biblical setting to introduce the importance of compassion in the modern world might seem backward in a time when France was pulling away from traditional religious beliefs and moving toward the cult of science. Why did these authors choose to use traditional Christian motifs as a means for criticizing traditional Christian beliefs and what is it about the figure of the fallen angel that would have struck a chord with the reading public of the 1820s and 1830s? The attempt to create a secular society in France after the Revolution had been a failed experiment that was widely blamed on a lack of morality. Shifting spiritual authority from an impersonal God to the divinized conscience puts morality in the

hands of the people which ideally balance politics and religion. Individuals in humanity coming together to form the spiritual base of a religion is the divine equivalent of a republic. Perhaps these authors felt that the only way to achieve a responsible republican government was to shift both religious and political power to the people. Under the monarchy, religion and government were one power emanating from one person but in the ideal republic, religion and government would be combined in each individual. Conscience would serve to keep individuality in check and produce the compassion necessary to bond society together.

Although elements of the republic, such as the Rights of Man, needed to be incorporated into modern French society, the purpose of ideas like “*liberté*” and “*individualisme*” were being reconsidered in the liberal sphere. In an 1835 letter to Martin Doisy, Lamartine explains his conception of liberty as a path to a just government in harmony with the divine:

La liberté est conquise, elle est assurée, elle est inviolable, quels que soient le nom et la forme du pouvoir ; mais la liberté n'est pas un but, c'est un moyen. Le but, c'est la restauration de la dignité et de la moralité humaine dans toutes les classes dont la société se compose ; c'est la raison, la justice et la charité appliquées progressivement dans toutes les institutions politiques et civiles, jusqu'à ce que la société politique, qui n'a été trop souvent que l'expression de la tyrannie du fort sur le faible devienne l'expression de la pensée divine qui n'est que justice, égalité et providence. (167)

For Lamartine, politics and God are inseparable and charity joins reason and justice in an ideal government but none of this is achievable without awareness of conscience on an individual level. The individual becomes a single tool in the service of humanity which in turn serves the will of God. Vigny's preoccupation with the nobleness of sacrifice echoes the concept that the good man considers his life as being

in service to others. Quinet agreed that the individual should be more in harmony with humanity but, as a historian, he saw humanity as not simply composed of one's contemporary society but of all humans from the beginning to the end of time.

Consequently, time itself takes on a divine quality. According to Ceri Crossley:

By turning to history Quinet sought an ethical underpinning for individual action, a way out of the negation of nature and the denial of value to other selves. How was the exercise of freedom to be made meaningful? Quinet began by reminding individuals that their actions were part of a general history of striving. Self-conscious freedom had meaning in virtue of its relationship to a history of individual and collective struggles. Freedom was not therefore circumscribed to the pursuit of individual goals, and the individual, despite his acute sense of separateness, remained part of mankind. (145)

As we have seen, God's most negative trait in these works is his jealous individualism. The negative portrayal of God is used however as a means for rethinking the divine, not simply abandoning it. The personification of God does for the Almighty what the personification of the Emperor does for Napoleon in Vigny's *Servitude et grandeur militaire* or in Lamartine's *Bonaparte*. It demystifies him to the point that ordinary men can pass judgment on the judge. Glorifying the fallen angel then allows the author to show that it is not one's status that makes a person noble but rather his actions. The fallen angel is a hero despite the curse that he bears and God is unjust despite his role as judge. Furthermore, the biblical setting and the theme of forgetting as the fallen angel moves forward in time serves as a reminder that Christianity had changed since its beginnings and can and will continue to change thus creating a reasonable argument for religious reform.

### **Conclusion**

Éloa, Ahasvérus, and Cédar ou la chute d'un ange each emphasize a perceived need for compassion in modern society. The religious context of these works suggests that these authors associated religion with the concept of compassion. Within the stories, an often angry masculine God character stands in contrast to an angel whose works show compassion for humanity and who ultimately sacrifices his or her privileged divine status. The angels' overwhelming desire for human companionship speaks to a desire for religion which is less associated with the classic fire and brimstone religiosity and more in tune with humanity.

The angel in Alfred de Vigny's *Éloa ou la sœur des anges* is half human and half divine. Although the love and pity which dominate Éloa's existence may seem incompatible with Vigny's "mâle religion de l'honneur," Vigny's journal suggests that he was developing sentiment and pity as honorable, masculine traits. The poet even considered a "divinisation" of the conscience comparable to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conscience-based spirituality in the *Vicaire savoyard*. Éloa is motivated by her conscience. She acts on emotion and offers compassion in spite of the fact that compassionate behavior is discouraged by her own angelic "society." The example of the angel's social context emphasizes the distinction between humanity (which is inclusive to all people) and society (which is potentially exclusive depending on opinions and norms). Éloa's refusal to conform to social expectations supports a philosophy which values humanity over society. Éloa offers consolation to Satan out of pity for him because he, as a cursed creature, is in the most need of pity. Éloa's sentiment, however, is shown to have both positive and negative effects. It allows her to take on a heroic role, boldly coming to the aid of one who needs it most. Her

generous sentiment is also taken advantage of by Lucifer the tempter and manipulator. Vigny's emphasis on self-sacrifice hints at his conviction that man's ability to sacrifice himself renders him potentially more heroic than God himself who is incapable of sacrifice. Weakness thus becomes strength through heroic opportunity.

Éloa provides consolation through compassion and sacrifice while Satan offers consolation in the form of flattery and denial. Lucifer's temptations are based in illusion. Vigny associates Éloa's weakness for flattery to her femininity. Éloa gives in to the temptation to project false modesty in place of her natural innocence. Through Éloa's vanity, Vigny illustrates the superiority of natural sentiment over crafted manners. He appears to agree with Ballanche, Chateaubriand, and Hugo that innocence is divine. Nevertheless, in contrast to Ballanche and Chateaubriand, Vigny's fallen angel also exhibits the dangers of ignorance and the injustice in supposedly infallible dogma. His Satan, like the sympathetic criminals found throughout Hugo's works, deserves pity despite his trespasses – as does Éloa.

Éloa willingly chooses to fall, acting as an individual rather than following accepted doctrine. Éloa's act of defiance might be seen as indicative of Vigny's opposition to tyranny, such as the tyranny experiences under the reign of the Empire. Although an individual, Éloa employs her individuality in service to others. Even after discovering Satan's ruse, she perseveres as the selfless consoler, concerned with the happiness of her abuser, reflecting the doctrine of "love thy enemy." Vigny's unfinished sequel to

Éloa, entitled *Satan sauvé*, imagines Satan pardoned from Hell due to his love for the angel, thereby suggesting that sentiment might actually be sacred.

Edgar Quinet's *Ahasvérus*, like *Éloa*, emphasizes the need for pity and consolation in a religion of humanity. Quinet shows God to be absent while Ahasvérus tirelessly searches for salvation. Through Ahasvérus' long journey across time and space, the author develops the idea that the universe is consistently driven towards renewal and growth. Again like Ballanche and Saint-Simon, Quinet insists that change is inevitable. Humanity and God alike must adapt to the currents of time.

The angel Rachel's mission is to provide pity, consolation, and companionship to the cursed Ahasvérus. Like the French people who were forced to come together through tragedy. Rachel and Ahasvérus join together in their despair thus creating hope for future regeneration. Since God is depicted as pitiless, men must create their own consolation amongst themselves. Like *Éloa*, Rachel challenges the infallibility of the almighty by daring to pity a cursed soul. Rachel's fall, her punishment, emphasizes intolerance for individualized thought in Christianity. Rachel ultimately chooses fraternity over religiosity.

Most of Rachel's story is driven by her inability to remember her past life. Unable to recall the circumstances of her fall or even the fact that she was once an angel, she completely misunderstands her relationship with God placing blind faith in an authority figure who has damned her. She likewise misconstrues her relationship with

Ahasvérus, seeing him as her *savoir* rather than as her tempter or her downfall. Rachel's misplaced faith is completely driven by sentiment and also completely out of sync with the realities of religion as they are presented in the context of the story. Ahasvérus becomes disillusioned with both religion and romantic love which is especially significant since love in general was so often proposed by Quinet's contemporaries as the foundation of any veritable spirituality. Vigny had envisioned Satan redeemed by his love for Éloa and Lamartine's Cédar sacrifices everything for the love of Daïdha. Ahasvérus, however, becomes the caricature of the romantic poet seeking the divine in ephemeral passion love. Ahasvérus' process of disillusionment is part of his ongoing quest for ultimate truths. Everything, even love, is shown to evolve or die in the course of time. Ahasvérus comes to believe that what he needs is a new religion but by the end of his journey we understand that the entire universe is in a constant flux of eternal destruction and renewal. By the end of *Ahasvérus*, it is clear that human companionship is actually the only enduring consolation in life but Quinet is careful to distance the reality of companionship from the romantic *beau idéal*.

Lamartine's *Cédar ou la chute d'un ange* imagines a scenario in which a divine being leaves the realm of the ideal and joins humanity on Earth, suggesting that religion could be with the people rather than above them. The poem's fictionalized biblical setting, not unlike Chateaubriand's American wilderness, allows the author to introduce compassion as a spiritual principle which has eroded over time. Lamartine's concept of "moral liberty" is a conscience-based religious theory. Lamartine's theory,

however, distinguishes itself from Rousseau's natural religion in that, for Lamartine, God alone knows universal truths and man can only look to his conscience as a "witness" and virtue as "evidence" of God's secret. For Lamartine, then, the conscience proves the existence of God. The proof of God's existence is unnecessary in the *Vicaire savoyard* since the conscience is perceived as the ultimate authority, as "God" himself rather than as a witness to some other higher authority. Nevertheless, both Rousseau and Lamartine suggest a diversion from rote doctrine and a movement towards spiritual liberty. Lamartine's *Cédar* furthermore explores the possibility of perfectibility and a balance of faith and reason reminiscent of Mme de Staël.

*Cédar*'s God, like Ahasvérus' God, is above all portrayed as a "judge." God, from the point of view of the poem, is too removed from humanity to be influenced by human sentiment. *Cédar*, like *Éloa*, is moved to act upon his sentiment despite religious law and the norms of his angelic society. His decision to rebel is conscious. *Cédar* chooses a physical existence. His yearning to be like humans, to experience what it is to be mortal, is reminiscent of Vigny's conviction that mortal sacrifice is in fact superior or more heroic than divine infallibility. Lamartine glorifies sentiment, instinct, and conscience as the paths to discovering universal truths. These "natural" human elements are depicted as innocent or pure. Feeling is the catalyst for true communication. This ability to communicate through pure feeling in *Cédar* is shown to wear away with time as the characters become increasingly affected by impure external influences. Lamartine also presents the idea that Christian ideas predated the arrival of the Christian messiah. The biblical prototype discovered in *Cédar* supports

the concept of religious palingenesis later found in George Sand's references to the *Évangile éternel* in her *Spiridion*. Both suggest that Christian law is in a state of continual evolution.

In all three of these works, conscience emerges as a means for keeping individuality in check. External religion is consistently viewed as an outmoded system of judgment, inconsistent with liberty, justice and equality. Although the use of the angel emphasizes the persistence of religious imagery in discussions of morality, the defiance of these angels indicates a spirit of liberty in an atmosphere of doubt. The truly divine is increasingly associated with good works towards fellow men, contributing to humanity by upholding justice and equality.

### **Chapter 11: George Sand's *Spiridion* and the Doctrine of *L'Évangile éternel***

In view of the fact that conservative Catholic critics overwhelmingly based their position against democracy on the assumption that it lacked historical and religious foundations, Lamennais' *Paroles d'un croyant* proved that a revised analysis of early Christian philosophy as a liberal doctrine had the potential to bolster support for liberal values as part of the western religious tradition. The popularity of the Saint-Simonian movement amongst 1830s intellectuals showed that Lamennais was not alone in his efforts to establish a historical foundation for a new Christianity. In the decades that followed, Alphonse Esquiros' 1840 *L'Évangile du peuple*, and Ernest Renan's 1863 *Vie de Jésus* continued rewriting religious history by reimagining the personage of Jesus himself, emphasizing the human side of the man-god whose goal, they said, was not to found a Church but to unify society.

This growing interest in researching diverse Christian philosophies prompted a surge of curiosity surrounding a thirteenth century radical Franciscan doctrine known as the *Évangile éternel*. The basis of the *Évangile éternel* is that Christianity, as part of the universal story of religion, is a temporary stage in an ongoing spiritual cycle.

According to the doctrine, the reign of Christ's gospel would be surpassed by a subsequent gospel of the Holy Spirit, bringing humanity into a final stage of spiritual enlightenment which would surpass Christianity and prepare the world for a new religion. With its ever-changing socio-political landscape, it is easy to imagine that nineteenth century France would have known spiritual and political growing pains which may have been perceived as comparable to those experienced by thirteenth century Franciscans. Xavier Rousselot's 1867 essay, *Étude d'histoire religieuse au*

*XIIe et XIIIe siècles: Joachim de Flore, Jean de Parme et la doctrine de l'Évangile éternel*, depicts the thirteenth century as being on the cusp of a “new era” (Rousselot 8). According to Rousselot, the thirteenth century was “une époque à la fois religieuse et agitée, mélange d’illuminisme mystique et d’esprit de révolte, d’audace philosophique et d’humilité chrétienne, de soumission pleine de foi et d’attaques contre le dogme et ceux qui en étaient les organes; attaques tantôt cachées sous l’enveloppe d’un catholicisme orthodoxe, tantôt hardiment hérétiques et rebelles” (Rousselot 8). For Pierre Leroux, a Saint-Simonian whose notable achievements include co-founding *Le Globe* and coining the term “socialism,” the nineteenth century was likewise in need of a “new religious era” in order to stabilize democracy (Du christianisme iii). In his *Du christianisme et de son origine démocratique*, Leroux proposes that a synthesis of all human knowledge is necessary to usher in true progress (48). Leroux briefly mentions the *Évangile éternel* in his *De l’humanité*, linking its origins to Saint John but affirms that John’s contribution was simply a small part of the greater “palingénésie cosmique” which he traces back to ancient times (De l’humanité 824). The doctrine of *L’Évangile éternel*, which focuses heavily on the importance of love, charity, and justice in society, would inspire George Sand to construct a fictional history of its principles in her 1839 novel, *Spiridion*. According to Marie-Reine Renard, “Les théories de George Sand prenaient appui sur certains courants religieux de l’époque romantique, dont sortira également le socialisme dit ‘utopique’” (25). Renard attributes Sand’s familiarity with the *Évangile éternel* to her association with Pierre Leroux and adds that the story likewise bears traces of Lamennais’ own “spiritual crisis” (30). *Spiridion*, which is dedicated

to Leroux, constructs a palingenesis based on the *Évangile éternel* from Saint John to Joachim de Flore to Jean de Parme and then connects the doctrine to contemporary times by extending the spiritual lineage to modern fictional clergymen: l'abbé Spiridion, Fulgence, Alexis, and Angel.

Other Sand novels, such as *Consuelo*, had already incorporated commentary on religion and mysticism into the lives of her characters. According to an 1845 article on Sand's *Œuvres complètes* in the *North American View*, even her American contemporaries recognized that "Her writings are affecting, not merely literary taste, but the political, religious, and social opinions of her countrymen" (106). While the article paints her in a negative light, comparing her "gloominess" to Rousseau, it is clear that Sand's contribution to religious thought was significant.

### **Palingenesis and Progress**

The concept of palingenesis in Sand's *Spiridion* recalls Ballanche's palingenesis and Mme de Staël's "*perfectibilité*" in that it depicts human spirituality and intellect as one ongoing process in which advancements are made through the course of generations. The story of the young monk, Angel, unravels as a spiritual mystery, as a discovery of the self, and as a discovery of humanity's destiny in the eternal course of time. Sand impresses the idea that justice, charity, and love are the keys to true human progress. These values form the foundation of a religion which exists not between the walls of religious institutions but in the hearts and minds of the people. *Spiridion* elaborates on the idea that all events throughout time – each social, religious, and political step in human history – moves humanity in the direction of God's will. Regardless of the immediate repercussions of human events, all is progress.

Within *Spiridion*, the author tells multiple stories which come together as one, illustrating the process through which progress is born. Carrying through the religious concept of the trinity, Sand organizes characters and themes in *Spiridion* by groups of three. In his 1866 article, “Joachim de Flore et l’Évangile éternel,” Ernest Renan traces similar patterns of three to a 1254 introduction to the *Évangile* written by Joachimite brother Gérard de Borgo-San Donnino (287). As the inheritor of l’abbé Spiridion’s intellectual legacy, Angel compiles the knowledge of three monks who came before him: Spiridion, Fulgence, and Alexis. All of these men started out as simple penitents who became tools for change through intellectual development as well as through a balance of heart and mind.

Throughout *Spiridion*, Sand develops the idea that belief systems are limited by the time periods in which they exist. Knowledge must therefore be passed on to the next generation in order for its potential to be realized: “Comme chaque génération de l’humanité, chaque homme a ses besoins intellectuels, dont la limite marque celle de ses investigations et de ses conquêtes” (262). Previously gained knowledge nourishes the new knowledge that grows out of it forging unity amongst human generations: “de même que chaque souffle intellectuel entretient, par une invisible communion, le souffle éveillé par lui dans un sanctuaire nouveau de l’intelligence” (263). When intellectual unity binds humanity, knowledge becomes sacred. Blasphemy, from Spiridion’s point of view, is thus redefined as the claim that one person might know all that there is to be known about the universe (269). The infallibility which he once recognized as the power of the Catholic Church surfaces as one of its fundamental weaknesses.

Sand's description of the process by which all three men arrive at enlightenment through self-analysis and a gradual casting off of individualist desires implies that truth is constantly within man but one cannot access the truth through meditation alone. The idea that truth can be found through examination of the self is expressed by the motto inscribed on Spiridion's tomb: "Hic est veritas," "Here is truth." The same phrase seems to have been coined in a fifth century hymn by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius<sup>19</sup>:

Sunt nempe falsa et frivola,  
quae mundiali gloria  
ceu dormientes egimus:  
vigilemus, hic est veritas.<sup>20</sup>

According to Gerard O'Daly's analysis of the hymn in his 2012 book, *Days Linked by Song: Prudentius' Cathemerenon*,

The awakening to virtue includes reflections on our past lives, as well as on persistent temptations: forgetfulness, vacuous dreams, the sleep-walking of worldly glory, wealth, pleasure, esteem, success [...] By contrast with their worthlessness and emptiness (*frivola*, l. 89; *nil*, l. 96), there is the waking state, the light of day in which truth is discerned: *vigilemus, hic est veritas*, 'Let us wake up! Here is truth!' (l. 92)... (53)

"Hic est veritas" is a call to awaken the innate knowledge of truth which lies dormant in every man. The novelist adds dimension to the search for truth by extending the concept of "reflections on past lives" to include the past lives of others, of a collective

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<sup>19</sup> Sand's extensive knowledge of religious music in *Consuelo* gives reason to believe she was likely familiar with the common hymn.

<sup>20</sup> *Hymns for the Christian's Day*, "Hymnus ad galli cantum" ("Hymn at Cock Crow"), translated by R. Martin Pope into English as: "Bound by the dazzling world's soft chain/'Tis false and fleeting gauds we gain,/Like those who in deep slumbers lie:-/Let us awake! the truth is nigh.

human experience rather than simply a personal experience. The sharing of human knowledge gradually brings truth to light because the true gospel in *Spiridion* is a gospel of humanity. As Xavier Rousselot reminds us in his 1867 essay, the *Évangile éternel* was above all a social doctrine but Joachim's writings insist that God, which he refers to as the Eternal, must first be found in the self (Rousselot 42-50). Sand's use of palingenesis emphasizes the eternal by tracing a collective human experience within a personal experience.

Visualizing eternity as the unification of past, present, and future, Sand also explores the idea that progress does not erase the great works of the past. In accordance with the *Évangile éternel*, *Spiridion* asserts that the efforts of a lifetime can endure in their influence on subsequent generations creating "l'immortalité sur la terre" (397).

Similar ideas are put forth by both Henri de Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte asserting that eternal life is achieved through the legacy one leaves behind on earth to influence subsequent generations.

L'abbé Spiridion's life story creates the impression of a palingenesis in that three different identities evolve out of the individual. Spiridion's progress is driven by his studies of western religious traditions. Cerebral knowledge evolves into spiritual awakening. Born into a Jewish family, Spiridion began life as Pierre Hébronius before he converted from Judaism to Protestant Christianity and then to Catholicism. At each stage of spiritual conversion, Hébronius<sup>21</sup> changes his name. As a protestant, he is known as Samuel and as a priest he is Spiridion. The priest's own life mirrors

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<sup>21</sup> Hebron, Hebronius' namesake, is the location of a burial cave known as the Tombs of the Patriarchs. In Genesis 23:17-20, Abraham buys the land and buries his wife, Sarah, in the cave: "So the field and the cave in it were deeded to the Hittites as a burial site" (Genesis 23:20).

the *Évangile éternel* in that each of the three stages of his spiritual growth builds upon the last according to the lessons learned in those stages.

According to Alexis, Spiridion initially moved from Judaism to Protestantism because he perceived Christianity as a more inclusive religion (250). His interest in religion remains centered on a desire to develop human unity. He recognizes that the emphasis on unity and eternity found in both Protestant and Catholic Christianity is rooted in Judaism, unifying the three traditions of the past and present of religious trends (251). The Christian emphasis on equality, love, charity, devotion to others, and renouncement of the self attracts young Hebronius to a protestant conversion (252). Ever-evolving, he goes on to prefer Catholicism for its dogma of infallibility; for its strong historical foundation (“l’aspect du caractère sacré d’antiquité”) and for the poetic nature of “la pompe et l’éclat” (252). Catholicism is described as having an aura of strength and beauty which appeals to Spiridion’s aesthetic sensibilities. Alexis recounts that, as a Catholic, Spiridion then sought to build an idyllic community by bringing intelligent and virtuous monks together to seek “faith through science” (253). When his monks eventually ceded to vice, Spiridion secretly turned against his own creation and quietly worked alone (254). Even after death, he only connects with a chosen few.

### **All in Due Time**

Throughout *Spiridion*, intellectual progress is described as a slow process which germinates throughout the centuries: “Le travail des siècles modifie la nature de l’esprit humain: il arrive avec le temps à la transformer” (302). According to the doctrine described in *Spiridion*, man can only accomplish a limited number of tasks in

a lifetime. Each generation must connect with the next generation in order to bring its efforts to fruition: “Ainsi un même homme ne renferme pas en lui-même à des degrés semblables le passé, le présent et l’avenir des générations” (303). The past and the future of humanity are linked through present works but not completed. Sand evokes Pierre Leroux’s plea for a synthesis of knowledge in Alexis’ assertion that truth is found through inclusion of diverse thought processes. According to Alexis, Catholics are disjointed from the past because the works of great non-Catholic thinkers have not been passed down to them (304). Catholicism has existed in solitude, isolated from outside philosophies which would have ushered in progress. Moreover, Alexis asserts that catholic isolation has kept its followers from joining the whole of humanity. The preoccupation with a utopian afterlife, he reasons, prevents Catholics from recognizing the world as their homeland and finding comfort in unification with humanity (305).

Nevertheless, as part of the history of spirituality, Sand does show Catholicism to possess some truths for Alexis in regards to personal spiritual development. Alexis finds that intellectual studies need to be balanced by the spiritual. In particular, he longs for the healing power of prayer (306). “Le grand œuvre du christianisme est donc le développement de la force intellectuelle par celui de la sensibilité morale, et la prière est l’inépuisable aliment où ces deux puissances se combinent et se retrempe sans cesse” (307). Alexis asserts that his “new God” is too vast to be accessible (308). His concept of the universe expanded in such a way that he began to view himself as insignificant in comparison. Alexis thus ceased his efforts to communicate with God because he believed that a prayer from one small human

being would be almost impious (308). In spite of his heretical convictions, a human need for prayer and love remained. Alexis admits to falling back on catholic formulas to fulfill these needs (308). His new concept of God lacked sympathy, even more so than the Old Testament's Jehovah: "Les colères et les vengeances du sombre Jéhovah m'effrayaient moins que l'impassible silence et la glaciale équité de mon nouveau maître" (309). Jehovah was an angry god but he retained a human-like display of passions which rendered him accessible to man. Quiet Eternity, in contrast, provides no familiarity with humanity, no hope for communication. With the same zeal which he employed to arrive at a state of near-atheism, Alexis takes the same philosophical path and reads the same books in an effort to support spirituality by reinvigorating new religion with an air of mystery: "revêtir la Divinité de son mystère sublime, avec la même persévérance que j'avais mise à l'en dépouiller" (403).

### **Cultivating Doubt in the Quest for Truth**

After the failure of his utopian experiment, Spiridion began to associate organized religion with corruption. This deception, however, delivers the priest from the bonds of organized religion and allows him to freely pursue his spiritual studies as an individual. He begins to think outside of the traditional dogma, a process which Sand describes as a natural extension of his research:

L'idée de la corruption et de la bassesse vint se mêler à toutes ses méditations théologiques, et s'attacher, comme une lèpre honteuse, à l'idée de la religion. Il ne put bientôt plus séparer, malgré sa puissance d'abstraction, le catholicisme des catholiques. Cela l'amena, sans qu'il s'en aperçût, à le considérer sous ses côtés les plus faibles, comme il l'avait jadis considéré sous les plus forts, et à rechercher, malgré lui, les possibilités mauvaises. Avec le génie investigateur et la puissante faculté d'analyse dont il était doué, il ne fut pas longtemps à les trouver; mais, comme ces magiciens téméraires

qui évoquaient des spectres et tremblaient à leur apparition, il s'épouvanta lui-même de ses découvertes. (255)

Spiridion's disillusion becomes the gateway to his enlightenment and his successors will follow similar paths, absorbing doubt as a means for analysis and arriving at truths. The vestiges of superstition continue to inhibit the priest from realizing perfect enlightenment but this is a challenge which follows his successors for generations. Spiritual and intellectual enlightenment is shown to be a continuous work in progress. Spiridion's principal contribution to spiritual knowledge was to replace religion with "une sorte de raison instinctive" which would lead to truth:

Il n'avait plus de règle certaine ni de loi absolue; mais une sorte de raison instinctive, que rien ne pouvait anéantir ni détourner, le guidait dans toutes ses actions et le conduisait au juste. Ce fut probablement par ce côté qu'il se rattacha à la vie ; en sentant fermenter ces généreux sentiments, il se dit que l'étincelle sacrée n'avait pas cessé de brûler en lui, mais seulement de briller ; et que Dieu veillait encore dans son cœur bien que caché à son intelligence par des voiles impénétrables. (259)

A return to instinct as a source for truth brings Spiridion closer to the divine by way of a reconnection with human sentiment. Spiridion finds that the sacred is found within the self. This new approach to spirituality also addresses the relationship between the heart and the mind. Sand shows that discord between heart and mind stunt growth in both spirituality and intelligence. According to Ernest Renan, the *Évangile éternel* sought to remove the abstractions customarily employed by Christianity in order to disseminate religious philosophy to a general public and usher in a more literal (and therefore less superstitious) age of spirituality (*Joachim* 287). Through her portrayal of l'abbé Spiridion, Fulgence, and Alexis, Sand shows that harmony between spirit and mind are necessary for preparing future men for this

new more straightforward gospel. Instead of relying on superstition as a false support for the conscience, they grow to rely on their intelligence and their ability to recognize truth through reasoning.

At first, Angel does not understand the monastic culture because of a divide between the brotherly love which Christianity claims to represent and the coldhearted behavior of his companions and superiors. Soon after joining the community, Angel finds himself in a reversed moral system in which goodness and piety are punishable acts of deviance (189-91). In the eyes of his fellow monks, Angel is allegedly guilty of some crime against “God’s justice.” As the story unfolds, however, the laws of organized religion are increasingly exposed as mundane. With the exception of Angel and his three predecessors, the religious brothers are uniformly depicted as selfish and unjust. Their goal is to erase the feeling of justice in others, forcing their peers to conform to a corrupt society (209). The corrupt monastery is indicative of a general loss of justice on earth. Superstitions surrounding religion remain but the ability to form true brotherhood through an understanding of justice is completely lost. According to Alexis, “la foi est perdue sur la terre, et le vice est impuni” (210). Alexis nevertheless teaches that the goal of life should not be to live better than other men but to strive to live *with* them (210).

Alexis explains that the monastery was once a haven for those called to follow “le culte de l’esprit” (212). Religious communities contributed greatly to the body of human wisdom (212). The decadent modern monks are shown not only to lack knowledge but to also distance themselves from genuine sentiment, rendering them unsympathetic to the point of seeming inhuman. The monks actually fear holiness and

discourage virtue. Alexis reveals to Angel that his superiors actually hope to curb the novice's reverence by encouraging his scholarly activities: "de peur que tu ne deviennes un saint, on cherchera à faire de toi un savant" (217). Alexis further reveals that the monks fear "l'esprit de justice et la droiture naturelle" (208). The disparity between the injustices committed by the religious community and Angel's instinctual integrity creates doubt which grows to be the foundation of his spiritual evolution. Alexis initially leads Angel away from rote doctrine and closer to humanity by inspiring him to consider his religious environment with a critical eye: "Alexis m'avait soufflé l'esprit de révolte contre mes supérieurs, contre ces hommes que je devais croire et que j'avais toujours cru infaillibles" (203). By stripping religious authorities of their divine facades, Alexis is finally able to judge them as men rather than accept them as representatives of God. Doubt thus becomes a means for progress. Actions and feelings replace ceremony and sacraments as the foundations of truth.

Because the monks' interpretation of divine justice has reversed, Alexis resolves to pray to an alternative God. Angel observes that Alexis diverges from Church law while still professing love for God: "Le père Alexis ne me semblait pas croire en Dieu selon les lois de l'Église chrétienne. Il y a plus, il me semblait parfois qu'il ne servait pas le même Dieu que moi" (219). Alexis' concept of God is more rooted in personal spirituality than it is in any kind of ceremony or official doctrine. Angel notes early on that Alexis invokes "l'Esprit" without preceding it with "Saint," recognizing the authority of spirit and mind developed independently of the Church (203). Angel's first move towards the acceptance of "L'Esprit" is his decision to stop listening to his

worried conscience and to support Alexis as a friend and a fellow human being (238). The follower of “l’Esprit” is thus a charitable friend of humanity who trusts his heart over his superstitions.

Alexis reveals to Angel that he began his philosophical investigations where his mentor left off, extending his research to heretical literature. His search for knowledge outside of the Church marks a loss of innocence, as indicated by the Dante quote on the door to the secular library, “Per me si va nell’eterno dolore” (297). The first step in Alexis’ transformation is to learn for the sake of enriching himself:

“J’éprouvais le besoin de m’instruire pour moi-même, et, la science catholique épuisée pour moi, j’étais poussé vers des études plus complètes, par l’amour de la science, et non par l’ardeur de la prédication” (298). He reads Abelard first, followed by other twelfth and thirteen century heretics (298-9). Above all, Alexis appreciates the freedom of self-discovery and the replacement of dogma with conscience (299). Alexis elects to only accept useful articles of faith which he understands (299). In his own words, he transforms into “un hérétique passionné” but looking back, Alexis admits that he was not conscious of the fact that he was no longer Catholic (299-300). Alexis’ unawareness of his trespass against religion attests to the idea that his spiritual evolution is in harmony with his conscience and is therefore a natural step in the progression of his spiritual and intellectual growth. His lack of guilt implies a first step towards the erasure of superstition.

Alexis recognizes his intellectual progression as parallel to the intellectual progression of humanity itself (300-1). After studying protestant literature, he reaches a point at which it would be impossible to return to pure Catholicism. Religion for

Alexis takes on “une forme toute philosophique” (301). Alexis equates his transformation to a coming of age. Like a child growing first into an adolescent and then into a young man, Alexis went from Catholic to reformist and from reformist to philosopher (301). He also expanded his world view to consider more than the western tradition: “L’Inde ne se montrait certes pas moins éclairée dans l’idée de la Divinité que la Judée. Jupiter [...] ne me semblait pas un dieu inférieur à Jéhovah” (302). The idea of various Gods constituting one Eternity recalls the spirit shared amongst St. John, Spiridion, Fulgence, Alexis and others as representatives of a unified humanity according to the *Évangile éternel* as it is revealed at the end of the novel. From comparative religious studies, Alexis embraces religious tolerance among other liberal ideals: “Je gardai pour toute religion une croyance pleine de désir et d’espoir en la Divinité, le sentiment inébranlable du juste et de l’injuste, un grand respect pour toutes les religions et pour toutes les philosophies, l’amour du bien et le besoin du vrai” (302).

### **Modern Religion as a Balance of Heart and Mind**

In his quest to join together with a sympathetic soul, Angel approaches the elder Alexis who likewise lives in solitude. Sand highlights the idea that great works cannot be accomplished on one’s own. Moments of significant growth in *Spiridion* occur as a direct result of sympathetic human relationships. Knowledge detached from humanity is fruitless. Through Alexis’ testimony, Sand depicts the monastery as having slipped into a sort of Dark Age where truth struggles against a reign of ignorance due to the lack of brotherhood:

Où est le temps où les hommes s’y chérissaient comme des frères et y travaillaient de concert, en s’aidant charitablement les uns les autres, à

implorer, à poursuivre l'esprit, à vaincre les grossiers conseils de la matière? Toute lumière, tout progrès, toute grandeur, doivent y périr, si quelques-uns d'entre nous ne persévèrent dans la lutte effroyable que l'ignorance et l'imposture livrent désormais à la vérité. (212)

Traditionally, the monk separated himself from humanity so that he could study and preserve religion as history handed it down to him. In doing so, however, he actively separates religion from the people it applies to, widening the gap between the secular and the divine. A tool for religion, the monk sacrifices his freedom and his fertility. As Alexis increasingly rebelled, he recognized the power that religion had wielded over him. The superstitions which accompanied his belief in God had hindered his growth as a man: "Pour avoir été catholique, ne me sera-t-il jamais permis d'être un homme, et dois-je, à la moindre langueur d'estomac [...] être en butte aux terreurs de l'enfance" (337). Alexis' story is the story of a monk turning back into a man and seeking that brotherhood through an alliance with humanity. The development of doubt as the gateway for a new way of thinking would be the first step in Alexis' personal transformation.

Conscience, and particularly the ethical responsibility to help mankind through one's intellectual growth, is increasingly stressed as Alexis recounts his dwindling connection to sentiment due to his obsession with amassing cerebral knowledge. Jean Deprun points out that Sand's reasoning here may have been inspired by a familiarity with Leibnitz's religious philosophy "qui ressemble beaucoup à la religion du Vicaire savoyard" and which strays from "tout l'appareil logique et métaphysique" (574).

Deprun summarizes this spiritual theory as "l'idée que la vraie foi doit être accompagnée de la lumière" (574). Knowledge without conscience leads to ugly pride, as illustrated in Alexis' nightmare in which Spiridion declared: "c'est un orgueilleux,

et l'orgueil l'a rendu sourd à la voix de sa conscience" (338-9). The nightmare ends with priests standing over a man's coffin trying unsuccessfully to rip the man's heart out (348-9). Alexis is guilty of a trespass against his conscience in the dream because he chose to save himself rather than come to the victim's aid (349-50). The victim, however, proves that saving another is akin to saving oneself. Alexis recounts that he watched as the man changed into Christ, then into Abelard, and subsequently into Jean Huss, into Luther, into Spiridion, into Fulgence, and finally into Alexis himself (349-50). No man stands alone as their fates are dependent on each other. The vision exposes the history of all prophets of religious innovation as being a part of the *Évangile éternel* palingenesis. It is their destiny to be sacrificed in service to humanity – which they are attached to through the heart, "martyrs de la vérité nouvelle" (352).

Alexis' reaction to the dream, however, is to combat superstition by closing off his imagination, "de refroidir mon imagination, comme j'avais réussi à refroidir mon cœur" (353). He began to lean towards an atheistic world view which fostered emotionless analysis. Atheism and sensibility are, according to Alexis' story, mutually exclusive. Even in his days as an unbeliever, Angel's mentor describes himself as conserving a concept of justice *despite* his atheism (360). Regardless of the form it takes, religion for the elder Alexis is perceived as a necessary component to being human and therefore religious sentiment is considered to be a building block of justice. Reason alone is not compassionate enough to be just without sentiment to counterbalance it. By the same token, sentiment turns to fanaticism when unchecked by reason (356). The novel avoids addressing the question of whether or not there is a

true religion. Instead, the author focuses on the persistent human need to feed the soul through some form of spirituality. Alexis concludes that man needs *a* God but leaves the identity of that God up to individual interpretation: “Sans doute il ne lui faut (à l’homme) ni tyrans ni fanatiques, mais il lui faut une religion, car il a une âme, et il lui faut connaître un Dieu” (400).

Alexis’ previous relationship with another young monk, Christophe, and his dog, Bacco, teaches him that some knowledge is acquired through the heart rather than through the mind. The death of Christophe further enlightens him on the valuable lessons learned through human suffering: “je compris par le cœur les douleurs de l’humanité” (361). His own pain brings him closer to all men who likewise inevitably experience pain. The human connection that Alexis forged through his feelings for Christophe finally reveals to him the importance of love: “L’homme est fait pour aimer” (363). Through love, the founding principle of the *Évangile éternel*, Alexis discovered that there was still a spark of spirituality within him which persisted in his ongoing appreciation for beauty and a “desire for the ideal” (364). Consequently, Alexis became more sensitive to his environment, finding comfort in the contemplation of nature which in turn allowed him to rediscover poetic sentiment in spirituality: “je redeviens sensible à la poésie du cloître” (366). Sensibility teaches lessons which neither religion nor science can communicate: “En un mot, la vie prit à mes yeux un caractère sacré et un but immense, que je n’avais entrevu ni dans les religions ni dans les sciences, et que mon cœur enseigna sur nouveaux frais à mon intelligence égarée” (368)

Alexis' relationship with the hermit continues to develop his notion of spirituality by offering an entirely different model of the holy man. The hermit sees himself as a divine tool, carrying out God's will through good deeds. Alexis had already envisioned a new concept of God as Eternity. The hermit's rejection of material goods and his practical application of love and charity prompt Alexis to consider new ways in which men might be able to serve such a God by serving humanity. The hermit follows Church doctrine but cares more for the human connection in religion than he does for ceremony (376). From the hermit, Alexis understands brotherly love and altruism, "la vie de l'âme en un mot" (377).

Alexis' experience with the hermit inspires him to join humanity in the present which he recognizes as in flux according to "le mouvement éternel des choses" (382). The priest is drawn to join the movement of humanity: "oubliant que j'étais moine... je me sentais homme" (382). As part of his effort to join humanity, Alexis realizes that he must somehow fertilize the earth. It is his duty to create, even if that creation is intellectual rather than physical in nature. Fertilization gives birth to the next generation and creates eternity: "...le but de la vie est de transmettre la vie" (422).

After having believed that philosophy had accomplished its task through social change, Alexis realizes that nothing is ever definitively accomplished because the universe is forever in process: "Les grandes époques engendrent les grands hommes; et, réciproquement, les grandes actions naissent les unes des autres" (382).

Reminiscent of later Lamennais, Alexis considers the Revolution as the result of humanity obeying its divine plan: "aujourd'hui je crois qu'il y a une action providentielle, et... l'humanité obéit instinctivement et sympathiquement aux grands et

profonds desseins de la pensée divine” (383). Considering the Revolution, Alexis sees more than a present problem. He sees, like Lamartine and later Lamennais, a movement towards the “liberty of conscience” which would free humanity from artificial morality: “Ce travail gigantesque de la révolution française, ce n’était pas, ce ne pouvait pas être seulement une question de pain et d’abri pour les pauvres; c’était beaucoup plus haut... [...] elle doit... achever de donner la liberté de conscience au genre humain tout entier” (399).

### **The Trinity as an Enduring Symbol of Unity**

Selflessness is one of the final stages of Alexis’ spiritual growth. Eager to contribute to humanity, he finally desires the knowledge contained in Spiridion’s manuscript. His desire to instruct himself has grown into a desire to benefit others through his knowledge (408). Alexis further realizes that he lacked the balance between reason and sentiment which is necessary to perceiving the truth (413). Though Alexis’ lifetime is marred by ethical imperfections and misunderstandings, the story of his trials becomes his contribution to the next generation. His journey also reveals an independent discovery of various principles of the *Évangile éternel*. According to Jean Deprun, Sand may have been influenced by Pierre Leroux’s concept of a “sensation-sentiment-connaissance” trinity of experience which was loosely based on Leibnitz’s idea that the celestial trinity may be mirrored in human “power, intelligence, and love” (576). From his personal experiences with knowledge and religion, reason and sentiment, Alexis devises a three-word motto: “croire, espérer, aimer” (416). From this trinity of belief, hope, and love, the priest layers other corresponding trinities. He says the Church, for example, failed to apply its three

theological virtues, “la foi, l’espérance, la charité,” which kept Catholicism from achieving “la sagesse, la justice, la perfection” (417). The Church instead embraced “Dieu implacable et la damnation éternelle,” thus losing all “heart” or compassion for humanity, surrendering itself to sophisms and ambition (417). Alexis affirms his belief in Divinity, again evoking the trinity: “Nous croyons en la Divinité... et Dieu lui-même est une trinité sublime dont notre vie mortelle est le reflet affaibli” (417-18). For Alexis, there are no atheists among men. A glimmer of the divine resides in all human beings (418). His philosophy unites all people of all faiths and belief systems throughout time by recognizing their efforts to discover divine knowledge as one united human effort: “c’était du moins des cris de l’âme élevés vers ce Dieu que toutes les générations humaines ont proclamé sous des noms divers et adoré sous différent symboles” (420). In the end, Alexis reassesses Jesus’ true place in human history as simply “a friend of humanity” and “a prophet of the ideal” (420). As men advance in time, it is their duty to continue the work of past prophets (421). In a continual evolution towards the achievement of perfection, man advances into the future (421). Alexis learns that balance is the key to truth. One must reject extremes and live without atheism or superstition (422).

Alexis’ research reveals that the Pythagorean, Platonic, and Christian philosophies are simply continuations of each other, “un dogme continué et modifié, et dont l’essence lui semblait le fond de la vérité éternelle; vérité progressive, disait-il, en ce sens qu’elle était enveloppée encore des nuages épais, et qu’il appartenait à l’intelligence humaine de déchirer ces voiles un à un, jusqu’au dernier” (423). Continuing the pattern of trinities as a template for the combination of various philosophies and

ideals, Alexis' concept of "Dieu-Perfection" combines science, justice, and love. Science, he says, reveals the greatness of the creator. For Alexis, man's social instinct and natural sympathy prove the sovereignty of justice. A continual attraction to the ideal attests to man's love of God as the father figure of the great human family in the "sanctuary" of human conscience (424). The conscience in this scenario replaces the Church as man's place of worship. Spirituality thus grows ever more internal as the good deeds which spring from that spirituality are turned increasingly outward toward humanity. Man's three duties in life, according to Alexis, are to educate himself in the sciences, to establish institutions which promote the unity of the human family, and to continually research in an effort to discover truth, wisdom, and virtue, "de chercher sans cesse pour soi et pour les autres les voies de la vérité, de la sagesse et de la vertu" (424).

### **The Final Stage: The Dawn of a New Religion**

It is only in the final pages of the novel that Sand makes an explicit connection between *Spiridion* and the *Évangile éternel*. The discovery of Spiridion's legendary manuscript reveals one packet composed of three different texts: a copy of the Gospel of John written in the hand of Joachim de Flore, *L'Introduction à l'Évangile éternel* by Jean de Parme, and lastly, Spiridion's own prophetic writings. Emphasizing the importance of the analytical process made possible through collaboration across the ages, Alexis explains: "L'ordre dans lequel Spiridion a placé ces trois manuscrits sous une même enveloppe doit être sacré pour nous, et signifie incontestablement le progrès, le développement et le complément de sa pensée" (430). Understanding the genesis of spiritual ideas finally becomes an important step in accepting those ideas.

The web of threes is further enriched by associating each time period with a particular mood, an apostle, and a reformer (434). The first stage, the reign of the Father is associated with the apostle Peter and with Grégoire VII. It is the period associated with the development of a religious hierarchy and a militant missionary agenda. According to Spiridion's vision, it lasted from the creation of the Church until Hildebrand, "le Saint Pierre du onzième siècle" (434). The reign of the Son is associated with the apostle John and the originator of the *Évangile éternel*, Joachim de Flore. It is the "reign of sentiment," spanning the time from Abelard to Luther (434). The reign of the Holy Spirit is associated with the apostle Paul and with Martin Luther. It was the reign of "libre examen" (434). Alexis' own life mirrors each of the stages, having gone from being an obedient member of the Church hierarchy to becoming a free-thinking humanist. The completion of these three stages marks the dawning of a new religion: "Là finit le christianisme, et là commence l'ère d'une nouvelle religion" (435).

As Alexis and Angel examine the documents, they come to understand that the upcoming era, the nineteenth century, will be this age of a new religion: "Le règne du Saint-Esprit a été prédit par saint Jean, et c'est ce règne qui va succéder à la religion chrétienne, comme la religion chrétienne a succédé à la loi mosaïque" (431). Within the Gospel of John, de Flore is said to highlight Jesus' proclamation: "Vous êtes tous des dieux," emphasizing equality among men (429). Sand explains that Jean de Parme's *Introduction à l'Évangile éternel* divides religion into three time periods, "le règne du Père," "le règne du Fils," and "le règne du Saint Esprit" (430-1). Angel cites Jean de Parme's text, highlighting a prediction by Saint John that during the reign of

the Holy Spirit “les hommes n’auront plus besoin de sacrements, et rendront à l’Être suprême un culte purement spirituel” (431). Religion, it seems, will be released from the binds of the Church. Sand goes on to explicitly link France’s political liberation to its religious liberation by evoking liberty, equality, and fraternity as the fruits of spiritual maturity. Alexis exclaims in a moment of revelation confirming the end of the *ancien régime* as the dawn of a new religious epoch: “Oui, la doctrine de l’Évangile éternel! Cette doctrine de liberté, d’égalité et de fraternité qui sépare Grégoire VII de Luther, l’a entendu ainsi.” (430-1).

At the end of his life, Alexis realizes that “sterile” erudition cannot yield truth for humanity (436). The most valuable lessons in his life are learned through the heart by way of friendship, charity, and brotherhood (436). Moreover, the religious cloister is no longer the place for research. Spiridion was the last true monk. It is time to leave the cloister, to follow the movement of time. The religious community, according to Alexis, is “une race finie” (437). Leaving the monastery, where time and knowledge have long been suspended by the limits of superstition, is analogous to going from the past into the future. As the monastery is finally invaded by Napoleon’s troops, crushing all that was holy, Sand reminds the reader of the brutality that accompanies major change. The story ends abruptly after Alexis is sacrificed by a soldier on the “Hic est” rock, announcing that suffering and sacrifice remain a necessary component of social evolution. In the final scene, Alexis goes fearlessly into death, proving that he has achieved a state of selfless devotion to humanity. The jarring violence of the final scenes, especially after the joyous revelation of hope, creates a shadow of uncertainty in Alexis’ doctrine of love and in the feasibility of “liberté, égalité,

fraternité.” This lingering skepticism serves as a reminder that the progress they had achieved was made possible not through faith but through the encouragement of doubt.

### **Conclusion**

The thirteenth century doctrine of the *Évangile éternel*, as described in *Spiridion*, suggests that Christianity is an unfinished stage of spirituality in an ongoing cycle of religious evolution. Christianity, according to the doctrine, would be surpassed by the gospel of the Holy Spirit. In *Spiridion*, all events in the course of time move towards the fulfillment of God’s will and man’s destiny. Following this line of reasoning, *Spiridion* develops the idea that knowledge is limited to the present time period as man awaits the next spiritual revolution. In order for this evolution to occur, knowledge must be passed on and built upon from generation to generation. The rapport amongst Spiridion, Fulgence, Alexis, and Angel illustrate this growth of knowledge through shared information. The motto “Hic est veritas,” inscribed on Spiridion’s tomb, calls for the awakening of innate knowledge of universal truths, not unlike the knowledge alluded to by Lamartine in *Cédar ou la chute d’un ange* or in Rousseau’s *Vicaire savoyard*. In *Spiridion*, however, the emphasis on sharing knowledge implies that this knowledge cannot be discovered purely through individual meditation. Spiridion’s gospel unites individuals in the past, present, and future. In accordance with saint-simonian doctrine, *Spiridion* shows that one’s immortality is dependent upon the legacy one leaves behind to influence subsequent generations.

Intellectual progress in *Spiridion* is therefore depicted as a slow process which takes centuries to mature. Progress in this scenario included diverse thought processes including consideration of the sacred as well as the profane. Rather than exclude certain ideas in order to simplify doctrine, as the Church had traditionally done, *Spiridion* includes a web of divergent schools of thought throughout time which intersect to form a more complicated yet more comprehensive body of knowledge rather than one infallible truth. Some Catholic elements of religion, such as prayer, are therefore preserved even as Alexis moves forward on his spiritual journey. The disillusion and the cultivation of doubt in *Spiridion* also allow its characters to grow into new spiritual stages of understanding. The sacred is found in the spirit as well as in the mind. All of the main characters learn to recognize truth through reasoning, not solely through sentiment.

Sand uses the backdrop of the corrupt monastic community as a microcosm of the Church in which the true meaning of justice is threatened by unreasonable doctrine and a culture of superstition. The monks lack both knowledge and sympathy and are therefore removed from the pathways to human progress and unity. Alexis is only able to progress spiritually and intellectually by doubting his superiors and judging them as men. Disillusioned with the monks' reversal of justice, Alexis elects to pray to an alternative God, separating his personal religious practice from formal Church practices. He refers to this God as "l'Esprit," evoking the unity of spirit and mind as a spiritual authority. The reign of the Holy Spirit is also the final stage of Christianity according to the *Évangile éternel*. Alexis reveals that he was able to arrive at a higher spiritual state by refusing to limit his knowledge to the boundaries enforced by the

Church. He opened his mind to heretical literature. Breaking free from the innocent ignorance advocated by Ballanche, Chateaubriand, and de Maistre is thus part of the necessary process of progression. Alexis' lack of guilt surrounding this loss of innocence attests to the idea that knowledge is not evil. Alexis recognizes his own progress towards knowledge and away from superstition as parallel to the intellectual progression of the entirety of humanity. His willingness to "fall" through sin is not unlike the fallen angels in Vigny, Quinet, and Lamartine who also seek a more complete worldly experience as a vital step in their quests for truth.

Modern religion is thus ideally presented as a balance of heart and mind. Human relationships in *Spiridion* are essential to the development of the heart. For Sand, an excess of knowledge without fraternity to keep that knowledge in check leads to an imbalance in the soul which threatens to render man unjust. In Alexis' story, atheism and justice are shown to be completely incompatible. Although Sand, like Mme de Staël, refrains from prescribing a specific religion, it is clear in *Spiridion* that the retention of some kind of religion is necessary to the preservation of justice because it nourishes human sympathies. Love emerges as a central doctrine of religion, just as it did for Saint-Simon, Lamennais, Lamartine, Quinet, Hugo, and others.

Especially in the conclusion to *Spiridion*, the trinity surfaces as an enduring symbol of unity for humanity. Alexis' three-word motto, "faith, hope, charity," and the three religious goals of the new doctrine, "wisdom, justice, perfection," emphasize the plurality of interwoven truths. There is not just one trinity but a palingenesis of convergent truths. Alexis' "Dieu-Perfection" ultimately combines science, justice and

love, three themes which we have already seen reworked in some form in all of the considerations on religion throughout this dissertation.

The final pages of *Spiridion* make an explicit connection between l'abbé Spiridion and the Évangile éternel. The discovery of Spiridion's manuscript packet reveals that the three stages of Christianity, "the reign of the Father, "the reign of the Son," and "the reign of the Holy Spirit" (which correspond to time periods associated with religious hierarchy, sentiment, and "libre examen") are complete. It is the dawn of a new, unknown religious era corresponding with the dawn of the nineteenth century. Religion, as prophesized by John the Evangelical and Jean de Parme, is due to be released from the Church and controlled directly by the people. Sand links this spiritual liberation to France's own political liberation. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are presented as the products of spiritual maturity. In the following chapter, we will see that Victor Hugo's *Le Pape* further envisions this return to a religion of the people.

## **Chapter 12: Hugo's "Dream Pope": Religion versus Republican Ideals in *Le Pape***

Victor Hugo's relationship with religion and spirituality is famously complex. The poet's belief in some kind of higher power, of souls, and of some mystical afterlife is unmistakable in the *Contemplations*, for example, which opens with a prayer-like poem evoking images of man's destiny spurred on by God<sup>22</sup>. Hugo's biographers seem to disagree on whether or not the young Victor Hugo was raised in the Church

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<sup>22</sup> "La mer, c'est le Seigneur, que misère ou bonheur,/ Tout destin montre et nomme;/ Le vent, c'est le Seigneur; l'astre, c'est le Seigneur; Le navire, c'est l'homme" (31).

traditions. In the opening chapter to Géraud Venzac's *Les Origines religieuses de Victor Hugo*, Venzac lists over twenty authors who have researched Hugo's religious background, categorizing them with a "oui" or "non" according to whether or not they accept the popular belief that Hugo was raised Catholic (10-11). Maurice Levaillant, who published his *La Crise mystique de Victor Hugo* in the same year (1954), confirms in the first sentence of his book that "Contrairement aux légendes, l'enfance de Victor Hugo ne fut point chrétienne; ni, davantage, son adolescence et sa jeune maturité" (13). For Levaillant, Hugo's brief flirtation with Catholicism begins and ends in the early 1820s when he was briefly drawn to the ultramontane circle "sous la double influence de Chateaubriand et de Lamennais" (15). Levaillant concedes nevertheless that, though he never embraced organized religion, "l'âme de Victor Hugo était sincèrement religieuse" (Levaillant 17). Hugo's work leaves no room for doubt on this point.

Venzac concludes that the only constant in Hugo's spirituality is his fidelity to the conscience: "La conscience élément stable, dans sa vie spirituelle orageuse" (15). Throughout Hugo's body of work, the conscience is indeed unmistakable and Republican ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity are consistently upheld as conscience-based universal truths. The value of religion for Hugo, it seems, rests on the conscience which one brings to it. It is not necessarily any particular religion which is good or bad, according to Hugo, but rather the sincerity of the individual who follows that religion. While Hugo's depiction of Claude Frollo in *Notre Dame de Paris* seems to condemn the decadence of the Church, for example, Bishop Myriel in *Les Misérables* provides a ray of hope that Christianity might still be interpreted as a

doctrine of love. The difference is not in the religion but in the individual. At the conclusion of *Religion et religions*, Hugo indicates that God's existence, like the sun, revolves around the Conscience and in the application of Justice, Equality, and Liberty which are truly the light of the world:

Il est! il est! Regarde, âme. Il a son solstice,  
La Conscience; il a son axe, la Justice;  
Il a son équinoxe, et c'est l'Égalité;  
Il a sa vaste aurore, et c'est la Liberté. (253)

In the last line of the poem, the poet urges men to stop "creating the sun." Organized religion is thus a pale imitation of the truth.

Hugo's spirituality might be compared to Rousseau's in that the source for truth is conscience-based. In agreement with Lamartine, however, Hugo goes beyond simply accepting the authority of the conscience to suggest that innate knowledge of goodness proves the existence of God. Whereas the Vicaire savoyard's faith chooses morality over mysticism, Hugo's work professes a sort of moral mysticism in which the two concepts are intertwined. Denis Saurat explains that Hugo's view of the infinite as unified with the individual is precisely what makes his spirituality unique: "pour lui, Dieu est le monde, mais Dieu est aussi une personne. Dieu est aussi vague que le Dieu du panthéisme, et, en même temps, aussi individuel que le Dieu du catholicisme" (10).

Hugo's *Le Pape*, published in 1878, uses this rapport between the individual and the infinite to guide its readers from religious orthodoxy to the discovery of a religion of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity through the personage of the "Pope." The poem, which recounts the dream of an unnamed pope, is structured as a dramatic

series of dialogues and monologues as the main character embarks on a quest to discover religious truth. In his biography of Victor Hugo, Graham Robb asserts that the pope character is Pius IX who died in February of 1878 but who was the reigning pope in 1874 when the poem was written (500). Hugo, however, does not indicate within the poem that his character portrays any particular pope. Given the universal nature of the poet's critiques, I am inclined to conclude that the poem is more of a commentary on the state of the Church in general than it is an attack on any particular pontiff.

The "pope," who serves as the hero of the epic falls asleep at the beginning of the first act, embarking on a discovery of religion in the world which is part revelation, part conscience. As the pope begins his slumber, mysterious "words in the sky," unattributed to any being but easily identifiable with the divine, suggest that man must be tired from "hating" his fellow man (5). The words seek to remind man of his innate knowledge of justice: "Homme ne te crois pas plongé dans l'inconnu;/ Tu connais tout, sachant que tu dois être juste" (6). Justice is thus established from the very beginning as the most essential foundation for humanity. Hugo's justice, however, is not the reason-based, purely secular "masculine" justice of contemporaries Michelet and Renan. The romantic softens his justice with sentiment, especially pity, and sprinkles it with traces of mysticism reminiscent of Lamartine or Saint-Simon "Heureux l'homme qui sent à travers son sommeil/ Que les étoiles sont sur la terre levées/ Pour protéger le faible et l'humble et leurs couvées" (6). Faced with the kings of the world, the pope character declares equality among men:

“L’homme à l’homme est égal” (9). He also establishes Christianity as a doctrine of love, just as other romantics had already done (11). For Hugo, this doctrine of love is directly related to pity, charity, and justice. His idyllic pope in this dream is associated with the best, most pure state of the human conscience. The dream pope endorses simplicity in spirituality: “Il n’est sous le grand ciel impénétrable et doux/ Qu’une pourpre, l’amour; qu’un trône, l’innocence” (13). Note that Hugo’s innocence differs from the concept of innocence in Chateaubriand in the *Génie du christianisme*. Whereas Chateaubriand’s concept of innocence was closely related to obedience and an absence of doubt, Hugo’s concept of innocence is more closely associated with the poor, the downtrodden, and the child-like regardless of their religious affiliation. Hugo’s sanctification of love and innocence as the only true royalty on earth suggests that this projection of the pope is simultaneously an anti-pope and yet more in tune with the true religion of humanity. Hugo’s dream pope epitomizes the ideal holy man. He is selfless, sincere, and wholly dedicated to humanity. The pope comes to realize that justice is a gift from God which should not be abused by men (14).

### The People’s Pope

Hugo humanizes the pope, bringing him closer to the concept of justice and subsequently reminding readers that the actual pope in the Vatican is too separated from humanity to truly understand the flock he leads. The poet shows the pope in this lucid dream to be confused by his own separation from humanity. He suddenly seeks to rejoin mankind. He bonds with his fellow men in admitting the human weaknesses they share: “Je suis comme vous tous, aveugle, ô mes amis!” (14). Such a confession

negates the pontiff's infallibility. Yet, in casting off his false pretense to perfection, the pope comes ever closer to the universal truth of equality. His declaration of solidarity with man is followed by a second confession of his general ignorance of the universe, a recognition of his weakness as an individual (and especially as an individual shielded from the rest of the world): "J'ignore l'homme, Dieu, le monde" (14). The pope is ignorant as to how or why he attained his role as supreme religious leader. He cannot understand why he would be superior to any other man. Embracing his conscience, he is transformed into a humble spiritual seeker: "La conscience humaine est ma sœur.../ ... je ne suis plus qu'un moine" (14). Like the doubting clergymen in George Sand's *Spiridion*, the fallen angels in Vigny, Quinet, and Lamartine, or Zola's Abbé Mouret or Pierre Froment, Hugo's pope simply wishes to rejoin humanity: "Que de marcher parmi l'humanité profonde,/ Que de créer des cœurs, que d'accroître la foi,..."/ [...] "Et je rentre chez Dieu, c'est-à-dire chez l'Homme./ Laisse-moi passer, peuple. Adieu, Rome" (15). God thus lives amongst the people and not above them. The pope, in leaving his throne, embarks on a quest to find the true God amongst humanity.

Hugo's pope then embarks on a mission eastward, disguised as an ordinary man, he begins by endeavoring to convince "le patriarche d'orient<sup>23</sup>" to renounce his power. In a moment reminiscent of Lamennais' *Paroles d'un croyant*, the pope reminds the bishop that his wealth has been amassed at the expense of the poor (17). The pope's understanding of God, as explained by Hugo, is that God is immense and uniquely concerned with ruling the universe. This immense and inconceivable God is therefore

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<sup>23</sup> According to Larousse, "patriarche" in this context refers to a bishop in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

nothing like the bureaucratic God suggested by Church law. The common Christian concept of God, in comparison to the reality of God, is exposed as ridiculously limited and false: “Un Jésus de carton! un Éternel de cire!” (21). The Eastern bishop uses a familiar ultramontane argument recalling Ballanche’s divine plan, Chateaubriand’s glorification of ignorance, and de Maistre’s unforgiving divine justice, all of which argue for inaction in matters of the Church: “Nul n’y peut rien changer, pas même toi, mon père” (24). The religious authority pardons inaction by insisting that nothing can be done. A chorus of bishops erupts and their responses multiply in opposition to the good pope’s perceived heresy. The first voice is again reminiscent of de Maistre: “Il faut que l’homme souffre afin que Dieu prospère” (24). Another seems to echo the likes of Ballanche and early Lamennais: “Le temple a Dieu pour base et pour cime les rois;/ Dieu croule si les rois tombent” (24). The bishops’ voices continue, evoking the feeling of an ignorant mob. Education is their enemy: “Le royaume des cieux est aux pauvres d’esprit;/ Donc peu d’écoles, point de science, un seul livre” (25). Above all, the Patriarch opposes liberty, equating it to “l’abîme” (26).

Although asleep, the pope declares himself awakened in the spiritual and intellectual sense since he is no longer duped by the Patriarch’s lies. The pope describes his awakening in terms of feeling. He feels “the immense weight of souls,” the spirit of humanity itself, and voices a realization that the true order of spirituality is the reverse of the present state of the Church. The only true pope, then, is an anti-pope: “Et je suis descendu, sachant que je montais” (28). The bishop tries to remind the pope of the “Dieu vengeur,” the fire and brimstone God brandished by the

ultramontanes who judges rather than sympathizes (28). The pope counters this outmoded image of God with the love-based figure of the martyred Christ (29). The Roman pontiff then frankly declares that his position neither represents God nor the people: “Je ne suis plus qu’un prince obéissant aux princes” (29).

Leaving the Eastern bishop, the pope heads for the dwellings of the people where he expects to find God. He first joins an impoverished family and attempts to be charitable according to his out-of-touch expectations. He discovers that his charity is insufficient. The pope offers bread to the poor man but finds he needs more to feed his family. He offers money for bed sheets but finds that they still need more for firewood. Finally, the holy man gives the needy everything they need to live, including *work*. Only then can the man declare his faith with a simple “J’y crois” (33). Through this scene, the poet shows that the poor would be inclined to believe in a God who reaches out to humanity through its priests.

The passage that follows this scene of goodwill depicts an inspired pope amongst the crowds of people. He gives a speech in which he calls the most miserable to join him, “Les damnés, les vaincus, les gueux, les incurables” (35). The scene is reminiscent of Luke 14:13-14 when Jesus invites the downtrodden to share in his feast and directly associates the miserable with the “just<sup>24</sup>.” The pope recognizes himself as one with the people. He connects to them through sympathetic feeling: “Je suis à vous, je suis l’un de vous, et je sens/ Dans mes os votre fièvre immense, agonisants!” (35). Again reversing the Catholic hierarchy, he recognizes his role as being in service to humanity (35). The concept of leaders serving their people rather than the people

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<sup>24</sup> “13. Mais lorsque vous faites un festin, conviez-y les pauvres, les estropiés, les boiteux et les aveugles; 14. Et vous serez heureux de ce qu’ils n’auront pas le moyen de vous le rendre; car Dieu vous le rendra lui-même au jour de la résurrection des justes.”

serving their leaders seems to represent a republican interpretation of religious structure. The pope here is reminiscent of the fallen angels we saw the works of Vigny, Lamartine, and Quinet in that he longs to come to Earth to experience authentic human sentiment. He brings the heavenly down to a human level where it can do the most good on Earth: “Je veux avoir ma part de toutes les douleurs;/ [...]/ Je suis l’universel étant le solitaire;” (36). This statement of universality through solitude is also reminiscent of Rousseau and Mme de Staël, as well as the general romantic trend towards meditation, in that personal internal reflection yields an external universal connection to humanity through the recognition of shared sentiment.

### Infallibility

The section entitled “L’*infaillibilité*” has no listed speaker, unlike the previous sections. This unidentified voice opposes the liberated pope with familiar conservative arguments that God’s knowledge is superior to scientific knowledge (39). This “*infallibility*” depicts God as jealous, irrational, and unjust: “Il damne l’univers pour le vol d’une pomme” (39). Man, who is able to perceive the fallacies in traditional divine reasoning, thus becomes more intelligent than God: “Donc son chien est le pape, et je comprends qu’en somme,/ L’aveugle étant le dieu, le clairvoyant soit l’homme” (40).

Again, the clergy is accused of degrading the divine by incorporating God into mundane law: “...imposant leur néant au mystère,/ Et tâchant d’ajouter à Dieu le ver de terre!” (42). The unidentified speaker goes on to condemn a system in which the laborer does not have the right to the fruits of his efforts. Comparing the people (the

working class) to “des brebis tondus,” he asserts that the role of the priest is that of a shepherd and asks “Où donc sont ces bergers qu’on appelle les prêtres?” (44). The priests thus seem absent to the flock they are tasked with leading, turning a blind eye to the suffering of mankind.

In the section entitled “Pensif devant le destin,” a still unidentified speaker states that everything asks for grace. Man’s destiny is to suffer blindly at the hand of God: “...le sort des neveux de Japhet<sup>25</sup>,/ C’est de souffrir...” (47). This exclamation exposes the dark side of religion. God was meant to comfort men (to guide through his representative shepherd-priests) but man is actually doomed to suffer according to popular religion: “Homme, il est Prométhée; ange, il est Lucifer” (48). The construction of the Church is depicted as a mission to intimidate rather than comfort men because, as the bishop explains, “nul ne doit sans crainte approcher l’Éternel” (49). The pope reminds the bishop, however, that the true purpose of the Church (again, in the spirit of Lamennais’ *Paroles d’un croyant*) is to save the people, to be charitable. For Hugo’s pope, the purpose of the Church is to house the poor, not to promote empty but glorious notions of God (151).

### On Love and War

Returning amongst humanity, the pope’s journey moves towards an examination of human law. “En voyant une nourrice” begins by recognizing women as the sacred givers of life (53). This is a theme which reverberates throughout the nineteenth century and we will visit it again in a later chapter on Auguste Comte and Emile Zola. Women, as the bearers of life, are depicted as proof of natural law. Human law,

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<sup>25</sup> According to medieval legend, the kings of France descended from Noah’s son Japhet (Demoule 744).

however, goes against natural law by passing judgment on human lives through the death penalty which Hugo asserts is not sanctioned by divine authority. The poet illustrates this concept with the example of a woman sentenced to death (55). The reader, like the pope character, experiences situational examples as he moves through humanity. Justice is mislabeled when it is left to be defined by men: “Attends qu’un enfant naisse, ordonne qu’on bâtisse/ Un tombeau sur sa tête, et dit: c’est la justice!” (56). A later section in *Le Pape*, entitled “Un échafaud,” finds the pope again as an onlooker at an execution. Witnessing the death penalty, the pope realizes that clearly “La loi commet un crime” (82). Human law is a reversal of divine law: “Mais vivants, votre loi, qu’est-elle et que peut-elle?” (85). Not only is human law useless in the eyes of Hugo’s pope, it is also destructive to humanity. The scene is reminiscent of Hugo’s famed criticism of the law, and especially of the death penalty, in *Le Dernier jour d’un condamné* and *Les Misérables*. For Mario Vargas Llosa, the ultimate purpose of Hugo’s sympathetic depiction of the poor in *Les Misérables* is to prove the existence of a higher power outside of the imperfect justice systems on Earth: “Et dans sa description de la société, ce que le roman tente désespérément de décrire, ce sont les traces d’une présence qui, sans se montrer jamais tout à fait, est la plus importante du livre, son contexte essentiel, le ciment de ces épisodes: la mystérieuse main de Dieu” (105). This same “hand of God” seems to push the pope along in his dream, presenting the pope with situations which provoke meditation, allowing his conscience to unfold.

Continuing this theme of injustice surrounding violence in humanity, *Le Pape* moves to the battlefield. War is depicted as incomprehensible when one is removed from the

automatic acceptance of its necessity. The poet forgets the meaning of war and remembers the true law of Christianity, which is essentially a law of love: “Pour le plaisir de qui vous exterminerez-vous?/Tous n’avez qu’un seul droit, c’est de vous aimer tous” (58). He recognizes that war is actually a waste of humanity. Humanity was supposed to be the Creator’s greatest work and yet man destroys himself by warring against his brother (58). According to the poet, humanity, in creating an angry God and arbitrary laws, has degraded its own intended greatness. By blending the monarchy with the Church, the people are subject to a system in which patriotism takes on sacred notions, convincing men to sacrifice their lives. These men are actually dying for a king, another man, who cares nothing for them. The entire system is a misunderstanding: “Vous mourrez pour vos rois. Eux, ils ne sont pas là” (60). Kings control men and take away their humanity, transforming them into animals (60-1).

The absurdity of war is even more pronounced in “La Guerre civile” (63). Public streets are described as a battle field. Humanity is meant to be unified as one man. In killing each other, they kill themselves: “Vous vous entr’égorgez, fils de la même France!” even though “vous êtes le même homme” (63). Being human, however, is described as experiencing joy, work, and love: “L’homme a pour droit, devoir et fonction la joie,/ Le travail et l’amour...” (64). Man, according to the poet, has the right to happiness. It is his duty to work and his ultimate purpose is to love. He finishes “La Guerre civile” by reminding men that they are all nourished by the same mother, evoking the imagery of the mother put to death in “En voyant une nourrice.” His final appeal to them is a call for brotherhood: “Arrêtez! Arrêtez! Fraternité!” (65).

One stanza, emphasized through spacing which separates it from the rest, shows solitude as the way to regain perspective. Among the crowds, the madness is too close to perceive. The apostle removes himself in order to connect with “the night,” to understand the universe outside of the bounds of the present:

Tout fait.  
Mais l’apôtre se sait écouté par la nuit;  
Et n’est-ce pas qu’il doit parler aux solitudes,  
O Dieu, les profondeurs étant les multitudes? (67)

A God-like voice seems to speak back to man in the beginning of the second part of the first act entitled “Parle devant lui dans l’ombre” (69). He calls man into action to bond with his fellow men: “Vivez, marchez, pensez, espérez, aimez-vous./ Nul n’est seul ici-bas. Tout a besoin de tous” (69). He condemns religious violence and war in general, distancing violence from the concept of liberty: “La liberté n’a pas l’assassin pour ministre” (71). Justice, he says, must be kept pure and clearly defined as an extension of goodness: “Jamais, non, même ayant la justice pour soi,/ On ne peut la servir par le deuil et l’effroi” (72). Justice, then, cannot be attained through the fear that high clergy hopes to inspire with its grandiose representations of the almighty. Goodness is meaningless without innocence: “L’aube est blanche; et le bien n’est le bien – qu’innocent” (72).

### Christianity and the Church: A Blessing and a Curse

Part II, “Malédiction et bénédiction,” opens with a voice announcing that “Les malédictions sont sur les multitudes” (73). Priests, despite the fact that they administer blessings in God’s name, are described as part of the curse: “Les prêtres sont pareils à des gouffres ouverts;/ Qui regarde dedans voit des choses affreuses” (73). The voice questions humanity which it views as forever ignorantly grappling

with life (74). Somehow man has lost the concept of life as a blessing: “La vie est une dette et la mort un paiement,/ Satan règne; le mal fait loi; l’enfer, c’est l’ordre” (74). He categorizes all organized religions together including those of India, Greece, Africa, Egypt, and the Vatican: “Tout menace. Partout les peuples sont maudits” (74). Seeing terror and grieving everywhere, the voice finally cries out for hope: “Oh! Disais-je, où donc est l’espérance?” (75). Jesus is then introduced as a figure of comfort, as a symbol of the religion of love and fraternity: “Il me semble sentir quelqu’un de secourable,/ Et je vis un rayon sur l’homme misérable,/ Et je levai mes yeux au ciel et j’aperçus,/ Là-haut, le grand passant mystérieux, Jésus” (76). Jesus thus appears as a sort of revelation announced by a *feeling*<sup>26</sup>.

This moment of hope ushered in by the sight of the messiah of love is followed by yet another monologue unattributed to any particular character, entitled “En voyant un petit enfant.” Carrying through with the theme of hope, the child represents innocence and renewal: “Il est le regard vierge, il est la bouche rose;/ On ne sait avec quel ange invisible il cause” (77). The presence of a child provokes self-reflection in adults: “Dès qu’un enfant est là, nous nous examinons” (78). Innocence is presented as eternal but also associated with childhood which is a temporary state: “Cette blancheur sans ombre et sans fond, l’innocence” (78). Youth is the mythical golden age that humanity hopes for. It is, in many ways, unattainable since youth is forever in the past as all people grow older. Yet, youth is also eternal because young people are continuously created through the life cycle, continuously providing hope for a

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<sup>26</sup> In poem XVIII of *Voix intérieures*, Hugo suggests that Christianity as a looming sentiment existed before Jesus’ philosophy. “Dans Virgile parfois, dieu tout près d’être un ange,/ Le vers porte à sa cime une lueur étrange./ C’est que, rêvant déjà à ce qu’à présent on sait,/ Il chantait presque à l’heure où Jésus vagissait.” [...] “C’est qu’il est un des cœurs qui, déjà, sous les cieus,/ Dorait le jour naissant du Christ mystérieux.”

better future. Consistent with Hugo's veneration of children's connection to the divine in poems such as "La vie aux champs," children in *Le Pape* thus become the spiritual ideal, the new model for man's imitation: "Restez, notre prison par vous devient un temple./ Rayonnez, innocents, et donnez-nous l'exemple,..." (79).

### Meditation and Enlightenment

"Pensif devant la nuit" leads the reader again into contemplating the value of meditation. The pope's journey throughout the dream illustrates the power of internal contemplation to find truth in the face of social and religious situations which regularly obscure reality by promoting human law over divine law which is defined in the poem as centered around love, work, and justice. The nameless voice in this contemplation begins by explaining the different roles assigned to religion and science. Religion and science, the voice says, are not mutually exclusive: "La prière contemple et la science observe" (89). Science and progress thus work together towards a common goal of discovering and understanding universal truths. Justice, however, is the only immovable force in the universe: "La justice, dit l'Ombre. Aucun vent ne l'emporte" (90). Change is portrayed as part of God's plan, as it was according to Ballanche, Saint-Simon and others. The role of the priest is not to resist change but to guide man through it: "C'est pourquoi, nous pasteurs, nous devons faire en sorte/ Que l'homme reste bon et sincère au milieu/ De tous les changements d'équilibre de Dieu" (90).

"Entrant à Jérusalem" manages to sanctify France's "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" as divine ideals: "Plus d'échafaud. Devant le ciel bleu Liberté, Égalité devant la mort, Fraternité/ Devant le Père. Aimons. Force, aide la faiblesse" (91). The poet

incorporates the national motto into a general plea to love one's enemy<sup>27</sup>: "Éclairez qui vous nuit, guérissez qui vous blesse./ Paix et pardon, soyez cléments aux criminels" (91). He pleads for love, hope, and brotherhood (92). In a rather confusing conclusion to this section, a voice speaks to the pope which also seems to be the voice of the pope himself. Could it be that the voice of conscience and the voice of the Eternal are one according to the poet? The pope addresses the Church proclaiming that Jerusalem is the true holy city: "Je prends Jérusalem et je vous laisse Rome,/ Jérusalem étant le véritable lieu" (92). The spirit of Christianity, then, is not in Rome with the Church but in Jerusalem where the sacrifice of the messiah was made: "L'ombre est au Capitole et l'âme est au Calvaire" (92).

In the final moments before the end of the revelatory dream, God speaks out against the kings and their "pourpre" (93). Eternity is depicted as man's invisible judge; "d'invisibles yeux" (93). The pope's succinct response sums up Christianity's simple, ideal message: "Peuples, aimez-vous. Paix à tous" (93). Man responds to the pope for the first time, blessing him: "Sois béni, père" (93). God then replies with a reciprocal blessing: "Fils, sois béni" (93). Simple love and peace are all that is sacred.

The entirety of the second scene is just one line from the pope. Upon his waking, the pope fails to take his dream to heart, exclaiming: "Quel rêve affreux je viens de faire!" (95). Without a conscience, the pope's place in the world is useless or, worse, destructive. Moreover, the role of any formal religious leader is nullified when the dogma can be reduced to a common denominator of "love" and "peace" which require no instruction, no external ceremony. Jules Michelet argued in the *Bible de l'humanité* that the true "bible" is in man's actions, in the history of humanity. For

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<sup>27</sup> Compare to Matthew 5:44

Hugo, God's book is indeed written in man, as he explains in "Les Mages"<sup>28</sup>, but one must be willing to read not only his own "book" but the stories written in the lives of others. As the poet writes in "La Vie aux champs": "tout homme est un livre où Dieu lui-même écrit./ Chaque fois qu'en mes mains un de ces livres tombe,/ Volume où vit une âme et que scelle la tombe,/ J'y lis" (43). According to Hugo, then, man learns universal truths not just through the conscience but through his contact with other human beings. Le Pape alleges that the pope's failure in his real life – outside of the dream – to connect with humanity inhibits him from internalizing divine revelation, rendering him completely ignorant to God's message of liberty, fraternity, and equality. For Paul Bénichou, Hugo therefore presents the poet, blessed with the gift of sympathizing with both the divine and humanity, as the ideal replacement for the priest as "mage" or divine intermediary to the people. The function of this intermediary is both spiritual and political: "La mission humaine du Mage a plusieurs noms, Science, Progrès, Liberté, mais elle a pour objet en toutes choses de mettre les peuples debout, de les instituer peuples" (Les Mages 1462).

### Conclusion

Hugo's *Le Pape* imagines the pope on a voyage, undertaken through a prophetic dream, which reveals Christianity to him as a doctrine of love which ideally supports justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. Hugo's pope is humanized, transforming into a pope of the people. He proves himself to be dedicated to the liberty of mankind and in doing so liberates himself from the Vatican walls which hindered his own personal

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<sup>28</sup> "Pourquoi donc faites-vous des prêtres/ Quand vous en avez parmi vous?/ Les esprits conducteurs des êtres/ Portent un signe sombre et doux./ Nous naissons tous ce que nous sommes,/ Dans les ténèbres des berceaux;/ Son effrayant doigt invisible/ Écrit sous leur crâne la bible/ Des arbres, des monts et des eaux" (477).

growth as well as the growth of Christianity itself. Among the people, the pope is faced with his ignorance of the universe. Like the fallen angels depicted by Vigny, Quinet, and Lamartine, or the doubting clergymen in George Sand's *Spiridion* and Zola's *Trois villes*, Hugo's pope sheds the illusions of religiosity and joins humanity on Earth in order to truly discover the mysteries of the universe through reason, sentiment, and valuable human interaction.

Along the way, the pope confronts the "patriarche d'orient" who takes on the role of a sort of mirror image of the pope himself before his conversion. The pope's interaction with his doppelganger is almost an interior dialogue. Having experienced authentic revelation, the pope finally sees God as Hugo does. The true God, according to *Le Pape*, is immense and absolutely incomparable to the jealous God championed by the Church. The "patriarche" and his army of bishops attempt to refute Hugo's enlightened pope with familiar ultramontane arguments charging that man is incapable of comprehending God's reason. The pope, however, awakened to the "truth" of the force presented by the spirit of humanity, remains unswayed by faulty logic. Humbleness emerges as the truly divine state. The pope's greatest realization is that he has no power and is simply a "prince obeying princes." Recognizing himself as one with the people, the pope connects with his fellow man through sympathy and charity. The true purpose of the Church, he says, is not to glorify God but to house the poor.

Examining the unnecessary violence committed by human law, the pope comes to realize that justice on earth, as it is interpreted by governments, too often destroys the very people that it is supposed to protect. Similarly, on the battlefield, human life is

shown to be needlessly wasted at the command of kings who, like the pope before his conversion, are absent to their people.

Hugo's pope receives wisdom through observation and meditation, illustrating the power of solitude to offer perspective on life and the universe. As a result of this meditation, many of the revelatory messages within the poem are delivered by disembodied voices. Among these revelations are calls to goodness, justice, and innocence, as well as a plea to the maddening crowd to keep liberty free of violence so that "goodness" might preserve its innocence. A voice also delivers blessings and curses upon the people, cursing the priests for failing to protect humanity but blessing the innocent, especially the children, through the introduction of the messiah as a messenger of love. Yet another voice confirms science and progress as integral to the divine plan, reconciling the long fought battle between reason and faith.

In the second act, the pope's waking rejection of all he has experienced is one short line. Nevertheless, Hugo's condemnation of the pope's conscious refusal, and the consequences of this denial on the people he betrays, speaks volumes in the space of the empty page. As Graham Robb has observed, Hugo's dream pope essentially transforms into Hugo's own vision of himself (500). The poet-pope thus emerges as the ideal spiritual leader of modern people.

### **Chapter 13: The Gospel of Renan: Imagining the Historical Jesus in Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus***

As we have seen in the works of Saint-Simon, Lamennais, and George Sand, mid-nineteenth century religious thought increasingly considered the idea that religion might be able to progress with the times alongside modern science. In his 1863 *Vie de Jésus*, Ernest Renan explains that Jesus founded a “religion dans l’humanité” in much the same way that Socrates founded philosophy and Aristotle founded science (461). Renan explains that religion, like the sciences, is forever in the process of being discovered (461). Moreover, for the historian, religion can be perfected through the scientific lens: “Par notre extrême délicatesse dans l’emploi des moyens de conviction, par notre sincérité absolue et notre amour désintéressé de l’idée pure, nous avons fondé, nous tous qui avons voué notre vie à la science, un nouvel idéal de moralité” (451). In *Vie de Jésus*, Renan attempts to apply modern research methods to create an exclusively human portrayal of Jesus. His work seeks to systematically debunk the legends which contributed to Jesus’ supernatural legacy. For Renan, religion is an entirely human phenomenon made up of “les manifestations du Dieu caché au fond de la conscience humaine” (LIX). By focusing on the personage of Christianity’s founder, Renan sets out to reconnect the “religion de l’humanité” with its humble human origins. The author approaches the historical Jesus through a meticulous critique of the New Testament informed by other holy books (most notably the Old Testament and the Talmud), studies written by fellow historians and,

perhaps most interestingly, Renan's own experience living in Galilee from 1860-1861 (LIII).

#### Biography rather than Theology

For Renan, the principle weakness of the four gospels is that they all rely on the memory and the personal point of view of their respective authors: "La plus belle chose du monde est ainsi sortie d'une élaboration obscure et complètement populaire" (xxi-xxii). Moreover, the memories which make up the gospels were, according to Renan, conceived in an environment where the impression of events was more important to the authors than the authentic retelling of the events themselves: "L'Esprit était tout; la lettre n'était rien" (xxii). For Renan, Mark and Matthew are working from unreliable memories and Luke is an "interpreter" who reworks the gospels of Mark and Matthew (XL). Memory and perception are often cited throughout the book as influences on the story of Jesus. Renan's interpretation of Jesus' legend is that he was different men to different people: sometimes the "Son of Man," sometimes the "Son of God," the "Son of David" or simply the "Son" (251-2). Even these multiple identities, however, are for Renan a sign of humanity's involvement in the shaping of its heroes: "Il n'est pas de grande fondation qui ne repose sur une légende. Le seul coupable en pareil cas, c'est l'humanité qui veut être trompée" (254). The people make religion possible by willing their own deception. Throughout *Vie de Jésus*, the author shows the involvement of the people in shaping their own savior, highlighting the legends they invented, the miracles they wanted to believe in, and the savior who wanted nothing more than to be a part of humanity rather than be above it. Renan explains that when first approaching his work, he set

out to write about doctrine but soon understood “que l’histoire n’est pas un simple jeu d’abstractions, que les hommes y sont plus que les doctrines” (LIV). It was not theory, he says, that created religious innovations. Rather, it was men like Moses, Mohammed, Jesus, the saints, Luther, and Calvin who changed the course of religious history (LIV, 45-6). People make history and, therefore, the study of those people is a study of the doctrines to which they contributed: “Faire l’histoire de Jésus, de saint Paul, de saint Jean, c’est faire l’histoire des origines du christianisme” (LV).

Although Renan considers his biographical approach to be scientific, the book is also clearly influenced by his own imagination. In his introduction, Renan presents this first volume of the *Histoire des origines du christianisme* as the antithesis of the subjective accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It soon becomes clear, however, that the biographer is in essence writing his own gospel. From the secular historian’s point of view, the New Testament is a collection of fictional biographies meant to manipulate history in order to provide a virtuous model for society through the legend of the man-god Jesus: “On comprend maintenant, ce semble, le genre de valeur historique que j’attribue aux évangiles. Ce ne sont ni des biographies à la façon de Suétone<sup>29</sup>, ni les légendes fictives à la manière de Philostrate<sup>30</sup>; ce sont des biographies légendaires” (XLIV). While Renan concedes that “En un sens, de telles histoires populaires vaudraient mieux qu’une histoire solennelle et officielle,” his work is obviously meant to correct the misconceptions perpetuated by popular legends and to prove that the historical Jesus was a mortal man, whose story was

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<sup>29</sup> According to Larousse, Caius Suetonius Tranquillus was a Roman historian who lived from 69 to 122 A.D.

<sup>30</sup> According to the *Encyclopédie de la littérature*, there were four sophists who were known as Philostratus. Renan is possibly referring to the Athenian Flavius Philostratus (born around 170 and died around 245 A.D.) who wrote adventure stories with moral and spiritual overtones.

transformed by various interpretations (XLV). Renan suggests that the Bible ignores Jesus' existence as a human being, focusing solely on his role as a spiritual leader: "Uniquement attentifs à mettre en saillie l'excellence du maître, ses miracles, son enseignement, les évangélistes montrent une entière indifférence pour tout ce qui n'est pas l'esprit même de Jésus" (XLV). For Renan, it was Jesus' personal charm as a "fils de l'homme" that secured his reputation as a prophet, not the miracles he allegedly performed (162). According to Renan, Jesus' greatest religious innovation was that he used man's sense of humanity to promote a lasting conception of the human relationship with God as a father-son relationship (87). Jesus, he says, appealed to the people through universally accessible metaphors which reduced man to the role of a child dependent on a heavenly father (191).

### The Holy Land

The physical setting of the gospels stands out for Renan as an essential but forgotten tool for analyzing the New Testament. During his two-year stay in Galilee, he recounts that he visited nearly all of the important places associated with the story of Jesus and claims that physically being in those places solidified his comprehension of Biblical accounts: "L'accord frappant des textes et des lieux, la merveilleuse harmonie de l'idéal évangélique avec le paysage qui lui servit de cadre furent pour moi comme une révélation" (LIII). Renan reveals an underlying idea that his own "revelation" elevates his work to a "fifth gospel." Through a combination of exposure to the physical setting and his research, Renan describes having "seen" the real Jesus:

J'eus devant les yeux un cinquième évangile, lacéré, mais  
lisible encore, et désormais, à travers les récits de Matthieu et

de Marc, au lieu d'un être abstrait, qu'on dirait n'avoir jamais existé, je vis une admirable figure humaine vivre, se mouvoir. Pendant l'été, ayant dû monter à Ghazir, dans le Liban, pour prendre un peu de repos, je fixai en traits rapides l'image qui m'était apparue, et il en résulta cette histoire. (LIV)

Renan's analysis of Christianity's place in society is sometimes contradictory. While he works to highlight Jesus' advancements in morality and demystify his legacy by debunking miracles and emphasizing Jesus' naiveté, he also feels the need to defend Jesus against the speculation of the philosophes and scientific-minded contemporaries who, he says, only appreciate Jesus as "un grand moraliste, un bienfaiteur de l'humanité" (124). Renan explains that he supports a certain level of secularity (for example, he does not believe in the existence of a "soul") but he wishes to distinguish himself from those who would discount religion altogether: "mais ne croyons pas qu'avec les simples idées de bonheur ou de moralité individuelle on remue le monde" (125).

Throughout *Vie de Jésus*, the growth of Christianity is attributed to a variety of situational influences. Because Jesus' story grew out of popular legend, Renan makes the case that popular beliefs exaggerated the deeds that their messiah actually performed in his lifetime (XLVI). For Renan, miracles only happen in the times and places where people are subject to believing in them and first century Galileans, he claims, did believe strongly in the supernatural (L). As a historian, Renan's goal is to strike a balance between truth and inevitable error: "le devoir de l'historien est de l'interpréter et de rechercher quelle part de vérité, quelle part d'erreur il peut receler" (LII-III). The author walks the line between fulfilling his duties as a rational researcher and a man who, at times, seems to want to believe. As Renan himself explains

Pour faire l'histoire d'une religion, il est nécessaire, premièrement, d'y avoir cru (sans cela, on ne saurait comprendre par quoi elle a charmé et satisfait la conscience humaine); en second lieu, de n'y plus croire d'une manière absolue; car la foi absolue est incompatible avec l'histoire sincère. (LIX)

These two sides of the balance are evident in Renan's approach which aims to maintain respect for Jesus' teachings while challenging the portrayal of the man himself. Reluctant to discredit the usefulness of Christianity as a basis for secular morality, Renan makes a point to reinforce the value of legend despite its errors. He appreciates the Bible as a historical document (XLViii). At times, he even seems touched by the "superior truths" found within Christian philosophy and is quick to defend the Bible's place in history despite his own criticisms: "Ces détails ne sont pas vrais à la lettre; mais ils sont vrais d'une vérité supérieure; ils sont plus vrais que la nue vérité, en ce sens qu'ils sont la vérité rendue expressive et parlante, élevée à la hauteur d'une idée" (XLViii). By the same token, "Les traditions même en partie erronées renferment une portion de vérité que l'histoire ne peut négliger" (XLIX).

#### Renan's Historical Jesus: Historical Context or Historical Fiction?

*Vie de Jésus* attempts to put Jesus' life into perspective in relation to early Christianity's place in the world and Jesus' place in his own society. Renan begins the first chapter with an insistence on the importance of the shift from ancient polytheistic religions to a monotheistic religion of *unity* (1). He defines religion as the belief in some kind of existence beyond mortality and explains that man has long felt the need for religion: "L'homme, dès qu'il se distingua de l'animal, fut religieux, c'est-à-dire qu'il vit, dans la nature, quelque chose au delà de la mort" (2). He faults

ancient Eastern religions for their superstitions and claims that they lack an emphasis on morality and liberty (4). For Renan, even if Christianity is faulty, it is still “la religion de l’humanité” and he credits the Torah for planting the “germes d’égalité sociale et de moralité” (6). Jewish culture, he says, had already created an ideal environment for a sacrificial savior. Commenting on the Old Testament, Renan notes: “Des accents inconnus se font déjà entendre pour exalter le martyr et célébrer la puissance de l’homme de douleur” (8). Popular sentiment favored social change. Renan’s descriptions of the utopian dreams shared by ancient Israeli society recalls the numerous social theories of eighteenth and nineteenth century France (10). Renan describes ancient Israel’s Law as making up its “patrie” (10). While most ancient laws had been overwhelmingly abstract, Jewish law, he says, dealt directly with human happiness and morality (11). For Renan, Judaism’s great innovation was that it placed the hope for paradise in the future creating the possibility for hope: “Toute l’antiquité indo-européenne avait placé le paradis à l’origine [...] Israël mettait l’âge d’or dans l’avenir” (11). According to *Vie de Jésus*, Judaism had already made progress towards removing superstition and materialism from religion and promoting pity as a virtue (12-14). Renan further praises Judaism for being a religion free from theology or mystical doctrines, noting that the most orthodox were the first to reject these “imaginings particulières” (16). What Renan seems to appreciate most about Judaism is its concreteness: “Nul *credo*; nul symbole théorique” (17). Despite the historian’s insistence on resisting imaginative interpretation, Renan’s description of Jesus’ life often borders on historical fiction and occasionally reveals traces of romantic influences on the author. He highlights, for example, an alleged

sensitivity and melancholy looming over Biblical times which recall the *mal du siècle*: “la grande ère de paix où l’on entrait et cette impression de sensibilité mélancholique qu’éprouvent les âmes après les longues périodes de révolution, faisaient naître de toute part les espérances illimitées” (18). At times, the researcher takes liberties in describing the prophet’s personal thoughts and feelings. In Renan’s commentary on Jesus’ Passover pilgrimages to Jerusalem, the historian refrains from his usual list of scholarly citations and simply asserts “Quoique Jésus attachât dès lors peu de valeur au pèlerinage, il s’y prêtait pour ne pas blesser l’opinion juive, avec laquelle il n’avait pas encore rompu” (205). Moments like these remind the reader that Renan, despite his sometimes detailed research trail, interprets Jesus’ life in much the way the apostle’s did – despite the historian’s criticisms of their dubious attestations. He again makes conclusions based on his own imagined historical Jesus in chapter XVI where he explains that miracles were a social expectation. For Renan, Jesus performed miracles reluctantly: “Les miracles de Jésus furent une violence que lui fit son siècle, une concession qui lui arrache la nécessité passagère” (268). Commenting on Jesus’ stay with Mary Magdalene and Martha, Renan again cannot resist adding his own details to the narrative asserting that this was the place where Jesus “oubliait les dégoûts de la vie publique” (342). Renan’s analysis of Jesus’ feelings systematically serve to support the author’s opinion throughout the book that Jesus only wanted to be human, not supernatural.

Renan similarly shapes the reader’s concept of Biblical society by adding details which create an atmosphere of revolution and frame the author’s theory that the first

century was an “incubation” period which prepared Galilee for the moment when someone would step into the role of the “Son of God”:

Ce mélange confus de claires vues et de songes, cette alternative de déceptions et d’espérances, ces aspirations sans cesse refoulées par une odieuse réalité, trouvèrent enfin leur interprète dans l’homme incomparable auquel la conscience universelle a décerné le titre de Fils de Dieu, et cela avec justice, puisqu’il a fait faire à la religion un pas auquel nul autre ne peut et probablement ne pourra jamais être comparé.  
(18)

The historian even takes some poetic license in describing daily life at the time, in all of its idyllic simplicity, emphasizing that it was the perfect atmosphere for dreaming and happiness (25-6). For example, Renan indulges in a moment of appreciation for the beauty of Jewish women. He goes so far as to imagine a somewhat sensual scene describing the simple beauty of Mary carrying her water urn (27).

Renan repeatedly returns to an emphasis on the pastoral setting of Galilee as a strong influence on Jesus. The author notes that Jesus always preached outdoors and in fields and that he despised the city (165-6). He notes that Jesus’ most inspired moments took place in the mountains (64-5). Galilean society was a peaceful “people agricole...peu soucieux de luxe” (65). For Renan, Jesus’ setting gave the entire Christian faith an aura of pastoral sentimentality: “Toute l’histoire du christianisme naissant est devenue de la sorte une délicieuse pastorale” (67). Renan ends the fourth chapter, focused on Jesus’ youth, by implying that Jesus found God in nature and that Christianity is therefore, at its core, a form of natural religion (70).

In *Vie de Jésus*, sentiment emerges as a central theme of early Christianity. The power of sentiment allowed Christianity to connect morally with the people: “en morale, la vérité ne prend quelque valeur que si elle passe à l’état de sentiment...”

(92). Renan presents Christianity as the first religions founded on the heart, a true “religion de l’humanité”(223). According to Renan, Jesus “dédaignait tout ce qui n’était pas la religion de cœur” (224). To illustrate Christianity’s sentimental foundation, Renan insists on the enthusiasm of female followers who influenced the religion (73). In chapter IX, “Les Disciples de Jésus,” Renan points out that women seemed especially welcoming to the prophet when he arrived in Bethsaida (151). Fellow historian, Jules Michelet, had previously denounced feminine influence in Christianity as a negative impact on human reason in his 1845 *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*. Renan, in contrast, judges that the lack of female influence on ancient Jewish society prevented “tout développement délicat” and that feminine influence enhanced Christianity’s human bond (515). Here, Renan’s interpretation recalls Mme de Staël’s description of the influence that women had on Roman society versus the less sensitive Greek society. According to Renan, “Elles apportaient dans la secte nouvelle un élément d’enthousiasme et de merveilleux, dont on saisit déjà l’importance”(151). He highlights Mary Magdalene’s role after Jesus’ death as someone who promoted faith in the resurrection and mentions the support given to Jesus by Joanna, Suzanna and others (151-2).

#### Jesus, “the Young Jewish Democrat”

By bringing Jesus closer to a mundane existence, Renan makes him a man of the people. Although Renan’s analysis discredits the mysticism surrounding the religious figure, he also creates a new myth that brings his historical Jesus closer to the people and thus closer to the modern spirit of justice. Renan is able to rewrite Christianity

from the beginning, strengthening the focus on morality and social reform while playing down the mysticism which tends to make religion more abstract. Renan recounts, for example, that Jesus' education was not formal. Rather, it was a moral education transmitted through the bonds of a close-knit society which Renan views positively compared to modern individualism (31). He makes a point of illustrating the idea that Jesus would have had no Greek or Roman influence whatsoever (32-3). Renan describes Jesus as charmingly naive with a worldview limited to his idyllic pastoral setting: "Les charmantes impossibilités dont fourmillent ses paraboles, quand il met en scène les rois et les puissants, prouvent qu'il ne conçut jamais la société aristocratique que comme un jeune villageois qui voit le monde à travers le prisme de sa naïveté" (39). Everything the man learned, according to *Vie de Jésus* was through society and conscience.

Renan also recounts that the people expected the messiah to perform miracles: "Quant aux miracles, ils passaient, à cette époque, pour la marque indispensable du divin et pour le signe des vocations prophétiques" (256). Miracles, he says, were also often exaggerated (259). Renan calls into question the definition of a miracle by defending Jesus' belief that he had the power to cure the sick. According to Renan, Jewish society at the time overwhelmingly considered diseases as being caused by moral deficiencies. Since Jesus considered himself morally superior, Renan reasons that the prophet would also have thought himself able to cure the sick (260-1). Following this line of reasoning, the definition of a miracle changes depending on man's understanding of the universe. Jesus' lack of knowledge about positive science, he says, kept the Nazarene from doubting certain popular superstitions (40). Renan

describes a people steeped in the supernatural, so much so that miracles were considered commonplace: “Le merveilleux n’était pas pour lui exceptionnel; c’était l’état normal” (41).

Renan emphasizes the foreignness of first century Jewish culture in an effort to convince modern day readers that the conditions through which Christianity came about were extraordinarily different from modern Europe and, what is more, that these conditions (which seem extraordinary in retrospect) were commonplace for Biblical Jews. Jesus was created by his environment: “le philosophe serait mieux placé qu’en aucun lieu du monde pour contempler le cours des choses humaines” (29). Society’s values were changing and for Renan, Jesus became a tool for expressing those changes on behalf of the people. He did not bring the change. Rather, he voiced it. Jesus thus emerges as a product of his environment, as an interpreter of the collective conscience of his time. The first few chapters of the biography are devoted to establishing Jesus’ banality and the idea that any mystical qualities that might have been attributed to his early life were likely invented by his followers. He makes a point of noting, for example, that even the name “Jesus” is completely insignificant and was a common name despite the fact that some have read unnecessary significance into the name (21).

As the story advances, Renan increasingly fixes upon the revolutionary aspect of Jesus’ life, depicting him as a social reformer. From Renan’s point of view, Jesus’ success as a prophet came from his determination to “créer, affirmer, agir” (458). He compares Jesus’ plight to that of other great philosophers such as Socrates and Spinoza noting: “L’opposition fait toujours la gloire d’un pays. Les plus grands

hommes d'une nation sont ceux qu'elle met à mort" (49). His description of Jesus at times depicts the prophet as a rabble-rouser who took pleasure in breaking rules and upsetting society (187). Jesus was not a reformer of Judaism, he says, but a "destructeur de judaïsme" (221). Multiple times throughout the book, the author refers to Jesus as a "révolutionnaire."

Jesus' main concern, he says, was to establish "un ordre nouveau" to govern humanity (117). For Renan, Jesus' movement was above all a "révolution morale" above all: "C'est sur les hommes et par les hommes eux-mêmes qu'il voulait agir" (120). Renan, like Lamennais and Saint-Simon, regards Jesus' doctrine as a doctrine of liberty (121-2). The historian even occasionally waxes poetic about the freedom enjoyed by the disciples, implying that part of the draw of Christianity in modern times is the distant collective cultural memory of the freedom enjoyed by these ancient people: "Dans nos civilisations affairées, le souvenir de la vie libre de Galilée a été comme le parfum d'un autre monde, comme une 'rosée de l'Hermon,' qui a empêché la sécheresse et la vulgarité d'envahir entièrement le champ de Dieu"<sup>31</sup> (177).

Renan, however, criticizes Jesus for diminishing the important role that citizenship plays in bonding a community because Jesus' concept of the "Kingdom of God" was a social model which devalued civic duty: "Le christianisme, en ce sens, a beaucoup contribué à affaiblir le sentiment des devoirs du citoyen et à livrer le monde au pouvoir absolu des faits accomplis" (122). Because recompense is expected in the afterlife, not enough emphasis is placed on man's duties towards humanity in the here and now. Conversely, Renan praises Christianity for expanding man's social

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<sup>31</sup> In Psalms 133:3 the "dew of Mount Hermon" is associated with eternal life.

awareness to include all of humanity rather than simply focusing on his own country: “...il a révélé au monde cette vérité que la patrie n’est pas tout, et que l’homme est antérieur et supérieur au citoyen” (123).

According to Renan, Jesus’ true mission was a complete reversal of the hierarchical social system: “une immense révolution sociale où les rangs seront intervertis” (128-9). Like Lamennais, he emphasizes the “bonne nouvelle annoncée aux pauvres” as Jesus’ most crucial moral message (128-9). Renan points out that the use of the term “brother” by Jesus’ disciples supports the idea that the group had no hierarchy (157). Moreover, Renan’s Jesus preaches that God’s followers were supposed to ignore their earthly needs, “de regarder les soucis de la vie comme un mal qui étouffe en l’homme le germe de tout bien” (170-1). This emphasis on physical sacrifice as a sign of holiness made it easier to reverse the social order so that the poor could be considered the most loved by God (171). Renan sees in Jesus’ approach “un élément communiste” (172). Although he notes that the Old Testament is full of passages which support charity for the poor, Renan actually criticizes Jesus’ intense focus on the poor as a flaw in the durability of his doctrine: “On entrevoit sans peine, en effet, que ce goût exagéré de pauvreté ne pouvait être bien durable” (180-2). He links the extreme focus on poverty to thirteenth century brotherhoods, such as certain Franciscan orders, who rallied behind “le banner de l’Évangile éternel” and took vows of extreme poverty (182)<sup>32</sup>. For Renan, these otherwise impractical dreams of “la religion nouvelle” at least served to teach humanity that man “does not live on bread alone” (184). Such doctrines provided hope to the destitute. According to *Vie de Jésus*, Christianity’s most progressive quality is that it is built upon promoting

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<sup>32</sup> See chapter on George Sand and the *Évangile éternel*

hope in the power of humanity: “... le christianisme réunit les deux conditions des grands succès en ce monde, un point de départ révolutionnaire et la possibilité de vivre” (127).

Renan’s interpretation of Jesus focuses on the potential for social change which fueled Christianity’s doctrine of hope. Although Renan sees nothing original in the prophet’s belief in the apocalypse, he points out that Jesus’ prophecy is unique in that it promoted a message of renewed life. Jesus’ apocalyptic dream “recélait un germe de vie, qui, introduit grâce à une enveloppe fabuleuse, dans le sein de l’humanité, y a porté des fruits éternels” (282). Eternity, and Christianity as a religion which acknowledges eternity, again emerges as an important theme for Renan. Renan’s Jesus is the founder of the kind of palingenesis explored in George Sand’s *Spiridion*. According to Renan, “il a conçu la réelle cité de Dieu, la ‘palingénésie’ véritable,... la réhabilitation de tout ce qui est humble, vrai et naïf” (282). Renan’s interpretation of the definition of “the Kingdom of God” is a reordering of justice and liberty – a better social order than what already existed (284). For Renan’s Jesus, the Kingdom of God was a concrete state of being, not an abstract idea. He directly applies these ideas to modern French politics: “...les tentatives ‘socialistes’ de notre temps resteront infécondes, jusqu’à ce qu’elles prennent pour règle le véritable esprit de Jésus, je veux dire l’idéalisme absolu...” (287-8). Nevertheless, Renan does seem to find beauty in Jesus’ less concrete moments of idealism describing his vision as “un vague sublime” which encompasses “divers ordres de vérités” (289). For Renan, Jesus is the founder of the “grande ligne intellectuelle morale” but men can move beyond strict interpretation and still benefit from the founding ideals of Christianity without buying

into the mystical tradition (447). He insists that it honors Jesus' legacy to remember him as a mortal man (449).

### The Application of Christian Philosophy in Modern France

For Renan, an understanding of Jesus' social revolution could shed light on a post-revolutionary French society which still struggled to define their ideals of justice, liberty, fraternity and equality. Renan refers to Jesus as "le jeune démocrate juif" (227). He also emphasizes the idea that early Christianity was a religion of inclusion. It was a unifying element in a diverse society even between Christians and "pagans." Renan uses the story of the Good Samaritan as an illustrative example: "Jésus conclut de là que la vraie fraternité s'établit entre les hommes par charité, non par la foi religieuse" (232). In Jesus, Renan found a personage who could serve as the founder of modern political ideals and an inspiration for modern social change:

À la fois théocratique et démocratique, l'idée jetée par Jésus dans le monde fut, avec l'invasion des Germains, la cause de dissolution la plus active pour l'œuvre des Césars. D'une part, le droit de tous les hommes à participer au royaume de Dieu était proclamé. De l'autre, la religion était désormais en principe séparée de l'État. (439)

Spirituality, he says, became a source of power for Christians after Jesus' death but that this power was misused by the Church (440). In order for Jesus' moral ideals to come to fruition, his message must be released from Church control and given back to the people:

L'empire prétendu des âmes s'est montré à diverses reprises comme une affreuse tyrannie, employant pour se maintenir la torture et le bûcher. Mais le jour viendra où la séparation portera ses fruits, où le domaine des choses de l'esprit cessera de s'appeler un 'pouvoir' pour s'appeler une 'liberté' (439-40).

According to Renan, Jesus also served as a unifier. He claims that Jesus invented the idea of uniting people through a Church congregation (296). Jesus' ultimate message was one of brotherly love (443).

Nevertheless, Renan describes Jesus as growing distant from humanity in his last days. By the end of the book, both Renan and his portrayal of Jesus pull away from the spirit of unity. Renan believes that Jesus' obsession with the "Kingdom of God" inspired him with a repulsion for the mundane and "la haine du genre humain" (311). For Renan, Jesus' constant contact with humanity somehow tainted his superior moral status: "Les hommes en le touchant l'abaissaient à leur niveau" (320). Renan contradicts his exaltation of the "religion de l'humanité" and his dream of unity by ultimately revealing his own prejudices. The last quarter of the book abounds in sweeping negative stereotypes of the Jewish people as the persecutors of an innocent man. Like John the Evangelist, Renan goes to great pains to portray Pontius Pilate as the reluctant enforcer of antiquated Jewish law (402-11). Renan's insistence on blaming the Jewish people for Jesus' downfall casts a shadow of doubt on his entire work. His failure to produce an objective analysis reminds the reader that the historian's interpretation is perhaps no more informative than the revelations of the original disciples.

### Conclusion

Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus* considers the historical Jesus as the founder of a Christian philosophy which, like the *Évangile éternel* in George Sand's *Spiridion*, is constantly undergoing a process of evolution. Religion remains subject to the research and continual study we typically reserve for the sciences. According to Renan, the

Bible's weakness lies in the subjectivity of its sources. The people, he says, created Christianity out of a desire to believe. The historian insists on the human influence that shaped religion and, in doing so, he argues for the use of biography as the path to uncovering the truth about Christianity. For Renan, Christianity as a religion was not created by the theory presented by Jesus but rather, it was created by the dynamic characters of the men who brandished that theory. Renan's work seeks to correct the misconceptions perpetuated by the legend of Jesus as it is presented in the Bible.

In *Vie de Jésus*, the setting stands out as essential to analyzing the New Testament.

The author's personal travel experiences inform his perception of the holy land.

Renan considers the intersection of his travels in Galilee with his textual research as a sort of "revelation," elevating his work to the status of a "fifth gospel." The historian describes the purpose of his work as an attempt to balance historical truth with religious belief. He depicts Christianity as a still useful philosophical foundation for social morality when its message of love and justice are extracted from the limits of legend and superstition.

*Vie de Jésus* seeks to understand Jesus' life and philosophical message in the context of first century Jewish society. According to Renan, Jewish culture created the expectation of a messiah – a role which was bound to be filled by someone. He also describes biblical Israel as teeming with popular sentiment in favor of social change. Despite Renan's criticism of subjectivity in the Bible, the author takes liberties in imagining scenes to illustrate his historical assertions. Renan focuses on Galilee's pastoral setting as a strong influence on Jesus' philosophy. This pastoral setting, he argues, contributed to Christianity's sentimental overtones. Renan suggests that

because Jesus found God in nature, Christianity is essentially a “natural religion.” Christianity, he says, is thus a true “religion de l’humanité.” For Renan, female influence on Christianity through disciples such as Mary Magdalene allowed the religion to grow by enhancing the internal spiritual bond.

Renan’s historical Jesus is depicted as living closer to the people. As a result, the historical Jesus is also portrayed as being closer to the modern concept of justice.

Renan’s Jesus is not an individual. He is a product of society and conscience, a harmonization of internal and external influences. Renan distances the historical Jesus from the miracles alluded to in the Bible. Superstitions were commonly believed and Renan’s Jesus is depicted as naively following customs and popular superstitions. The Christian messiah in *Vie de Jésus* is the result of Jesus’ interpretation of the social expectations of his environment. Jesus’ main objective, according to Renan, was social reform. Throughout the book, Jesus is referred to as a social activist who sought to revolutionize Jewish law. Jesus, he says, was mainly concerned with reforming government to better support the people. He concedes, however, that Jesus’ concept of the Kingdom of God did not place adequate emphasis on civic duty. Nevertheless, Renan does praise Christianity for expanding man’s worldview to include all of humanity.

All in all, Renan evaluates Jesus’ mission as a reversal of the social hierarchy. Consistent with Republican values, Christianity was meant to support equality and brotherhood. Renan goes so far as to note traces of communism in Jesus’ utopian vision. Although Renan criticizes Jesus’ extreme emphasis on providing for the poor, he admits that Christianity’s most progressive aspect is the hope it places in the power

of humanity. Christianity in *Vie de Jésus* is conceived as a continual palingenesis of society moving towards the improvement of the social order, towards justice and liberty. For Renan, Jesus founded this movement but society is faced with the task of continuously interpreting and perfecting his philosophy. It is therefore not infallible. Renan's interpretation of the origins of Christianity supports post-Revolution French ideals of justice, liberty, fraternity, and equality. Renan seems to support religion when it is a religion of inclusion, with the goal of unifying a diverse society. With later Saint-Simon, later Lamennais, Hugo, and others, he emphasizes the idea that the original Christian message was one of brotherly love. In the end, however, Renan's insistence on the importance of humanity and equality ironically breaks down as he reveals his own prejudices against the Jewish people and in favor of the Romans. The "science of history" thus shows its inevitable flaw – that history too is subject to the biases of its interpreter. In the following chapter, we will observe a comparable phenomenon in Jules Michelet's *Bible de l'humanité*.

#### **Chapter 14: Nature and Gender, Justice and Grace in Jules Michelet's *Bible de l'humanité***

Critiquing Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, Jules Michelet states in his *Bible de l'humanité* that he "regrets two things" in his peer's work: that Renan focused more on the story of Jesus than he did on Christian doctrine and that the biographical nature of Renan's work left no room for the "petits Évangiles populaires"<sup>33</sup> which he believes "caractérise fortement ce monde de femmes" (*Bible de l'humanité* 439). Michelet's

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<sup>33</sup> Michelet is likely referring to the gospels in the apocrypha which include the books of Judith, Esther, and Susanna, among others. In Ernest Renan's 1899 essay, *L'Église chrétienne*, Renan does address these books, and for the most part dismisses them as a "basse littérature chrétienne, empreinte d'un esprit tout populaire" adding that they were generally "l'œuvre des sectes judaïsantes et gnostiques" (*L'Église* 516).

1864 *Bible de l'humanité* therefore focuses on the history of the doctrine rather than on the history of Biblical characters themselves. Continuing familiar themes already touched upon in his 1845 essay, *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, the *Bible de l'humanité* often focuses on the role of women and the family in the formation of organized religions. In 1845, Michelet's work suggested that Catholic control over women and children created a rift in the home which distanced men from their families. He alleged that the resulting loss of harmony caused a breakdown in the family unit, the cornerstone of humanity. Women, he says, have become tools of the clergy whose persuasive tactics appeal to feminine weaknesses (Du prêtre 27). According to the author's description, these women, planted in homes like spies, immerse the family in religious propaganda which keeps the entire society at the mercy of the Church. According to *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, "Nos femmes et nos filles sont élevées, gouvernées, par nos ennemis" (6). *Bible de l'humanité* proceeds to cloak an argument in favor of social liberty and justice while excluding women from society as tools of the Catholic conspiracy. Michelet's reasoning throughout the work is often difficult to follow as it flows from romanticizing ancient religious history to promoting justice and alternately denouncing women and the clergy while glorifying female idols of fertility. Not content to limit his research to modern European history, Michelet endeavors to make the *Bible de l'humanité* a testament to an alleged phenomenon of demasculinization through religious doctrine from ancient history to the modern era. Looking to ancient traditions as a source for spiritual purity, Michelet reaches back into humanity's religious past in an effort to debunk modern Christianity. His work is

unique in that he is not content to simply challenge the doctrine as other skeptics had done since Rousseau. Michelet retells the story of human religion which for him is the story of humanity itself. Through his work, he tries to show that a culture's religion shapes its concept of Justice. Often associating organized religion with women, however, the end result is (as it was in *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*) an argument which characterizes Christianity's flaws as "feminine" and the ideal religion of humanity as "masculine." Notably the doctrine of grace and messianism are characterized as feminine while reason, justice, and work take on masculine connotations. The modern age is "l'âge du travail" (*Du prêtre* 92). For Michelet, Justice is God and the traditional *human* family is the true divine trinity.

Michelet's *Bible de l'humanité* challenges the Christian concept of the sacred by presenting Christianity as a degeneration of the human ideals on which all religion is founded. Tracing the path of religious traditions back to ancient India and following the evolution of religious practices through the ages, Michelet evaluates each society's religious practices according to its support of Goodness and Justice. In his preface, he defines the human experience as "une Bible commune," a continuing compilation of spiritual works and philosophies (i). This concept of religious compilation is comparable to the various theories of palingenesis we have already studied in this dissertation in authors ranging from Pierre-Simon Ballanche to George Sand. For Michelet, the human soul is not contained in a physical holy book. Rather, it can be discovered in the actions of the people: "Un Dieu parfois, une Cité, en dit beaucoup plus que les livres, et, sans phrase exprime l'âme même" (i). His emphasis on action stands in contrast to the Christian emphasis on the creative power of the

“word.” Through his comparison of world religious literatures, Michelet looks to human history for a more authentic source for eternal truth: “Il se trouve souvent que c’est le plus profond qu’on oublia d’écrire, la vie dont on vivait, agissait, respirait”

(ii). Michelet meticulously combs through history in order to make connections with the ancients which explain modern religious practices. The retelling of historical events relating to religion gives the author the chance to demystify those events. Michelet describes the nineteenth century as a pinnacle moment in history for progress. Modern advances in “sciences, langues, voyages, découvertes en tout genre,” he says, have created new possibilities which were previously unimaginable

(ii). For Michelet, these advancements have finally facilitated the possibility of human harmony through a synthesis of world cultures (ii-iii). While Renan sought to document and correct religious history through his portrayal of the historical Jesus, Michelet frames his work in the context of ancient traditions, as a foundation for the great living “Bible” continuously added to from generation to generation (iv-v). The *Bible de l’humanité* introduces doubt in the Catholic claim to infallibility by presenting religion not as a divine doctrine prescribed by the heavens but as a creation of humanity. Man, not God, is the original “creator.” From this point of view, man has control over his religious beliefs which are expressions of the human experience.

### The Fall of Man

The *Bible de l’humanité* begins with the author’s analysis of the Indian *Ramayana*, highlighting the ancient text’s focus on nature. For Michelet, India is the origin of humanity (15). He refers to the book as divine (1). For the historian, a return to the past has the potential to restore human spirituality by connecting man with the

refreshing “grandes sources vives” of eternity (2). In Indian legend he finds an “immense poème, vaste comme la mer des Indes, béni, doué du soleil, livre d’harmonie divine où rien ne fait dissonance” (3). The “discovery” of ancient Indian texts, he says, teaches “un grand résultat moral”: all men throughout time have shared similar experiences. It is these shared experiences that unite humanity: “On a vu que l’homme en tout temps pensa, sentit, aima de même. – Donc, une seule humanité, un seul cœur, et non pas deux” (13). For Michelet, the Ramayana, which he refers to as “la Bible de la bonté,” is a testament to Fraternity (3). The goal of the *Bible de l’humanité* is, according to the author, “uniquement les grands résultats moraux” (56). India’s history in this context is thus the history of humanity itself (44-5). He claims that India’s religious history went through a process which is common to all religions. Religions are constantly created out of a human need for spirituality, he says, and then they are corrupted in time through the invention of laws and clergy: “cette loi va se chargeant de prescriptions tracassières, vexatoires. Ce sacerdoce devient tyranique et stérile” (45). Throughout the *Bible de l’humanité*, Michelet attempts to follow this phenomenon of sterility in ancient religions as a result of formal doctrines which he presents as precursors to Christianity.

In Michelet’s interpretation of the Ramayana, the fall of man and the origins of evil result from the inevitable contradictions in Rama’s struggle between earthly existence and the desire to achieve a divine state (64). Rama and Sita are, for Michelet, a pre-biblical Adam and Eve (65). They share the desire to hunt the gazelle – a practice which is foreign to their compassionate culture (66). Abandoned by both humanity and divinity after Sita’s seduction, the animal kingdom comes to the hero’s aid “pour

la cause de la bonté, de la pitié, de la justice” (69). Masculinity is thereby associated with nature, reason and justice while women represent sensuality, the most prominent human weakness. Throughout the *Bible de l’humanité*, Michelet consistently returns to humanity’s connection with nature, the family unit, gender roles and the development of abstract doctrine. In *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, the author alleges that modern women still play the role of Eve in man’s demise: “Ève trahit encore Adam” (66). The alleged destruction of the family unit by deluded women resurfaces in the *Bible de l’humanité*. Doctrine, he says, eventually corrupts religion by obscuring human nature and women are the agents who embed religious doctrine into the social fabric.

#### Religion and Justice, Church and State

For Michelet, a society’s religious convictions define its justice system. Church and State are inevitably intertwined. He evokes ancient Persia as an example of a society where equality reigned: “La Perse n’a point de caste. Tous sont égaux chez elle au point de vue religieux. Tous également sont et s’appellent les *purs*. Chacun, pontife en sa maison, officie et prie pour les siens” (77-8). Returning to the concept of the family as the common cultural denominator, Michelet describes the Persian family as a society within itself in which the husband-father fulfilled the dominant religio-political role: “Point de caste, point de mages, point de royauté encore. Le père, dans chaque maison, est roi-mage” (85). The ideal priest is the husband-father who is a part of the family. Michelet portrays the Catholic priest, in contrast, as a foreign

influence on the family, referring to the clergy as “ennemis de la liberté” and “sujets d’un prince étranger” (283).

The second half of the *Bible de l’humanité* begins with Michelet’s analysis of the cult of Isis in ancient Egypt. According to the author, ancient Egypt’s female-centered culture marked a shift in gender roles. In Egypt, “la femme reignait” (287). He describes the Egyptian woman as reigning over her household similarly to Indian and Persian women but with the added power to also reign over the nation (287). Michelet depicts Egypt as the most feminine of all cultures but its continuing connection with nature prompts him to admire the culture as fertile (288). He emphasizes, for example, the humanness of the Egyptian trinity in contrast to other ancient religions (289). The ancient Egyptians venerated a holy family (mother, father, and child) dominated by a mother who is not a virgin (289). The non-virgin holy mother celebrates fertility: “c’est bien une femme, une vraie femme, pleine d’amour, sein plein de lait” (289-90). The result is an emphasis on truth and positivity (290). For Michelet, femininity is only positive when it is supported by fertility, with the specific purpose of the eternal rejuvenation of humanity.

Michelet marks the downfall of spirituality in Egypt as the shift from the natural religion of Isis (a religion of “Goodness” and fertility) to the dogma-ridden religion of Thoth: “Par lui, cette religion de bonté, sortie d’un cœur de femme, change et devient système, un système laborieux, chargés de dogmes, de pratiques, une scolastique de prêtres” (301). According to the author, this pull away from nature inspired women to seek comfort in death: “De son côté, la femme, cultivant seule avec son fils, ne pense à autre chose; par ses jeûnes, elle amasse le petit pécule de la mort” (301). In his

analysis of Thothism, the parallels with Catholicism are obvious. The religion of Thoth, he says, is the beginning of a medieval style of religion in which demons are opposed to saints and man is forced to appeal to various divine representatives for protection (302-3). In *Du prêtre*, Michelet similarly describes the seventeenth century as a culture which looked to death as its only hope: “Spinosa, Hobbes et Molinos, la mort en métaphysique, la mort en politique, en morale!” (119).

Moving on to Syria, Michelet continues tracing the degeneration of male power. Ancient Syria, he says, “eut pour idéal le poisson et le Poisson-Femme”: “Voilà la Vénus de Syrie, c’est Dercéto, c’est Astarté ou Astaroth, mâle et femelle, le songe de la génération” (311). Michelet notes that Adonis represents male weakness. God’s first man is made to die (319). While Michelet praised Egypt for at least conserving “le mariage saint,” he cites “l’amour impur” as the poison which leads Syria towards a “progrès de faiblesse” (319). In Syria, sensuality replaces pity as the dominant female characteristic, altering the meaning of love and the equality between men and women (314). “La pitié amoureuse, la mollesse et les pleurs, la contagieuse douceur des *Adonies* amenèrent dans le monde le grand fait, terrible et mortel: *l’évanouissement de la force mâle*” (319). According to Michelet, the ancient Syrian male never comes to fruition and therefore does not contribute to the regeneration of humanity: “En Syrie, le mâle n’est plus qu’un faible adolescent qui ne fait que mourir. Point de paternité” (319). In the *Bible de l’humanité*, the loss of defined gender roles seems to signify the loss of the natural order of humanity. Michelet briefly refers to the modern European women, “ce fier demi mâle qu’on appelle femme en Europe,” as comparably genderless (287).

The Judeo-Christian tradition follows as the spiritual inheritor of a growing trend towards sterility and a reaction against reason and justice. According to Michelet, doctrines become increasingly obscure and less “natural.” “Love” and “Grace” replace “Justice” and take on definitions which distance the concept of love from pity and goodness. Michelet claims that most of the wisdom contained in the Old Testament was short-lived and did not lead to social progress: “Tout le progrès des Juifs aboutit à la stérilité profonde” (382). Michelet describes Judaism as the ultimate extreme in prescribed religious law. In particular, he associates Jewish law with “the word”: “l’excentricité étrange d’un culte de grammaire, l’adoration de la langue et la religion de l’alphabet” (383). He thereby contrasts *language* and *the human heart*. The “word” in Judaism, he says, differs from the Persian “word” in that the Persian concept of “the word” is associated with the “Tree of Life” while Jewish law is, according to Michelet, concerned with the actual pronunciation of the name of God (384). The Jewish focus on concrete language, he claims, led to a divinization of the alphabet itself (385). The historian tries to illustrate that this focus on the word, on the translation of God’s word, endures in Christianity’s miscomprehension of Jesus’ philosophy. Michelet describes early Christianity as plagued by a complete loss of reason and justice through misunderstandings of Jesus’ words. He notes, for example, that the mystics translate Jesus’ “Ma grace te suffit” as “En te pèchant on glorifie dieu” (447). By the same token, he says Saint Paul interprets Jesus’ “Rends à César<sup>34</sup>” quote as “Obéis même aux mauvais maîtres” (451). It stands to reason, then, that

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<sup>34</sup> Mark 12:17: “Jésus leur répondit: Rendez donc à César ce qui est à César, et à Dieu ce qui est à Dieu. Et ils admirèrent sa réponse.”

these misconstrued messages have formed the foundation of Christianity since the establishment of the Church.

### Getting Back to Nature

Throughout the *Bible de l'humanité*, Michelet reconstructs the past in an effort to discover truths which have been lost to modern French society. Progress thus necessitates a step backwards, a renaissance to rediscover certain truths and cast away false progress which has thrown humanity off of its natural course. In Michelet's analysis of the Ramayana, he stresses the work's movement from a focus on the individual (the lives of Rama and Sita) to a focus on the universal through the story's natural setting which represents the power of nature in general (55-6). Rama's story, according to Michelet, is completely engulfed by its natural environment: "Autour de ce fond, se tisse comme un tapis délicieux, toute nature, montagnes, forêts, rivières, tous les paysages, toutes les saisons de l'Inde, tous les bons amis de l'homme, animaux et végétaux" (55). In contrast to this organic landscape, Michelet frames Sita's capture as a manipulation of nature affected by art. In retelling Sita's seduction, the author presents the demon Ravana as the power to create art and desire, "de faire par la magie une anti-nature qui trompe, des êtres éphémères, charmants, terribles à volonté," in contrast to nature (74). Evil is falsity, the opposite of nature. Rama, from Michelet's perspective, is anti-art, responding with rugged nature: "Et contre tant d'art, Râma n'amène avec lui que des simples, des êtres grossiers, sauvages" (74). Masculinity is thereby associated with some true, lost, natural religion of humanity while femininity has been corrupted by artistic conjurers and vain sensuality.

The *Bible de l'humanité* therefore revolves around a return to nature which Michelet associates with authentic sentiment. Nature is assumed to have the power to restore humanity. In his references to the Ramayana, Michelet repeatedly cites man's rapport with the animal kingdom as the source for his goodness and justice. The author claims that the Indian emphasis on pity for animals, for example, gave birth to the concept of poetry (63). Faith was created through the heart (64). Chapter VI, "Rédemption de la nature," explains man's rapport with the animal kingdom in Indian mythology (61). Michelet uses the comparison of man to the animal kingdom as an opportunity to highlight the notion of pity as an ancient spiritual concept (62-3). He shows pity to be the source of the divine poetry in the Ramayana: "Ce fleuve immense d'harmonie, de lumière et de joie divine, le plus grand qui coula jamais, il part de cette petite source, un soupir et une larme" (63). This harmony attests to the unifying power of pity inspired by human connectivity with nature. The lesson for modern France is that the cultivation of a sense of pity through connections with nature will result in the republican ideal of fraternity.

Michelet endeavors to trace a similar process of degeneration from natural to unnatural religious practices in Persia and Greece. According to Michelet, the Persian God was just and man followed his example. Since then, man has increasingly cultivated the idea of a vengeful God along with an irrational fear of evil (96-7). In Persian religion, as in Indian religion, Michelet tries to illustrate the idea that formal religion fails to capture the original spiritual goals of the people. From Michelet's perspective, the Avesta (a collection of prayers and rituals) does not convey the original sense of unity in Persian spirituality and is diluted with "magisme médique et

chaldéen” (114). For Michelet, Muslim legends, like Christian legends, obscured their moral undertones with an excess of magism and rituals (129). Similarly, Michelet explains that Greek fables responded to human realities and Greek people did not actually believe the stories to be true. Rather, they used the stories as inspiration for interior reflection (160). By Byzantine times, however, people no longer understood the nuances of Greek mythology (168). The “clair-obscur” in which the fables “flottaient entre le dogme et le conte” was lost (168). He goes on to condemn the concept of jealous gods which eventually spread throughout Greece and negated the idea that gods represent supreme justice (180). Michelet manages to compare this same “magie du clair-obscur” to Eve, suggesting that feminine influence, which he associates with “the orient,” dealt the final blow to justice in Greece:

Mais l’Orient s’avance, invincible, fatal aux dieux de la lumière, par le charme du rêve, par la magie du clair-obscur. Plus de sérénité. L’âme humaine, cette Ève curieuse, fouillant dans l’inconnu, va jouir et gémir. Elle trouvera là sans doute d’étranges approfondissements. La force et le calme? Jamais. Elle aura la joie, - violente, souvent insensée, âcre, et sombre. Elle aura les pleurs (que de pleurs!), le contraste de ces deux choses, leur lutte et l’impuissance, et la mélancolie qui suit.  
(277)

In the *Bible de l’humanité*, the substitution of sentiment for justice is the true fall from Eden. Michelet’s “Eve,” however, is a vague notion of misguided feminine influence, a triumph of woman’s stereotypical hysteria over male reason.

### Women, Family and, Work

In the conclusion to *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, Michelet insists on the trinity of the family as truly holy for humanity: “L’homme, la femme, l’enfant, l’unité

des trois personnes, leur méditation mutuelle, voilà le mystère des mystères” (323).

The opening chapters of the *Bible de l'humanité* focus especially on the family unit in India as the source of this ancient culture's social harmony. Michelet establishes the primitive model of the family as “le premier culte” and considers the primitive role of women in relation to their husbands (25-30). Women in this tradition, he says, are initially like children to their husbands, then they are like sisters, and finally they fulfill a motherly role (30). Above all, Michelet envisions woman as the keeper of the “fire,” responsible for creating and protecting life (33). According to Michelet's account of the law of Manu<sup>35</sup>, man is not fulfilled until he has united into the “homme-femme-enfant” trinity (43). Women are socially superior to men, he says, because motherhood is sacred (43).

In Persian culture too, he says, women became the guardians of sacred traditions. Thanks to women, Persia's ancient soul lives on beneath its modern exterior. Women thus become like gods because of their connection to the past: “Elle était reine et maîtresse au foyer, et pour son fils un Dieu vivant” (121). The chapter entitled “La Femme forte” establishes women as the guardians of Persian tradition: “La femme, c'est la tradition elle-même” (121). Michelet's assertions about ancient Persian women are similar to his ideas concerning the role of women in the Indian family. The home is a maternal institution and the wife-mother is only outranked by her adored son, under whom she rules (121). Reminiscent of the Virgin Mother, the Persian homemaker is described as perfectly pure: “L'idéal de la pureté est, non-

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<sup>35</sup> According to Indian tradition, Manu was the “creator god” whose laws “gave divine sanction to the social system” including “the inferiority of women and the low valuation of manual labor” (Stearns 43). Curiously, Michelet does not choose to argue against the low ranking of the most hard working members of the Indian caste system despite his insistence that a corruption of this system in modern European society is to blame for Europe's devaluation of working men.

seulement la fille enfant, la vierge, mais la chaste et fidèle épouse” (121). It seems that all Persian women, unlike Christian women, had an equal opportunity to be considered divine. Michelet’s praise for the ideal ancient Persian and Indian woman as the fertile “maîtresse au foyer” stands in dramatic contrast to his later assessment of women as agents of sterility corrupted by sensuality. In these ancient cultures, Michelet views women as actively engaged in the trinity of the family unit. The breaking of that trinity due to Church loyalties transforms women into heretics against the family institution.

Michelet praises ancient Greek liturgy which he says preserved the family unit by taming the feminine imagination (170). The Greek liturgy is described as the opposite of the state of literature in the Middle Ages which allegedly promoted the destruction of the family unit: “La Grèce présente exactement l’envers du Moyen âge. Dans celui-ci, toute littérature (ou presque toute) glorifie l’adultère; poèmes, fabliaux, noëls, tout célèbre le cocuage” (170). Here, Michelet’s view of history clearly contradicts the romantic idealization of the middle ages in favor of an Enlightenment-style glorification of Hellenic ethics. The historian lauds the strength of the ancient Greek family, presumably made possible through the role of women as mothers and wives (171). For Michelet, Homer illustrates the “vrai rôle de la femme” as an equal to her husband and as the “maîtresse de maison” (172). Ancient Greece, however, is presented as a turning point in the traditional role of women. According to the *Bible de l’humanité*, the arts are largely responsible for woman’s transformation from fertile mother to sterile hysteric. Michelet cites the popularity of Bacchanalian adoration as the moment in history when women’s loyalties to the family unit began

to change. He describes a period of time in ancient Greek culture when “the flute and the lyre” dominate society and women follow Bacchus in a hysterical fervor (220). Bacchus is the anti-Hercules, “le féminin, le furieux” (220). Michelet refers to the freedom of Greek women as a danger to their society which led to human disharmony: “Elle ne put jamais suivre l’homme, et resta sombrement à part” (272). This view of women is reminiscent of his insistence in *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille* that women are easily misled by priests because of their lack of inclusion in healthy “male” activities (Du prêtre 290). His ultimate conclusion on ancient Greek culture is that Greece’s strength came from its masculinity. “Feminine” gods like Bacchus introduced an unreasonable element into society which resulted in discord: “C’est un regret pour nous. La Grèce, mâle et pure, très-lucide, avait seule le droit, le pouvoir de nous mener, comme un autre Thésée, au double labyrinthe où l’on se perd si aisément. Les dieux efféminés d’Asie, mutilés, énervés, nous y menèrent très-mal, par les sentiers de l’équivoque” (276). The “Orient” for Michelet is synonymous with femininity, dreaminess, and magic – the “clair-obscur” which he establishes as the opposite of enlightenment (277). Throughout the text, this supposed illogical “femininity” grows as society progresses, pulling man increasingly farther from his simple work ethic and natural religion.

Michelet continues to blame the “feminine” cult of Dionysis for the downfall of Justice and Liberty in Syria calling the god of wine “le faux Médiateur, le faux Libérateur, dieu des Tyrans, dieu de la mort” (329). His description of Dionysus recalls Sita’s temptation by Ravana. Michelet portrays women falling into a similar sensuality trap throughout history, often dragging humanity with them away from

reason. Michelet traces the Passion back to ancient Greek Bacchus festivals whose traditions lived on through a Syrian festival he refers to as “le spectacle des Pathèmata” (331). He describes Bacchus as offering bread in a sort of pagan mass in which the messiah-like god “prétendait mourir pour nous” (332). Bacchus, he notes, also acted as a mediator between the people and God in a culture that did not believe humans could directly communicate with their God, Mithra (332-3). For Michelet, Bacchus was actually feminine or, at least, represented negative female characteristics: “le vrai Bacchus, la femme grasse, immonde et poltronne, qui pour un rien se meurt de peur” (336). He depicts the god as an “ennemi surtout du travail, Ivresse et Paresse incarnées” and therefore a tyrant (337). Liberation begins to take on a new meaning: the liberator frees men (slaves) from work, but Michelet points out that this freedom is an illusion (337). The slave hopes for the freedom of “la vie sans loi,” which never becomes a reality (337). To women, Bacchus grants the freedom of emotions, “la liberté des larmes, des larmes sensuelles, ‘la douceur de pleurer’” (338). According to Michelet, these tears are however completely useless (338). The women cry for one being (Adonis) instead of crying for their nation, for humanity, thereby limiting their power of goodness and pity by projecting it onto a fetish object (338). In *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, Michelet’s description of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus describes a comparable fetish, “la sanglante expiation mithriaque, le culte du sang” which endures in modern France (172). For Michelet, the emphasis on the heart targets women above all since “chez elles la vie du cœur est tout” (*Du prêtre* 174). The Sacred Heart, in a parallel with the cults of Bacchus and

Adonis, is described as purely sensual, “la charnelle et sensuelle dévotion du Sacré Cœur” (Du prêtre 183).

The *Bible de l'humanité* ultimately seeks to forge a rapport between Judeo-Christian religious customs and femininity in an effort to argue a tendency towards irrationality in the occidental religious tradition. As the majority of the most important figures in these traditions are men, Michelet tries to show, just as he did with the pagan gods Adonis and Bacchus, that many of these men displayed feminine characteristics. His description of Jacob, “le type et le nom consacré du peuple (Israë),” depicts the shepherd as someone whose cunning calculations go hand in hand with his appeal to the opposite sex. Jacob himself, he says, “seems surprisingly female”:

Le vrai Juif, le patriarche, est le *berger spéculateur*, qui sait augmenter ses troupeaux par un soin intelligent d'acquisition et de calcul. Il plaît à la femme (sa mère Rebecca), et il semble étonnement femme, plus que prudent dans ses soumissions, ses adorations au frère Ésaü, auquel si subtilement il a ravi le droit d'aînesse. (366-7)

Michelet also compares the male lover in the Song of Songs to a woman, referring to him as the “féminin jeune homme” (391). He complains that the text, in comparison to the Ramayana, is impure. According to Michelet, the canticle's references to balms and perfumes attest to the falsity of this kind of adoration (395). In a footnote, he refers to the proliferation of references to these substances as “une complète pharmacie” (395). True love's own natural “ivresse” is lost in such artificial sensualities. In *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, the author makes a very similar connection between perfumes and false religious principles which he refers to as “un nauséabond mélange de musc et d'encens” (298). This loss of sense in the face of an

overabundance of sensation is analogous to the loss of Reason which allowed Grace to take root. In the *Bible de l'humanité*, Grace is equated with sensuality and imagination. Michelet connects Judaism to the romanesque, for example, through the concept of Grace: "L'amour est une loterie, la Grace est une loterie. Voilà l'essence du roman" (Bible 403). He refers to the Jewish holy books as "novels" claiming that they exploit feminine power (407-8). In books like Judith, Ruth, and Esther, he sees the fall of masculinity and the glorification of feminine charms (405-6).

In his commentary on Rome, Michelet blames female ownership of property for the Empire's downfall (424-5). The historian compares these Roman laws to post-Revolution laws which guaranteed inheritance rights for women<sup>36</sup>. Without education, he says, wealthy French women set out to destroy a law that they did not fully understand: "Lui donnant la fortune sans lui donner l'éducation, la faisant riche sans la faire éclairée, sans la mettre au niveau de la lumière du temps, la Loi mit en main des armes pour détruire la Loi" (425). Women, he says, brought religion back to society after the Revolution by using their newfound wealth to financially support the construction of Catholic Churches (425). The implication is that female influence led to the fall of the Republic just as female influence contributed to the fall of Rome.

Rome, like Israel, supposedly cultivated a "feminine" society. Michelet compares the poet Virgil to a woman, "aux longs cheveux de femme," and generally emphasizes the disappearance of gender differences accompanied by a looming sense of sterility in the Roman Empire (428). In Michelet's interpretation of Christianity's "feminine" culture, the family is broken into two camps: the woman and child are united while

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<sup>36</sup> "In March 1793, the National Convention declared equal inheritance of all in equal line of succession" (Caine & Sluga 18).

the father/husband is separate and inferior (471). “La mère et le fils sont un peuple, l’homme un peuple inférieur” (471). The “feminine” man in Christian times becomes the figure of the priest who, like Jacob, is at once demasculated and adored by women. In *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, Michelet often presents the relationship between women and priests as scandalously intimate, plotting against the husband. The separation of the family endures because of the “invisible” priest who is forever coming between male and female family members (282).

#### Liberty and Justice : A Religion for and by the People

In the *Bible de l’humanité*, Michelet asserts that greater liberty leads to greater justice (ix). According to Michelet, his research tracing religious history from India to Persia to Europe follows the path of Justice because “Dieu est la Justice même” (485). Thus, liberty leads to God. Chapter V, “Les profondes libertés de l’Inde,” traces the concept of Liberty to ancient India. Michelet points out that the beauty of the Ramayana is indeed that it celebrates a *man*, not a god or a saint (52). Michelet stresses the idea that Rama’s humanity in the Ramayana, his lack of awareness that he is in any way divine, adds to the nobility of his actions and the value of his “passion”: “La passion du jeune dieu perdrait de son mérite s’il avait la moindre idée qu’il est dieu et fils de Dieu” (67). Rama acts freely, in “liberty” if you will, and in doing so he approaches the divine. The Ramayana likewise promotes an ideal model of equality: “personne n’est excepté de la miséricorde divine. Tous sont sauvés” (53). This concept of achieving a superior moral state through human vulnerability is reminiscent of Vigny’s idea that man’s ability to sacrifice himself actually gives him a moral advantage over the immortal. Michelet adds that the Ramayana was written for the

“people” (52). The people, he says, actually created their gods. He explains that the “Indian soul” is built on the idea that man, as the creator of his own gods, has the power to undo them (51). As inventions of the soul, the gods are a reflection of humanity. Rama’s dual nature represents Liberty (49). He is a combination of two casts. He is part soldier, part holy man: “En Râma se réunit le double idéal des deux castes... – ce guerrier-brahme” (56). According to Michelet, Rama’s humanness allows him to reach a more holy state than the pure brahma because he has the ability to sacrifice himself (56). In modern times, this “sacrifice” translates to a willingness to join the labor force, to contribute to society through work. Indian myth provides an unexpected model for Liberty to a French public traditionally divided by social casts. Labor becomes an increasingly important masculine element of human justice in the *Bible de l’humanité*. In *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, Michelet establishes the idea that women in particular fall victim to their imaginations precisely because they do not have enough physical and intellectual activity in their lives (290-1). Like Rousseau, Michelet considers idleness to be the downfall of human morality. Persia emerges in the *Bible de l’humanité* as an example of a perfectly active masculine society free from the imagination associated with women. The author describes ancient Persia as an example of a paradise of laborers where people create goodness and avoid evil through their work (95-6). Persia, according to Michelet, is a more positivist society than India because it is less affected by the imagination: “Point de mythologie. Nulle poésie imaginative. Tout vrai, positif, grave et fort” (78). He attributes Persia’s positivity to their no nonsense work ethic and strong belief in justice: “c’est l’agriculture héroïque, le courageux effort du Bien contre le Mal, la vie

*de pure Lumière dans le Travail et la Justice*” (78). He describes ancient Persian philosophy as one which stresses physical activity (78). Persia, according to Michelet, managed to spread power to all social casts, “dans le moindre laboureur,” in contrast with India which limited this power to kings (85). He goes on to note that the shepherd, “le pasteur,” so revered in Christian symbolism, was considered “le maudit” by the Persian laborer (88). Ancient Persia emerges as a model in which work, order, and justice existed in perfect harmony (91). Michelet describes the population as blessed by their work ethic, a “peuple travailleur, d’esprit très-positif” (90). He sees in the sharing of resources, the equal distribution of water in Persia, government order which supports justice (92). This justice, he says, is cultivated within the family or tribe but extends to the entirety of humanity: “Dans cette Perse qui semble exclusive, où la parenté, la pureté du sang, l’orgueil de famille, de tribu, semblent très-forts, l’inconnu n’est point un hostis, comme Rome qualifie l’étranger. La fille errante, inconnue, qu’on amène, est protégée et garantie” (92).

In his analysis of ancient Greek culture, Michelet directly links the concept of Liberty to Greek genius: “laissée à son libre génie, toutes les facultés de l’homme, - âme et corps, - instinct et travail, - poésie, critique et jugement, - tout a grandi, fleuri d’ensemble” (159). He describes ancient Greek religion as “une religion de la vie” based upon “la liberté de tous les êtres” (180). Greece humanizes its gods, transforming them into “dieux justiciers” and glorifying wisdom (165). Greece, improving upon India’s Earthly gods according to Michelet, established a system through which man could earn the status of a god through the merit of his labors (166). For Michelet, Greece’s Hercules – the advent of the human hero – is the

ultimate humanist religious figure (222-3). Michelet's revival of Hercules as representative of humanity's power recalls similar usage of Hercules symbolism during the First Republic: "Hercules represented a higher stage in the development of the Revolution, one characterized by the force and unity of the people, rather than by the sagacity of its representatives" (Hunt 102). Whereas the Revolutionary image of Hercules was largely related to political liberty, Michelet extends his significance as a religious figure. Hercules distinguishes himself from more frivolous gods such as Apollo through his association with human challenges such as love, work, and death (218). Hercules' story goes beyond art and incorporates the human soul. Again associating work ethic with liberty, Michelet describes the man-god as "le type même de la liberté" (416). Hercules' mission is one of peace. He brings peace to Greece and, for Michelet, aspires to bring peace to the world (227). Hercules' stands out as a symbol of truth contrary to the dangers of imagination: "Le ciel du cœur détruit le ciel de fantasie et d'imagination. Enfer, Olympe, tous les deux ont croulé. Reste une chose: le grandeur de l'homme" (235). It is Hercules' role as an active human being which makes him a god and encourages activity, rather than passivity, in all humans:

D'autres sauveurs ont pu varier le grand thème de la Passion  
[...] Mais leur Passion passive, loin de nous donner force, a fait  
nos découragements, et leur fatale légende crée l'inertie stérile.  
C'est dans la Passion active, herculéenne, qu'est la haute  
harmonie de l'homme, l'équilibre, la force qui le rend fécond  
ici-bas. (238)

All of the Olympian gods, even those who did not share Hercules' status as a man-god, remained grounded because of their continuing association with humanity. Their personalities took on human qualities and they lived amongst the people (247). It is in

fact their humanity that makes them divine: “Les dieux humanisés, ou, disons mieux, divinisés par l’âme” (247). Justice is thus bound to the concept of the human soul.

### Love, Adoration, and the “Messianic Epidemic”

In *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, the author bemoans a perceived loss of sincerity in the emotions of misguided women: “Le cœur de femme, de mère, l’invincible instinct maternel, qui est le fond de la femme, cherche à se tromper” (24).

In the *Bible de l’humanité*, Michelet elaborates on this kind of ephemeral love as foundational for Christian admiration. Love subject to whim is the opposite of Justice (Bible 442). He refers to Christian law as “la Folie de Dieu” and reiterates the idea that love is too “vague,” too “obscure” of a concept to replace justice (455, 453).

Without Justice, Love becomes dangerously unpredictable (455). This capricious divine love evolves into the doctrine of Grace.

According to Michelet, slavery in Israel created the necessity for a vengeful God since the slave needed to believe that the master would be punished (370).

Desperation gave way to an environment in which chance, or Grace, was the only source of hope. Belief in Grace, he says, diminished the value of Reason: “Il veut le hasard de la Grâce, le salut par un coup de dés. Tendances aléatoires qui corrompent profondément le jugement de l’esclave, lui font haïr la Raison, désespérer de l’action” (373-4). From this desperate need for divine intervention came “l’esprit Messianique”

(374). Messianism is explained as the culmination of misguided adoration: “La lassitude extrême, l’atonie et le désespoir ont pour effet de produire en ce monde la maladie qu’on peut nommer: l’épidémie messianique” (348). He describes Judaism as favoring the weak over the strong, the feminine over the masculine: “Au fier Juda

il préfère Joseph, au vaillant Ismaël, au fort Ésaü Jacob, fin est doux comme une femme” (374). The elected are saved and “Le genre humain est rejeté” (374).

According to Michelet, the apostle Paul’s sole mission was to speak out against Greek Reason: “Son unique combat est contre l’esprit grec, et comme il le dit bravement, contre la Raison” (445). He also characterizes Paul as “belonging to women” noting that he was often amongst women in various Bible scenes (445). The privileged status of the worker, which Michelet so fervently praises in ancient cultures, is supposedly lost in Judaism: “Il (Dieu) choisit l’*oisif* Abel *contre le travailleur* Caïn” (374).

Election becomes stronger than Justice (375). “La miséricorde gratuite,” or mercy for the undeserving, is used to illustrate God’s power (375).

For Michelet, the system of Grace negates all of the masculine Jewish figures such as Moses and Isaiah (376). He describes Grace as “la fantaisie féminine, du caprice de la femme” (376). He insists that it “discourages” effort on the part of the people and destroys justice (377). Grace excuses God from acting justly, he says. It allows people to assume that divine justice is incomprehensible, thereby excusing injustice (377).

Here, Michelet refutes conservative Catholics such as Chateaubriand and de Maistre who used the mystery of divine justice as the foundation for their arguments against critiquing the Catholic Church. By comparing this kind of God to an unreasonable woman, he completely reverses the image of the Church as stable and paternal. Like Renan, Michelet sees in messianism a long tradition established well before the first century (429). Michelet’s description of the Virgin Mary as “une mère stérile” supports his claim that mysticism tended towards sterility (429). For Michelet, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception succeeds in nullifying the male role in

society, erasing man from creation: “Une longue incubation de femme en femme, un enfantement continué, amena cette création, qui ne doit rien à l’homme, comme on le dit en toute vérité, sortant uniquement de la Femme et de son Esprit” (431).

Michelet concludes that the Gospel of Mary was suppressed because it made Jesus seem too real, too human (435). By dehumanizing the child Jesus, he says, Mary is denied the true human role of a mother (468). In essence, the mother of God is denied the chance to be Isis, to be celebrated for her fertility. By the same token, she betrays her gender by rendering biological fertility an impure act. She may be divinely sterile, but humanity’s growth is also stunted as a result (468). Following this line of reasoning, Jesus’ supernatural birth distances Christianity from the most basic elements of humanity.

Michelet, as a sort of modern prophet of secularism, foresees that the future of humanity is not in the hands of a messiah but in the “second coming” of Justice (480). Doubt in religion, he says, is the path to positive progress towards Justice which can only be realized through a revolution (480). The *Bible de l’humanité* closes with the idea that the home should be restored as the cultural center of society (485-6). In *Du prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, Michelet proposes that men share their activities with women in order to keep women thinking and creating and to rekindle harmony between the sexes (290). When the home is not divided, fraternity will be accomplished through “la grande Église de Justice” (486). Through knowledge, humanity will find peace: “la profonde paix de la lumière” (486). Ultimately, the goal of the *Bible de l’humanité* is to explore the concept of a religion of humanity in which Justice is society’s collective goal. The author links modern science to ancient faith:

“La science marche, et la lumière avance. La foi nouvelle se confirme en trouvant sous la terre ses solides racines dans la profonde antiquité” (157). A religion of justice would necessitate a move towards positive science and a rejection of superstition. Michelet criticizes belief in miracles as harmful to human progress: “L’obstacle insurmontable à l’éducation orientale, sacerdotale, c’est le miracle. Le miracle et l’éducation sont deux mortels ennemis” (194). Heavenly miracles negate the necessity for men to actively labor for their own benefit (195). The Hercules myth represents an alternative ideal situation in which human activity motivates progress. The historian prescribes forgetting religious superstitions as the way forward (483). He proposes education as a substitute for religion in the advancement of human progress: “Marchons aux sciences de l’histoire et de l’humanité, aux langues d’Orient. Interrogeons le *genius* antique dans son accord avec tant de récents voyages. Là nous prendrons le *sens humain*” (283).

### Conclusion

Michelet’s *Bible de l’humanité* distinguishes itself from Renan’s *Vie de Jésus* in that Michelet insists on the importance of religious doctrine rather than dwelling on biographical information. The *Bible de l’humanité* alleges that history has seen a gradual demasculinization of European society through organized religion. Michelet attempts to prove that this femininity, often in the form of the doctrine of Grace, is contrary to the “masculine” spirit of justice. Michelet’s concept of the “Bible commune” traces religious traditions back to ancient India and through the ages into modern times. For Michelet, the human soul is expressed throughout history not through literature but through the actions of the people. Although their methods and

subject matter differ, both Michelet and Renan look back on history as a source for truth. Both historians furthermore agree that religion was originally created for and by the people.

The *Bible de l'humanité* begins with an analysis of the Indian *Ramayana*. Through the discovery of ancient religions, Michelet hopes to reunite modern man with his spiritual origins proving that all men throughout time are unified through common experience. Moreover, Michelet uses India's religious history as an example of religious evolution which he says is common to all cultures. The fall of man in the *Ramayana* is likened to the fall of Adam and Eve. Feminine weakness or female refusal of justice is, in this scenario, to blame for humanity's disconnection with nature and divinity alike.

For Michelet, a nation's religion is inevitably reflected in its government. He uses ancient Persia as a model of culture in which a religious doctrine of equality supported social equality as well. Persia is also notable for Michelet because its ancients considered the family to be a sacred unit in which fathers acted as priests to their wives and children. Feminine influence in religion is only acceptable for Michelet when it is associated with fertility. For example, in the *Bible de l'humanité*, Michelet bemoans Egypt's shift from a religion built around a fertility goddess to a dogma-centered religion emphasizing the afterlife. He goes on to criticize the loss of specific gender roles in ancient Syrian culture and the weakening of male "force." For Michelet, sterility is a growing problem throughout human history. He defines sterility as the abandonment of humanity by a society which increasingly turns away from justice, pity, and goodness – from the elements of culture which he categorizes

as either masculine or motherly. Michelet particularly attacks Jewish law as being overly focused on “the word” rather than privileging action. This emphasis on the word, which he contends is misguided, supposedly extended to early Christianity and led to messianism followed by a general misunderstanding of foundational Christian doctrine.

Throughout the *Bible de l'humanité*, Michelet contrasts this false doctrine with the reality of nature, suggesting that society must first take a step backwards in order to eventually progress. Michelet's proposed step backwards differs from Chateaubriand's, for example, because the purity Michelet seeks would introduce doubt in religious doctrine. Whereas Chateaubriand's *Génie* glorifies a childlike innocence associated with the blind acceptance of Christian doctrine, Michelet proposes a reconnection with nature which would expose the fallacies of Christian doctrine. The *Bible de l'humanité* associates masculinity with some true, lost natural religion which has been overshadowed by feminine precociousness. The *Bible de l'humanité* therefore proposes a return to nature as the authentic source of sentiment. The family emerges as sacred and women's role in the family is defined by their supposed duty to protect traditions and fulfill their destinies as mothers. Women, he says, have the potential to become socially superior to men when they fulfill their destinies as fertile life-givers. The feminine imagination, however, is depicted as a danger to the family unit. Literature is cited as a source of degeneration because, Michelet says, it introduced women to desire. He portrays women as continually falling into destructive patterns of sensuality throughout ancient history. Michelet links this sensuality to modern religious practices which he categorizes as

destructively feminine. In particular, he mentions the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which he says romanticizes the heart of the messiah. Devotees allegedly misuse their passionate energies towards the adoration of an imaginary idol rather than channeling religious energy into positive actions which would improve the human condition. Female social domination is blamed for the anti-justice system of grace. “Feminine” religious culture, he says, succeeds in dividing rather than unifying humanity by driving women and children away from their male head-of-household and replacing his authority with the Church patriarchs.

The *Bible de l’humanité* associates liberty with justice and justice with God. For Michelet, in fact, “Justice is God.” Liberty is therefore the path to God. Labor is shown to be necessary to keep man free since it renders humanity self-sufficient. Labor also provides an action on which man can rightfully be judged depending on his contribution to humanity. Michelet celebrates labor as a foundational to “masculine” culture. He identifies ancient Persia as the model of a working society uncorrupted by idleness and imagination. He also attributes Greek genius to the development of liberty in Hellenic culture. Hercules, for Michelet, becomes the ultimate male symbol of the power of liberty through labor. For Michelet, humanized gods, like the Olympian divinities, are made divine through their humanity. In the following chapter, these themes of fertility, labor, and liberty as elements of a religion of humanity are revisited in the works of Auguste Comte and Emile Zola.

## Chapter 15: Pierre Froment and the *Prêtre Positiviste*: Reconsidering Zola's *Trois villes* in Light of Auguste Comte's *Catéchisme positiviste*

Towards the end of *Lourdes*, published by Emile Zola in 1894, the novel's main character, father Pierre Froment, comes to see Bernadette Soubirous as a “*misérable*,” exiled from the very cult that she helped to establish. Able to separate the progressive element of Bernadette's legacy from the mystic craze that she inspired, Pierre is driven to discover a “religion nouvelle” through his experiences in the three cities that make up the novel trilogy: *Lourdes*, *Rome*, and *Paris*.

Elle restait à ses yeux l'élue, la martyre ; et s'il ne pouvait plus croire, si l'histoire de cette malheureuse suffisait pour achever de ruiner en lui la croyance, elle ne l'en bouleversait pas moins dans toute sa fraternité, en lui révélant une religion nouvelle, la seule dont son cœur fût encore plein, la religion de la vie, de la douleur humaine. (417)

More than forty years before the publication of *Lourdes*, another man of science, Auguste Comte, had also envisioned a “religion nouvelle.” Although Comte's religion can hardly be categorized as a religion of “la douleur humaine,” it was certainly a “religion de la vie” similarly focused on uniting humanity. The renowned mathematician's positivist religion sought to combine the logic of positivist philosophy with the motivational power of sentiment in order to establish a science-based religion that would recognize the human desire for faith and love. Comte was not unique in his mid-century search to bridge the gap between science and faith. Charles Fourier, Henri de Saint-Simon, Prosper Enfantin, and others had also imagined utopias based on fraternity and an approach to religion that would substitute justice for the Catholic doctrine of grace. In this dissertation, we have also already

studied a number of authors, such as Lamartine, Lamennais, Sand, and Hugo, who likewise promote religious ideas founded on a doctrine of love. As Paul Benichou points out in *Le Sacre de l'écrivain*, Comte was one of the many utopian “reconstructeurs” who promoted “une foi nouvelle” focused on fraternity, equality, goodwill, utility, love, and family (43).

Comte stands out among these thinkers, however, as a particularly surprising contributor to religious thought. In publishing his *Catéchisme positiviste* in 1852, he does something rare. He reconsiders his own positivist system that became so fundamental to the scientific thought of the era – and he corrects himself. The same man who confidently declared “l'Ordre et le Progrès” as the ultimate formula for humanity's success in his *Discours sur l'esprit positif*, adds the word “amour” to this formula twenty years later. The Catechism's motto “l'Amour pour principe, l'Ordre pour base et le Progrès pour but” posits the theory that love, or sentiment, is actually the motor that powers order and progress. This new trinity provides the basis for Comte's positivist religion which proposes scientific laws as its dogma but borrows its structure from the Catholic Church. The *Catéchisme positiviste* details the plan for Comte's church, complete with a new goddess figure to replace the Virgin Mary, a priesthood, temples, and an obsession with organizing all ideals into interwoven trinities based on the three stages of religion: “le culte,” “le dogme,” and “le régime .” For Comte, “le positivisme chemine entre le mysticisme et l'empirisme,” ideally closing the gap between faith and reason (*Catéchisme* 151).

Comte's recourse to a religious system as the answer to France's social, political, and moral woes may seem strange in light of the anti-theology stance firmly

asserted in his earlier writings but, as John Laffey points out, Comte's intellectual development was a blend of influences from enlightenment philosophers like Montesquieu and Condorcet to Catholic theocrats, namely de Bonald and de Maistre (46). Comte especially admired Bonald's scientific approach to organization which for him contrasted sharply with the lack of organization he saw in the *Nouveau Christianisme* proposed by Saint-Simon (Laffey 46).

Zola's decision to devote the last decade of his life to writing about religion was no less surprising. As Sophie Guerres points out, despite the persistence of religious themes throughout Zola's work, research focusing on religion in Zola is noticeably limited and the "troisième Zola" (Zola after the Rougon-Macquart) is largely ignored (17). In Andrew Wernick's *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity*, Wernick likewise describes the "second" Comte as a topic that has been forgotten by researchers, noting that "In practical terms, Comte's founding religious project was a complete, even preposterous failure" (5). Wernick argues however that Comte's positivist religion, which was "fashioned *both* as a scientific systematization of science *and* as humanistically demystified religion," is noteworthy in the nineteenth century quest to reconcile faith and science (20). Although Comte was certainly not original in the concepts he promoted, he was arguably "the first to think out, systematically and self-consciously," the integration of science and religion (Wernick 20).

In *Paris*, the last book of Zola's *Trois villes*, Pierre Froment recognizes Comte as one of the many predecessors to the "religion nouvelle" taking shape in his own mind:

D'où soufflait le vent, où allait la nef de salut, pour quel port fallait-il donc s'embarquer ? Déjà il s'était dit que le bilan du siècle était à faire, qu'il devrait, après avoir accepté l'héritage de Rousseau et des autres précurseurs, étudier les idées de Saint-Simon, de Fourier, de Cabet lui-même, d'Auguste Comte et de Proudhon, de Karl Marx aussi... (1266)

In a sense, Pierre's journey from Lourdes to Rome and, finally, to Paris is a retrospective on the same spiritual, social, and scientific movement that inspired Comte. Looking back on the variety of failed utopian schemes, Pierre determines that they all share some common principles that might be the foundation of a new religion:

Dans les évangiles de ces messies sociaux, parmi le chaos des affirmations contraires, il était des paroles semblables qui toujours revenaient, la défense du pauvre, l'idée d'un nouveau et juste partage des biens de la terre, selon le travail et le mérite, la recherche surtout d'une loi du travail qui permit équitablement ce nouveau partage entre les hommes. N'était-ce donc pas puisque tous les génies précurseurs s'entendaient si étroitement sur ces vérités communes, qu'elles étaient le fondement même de la religion de demain, la foi nécessaire que le siècle léguerait au siècle suivant, pour qu'il en fit le culte humain de paix, de solidarité et d'amour ? (OC 1559)

His analysis then is that the previous philosopher's error was not in their ideals but in the presentation of their ideas, which Zola often refers to as their "systèmes." Zola's treatment of these same ideas through the form of the novel might be interpreted as an attempt to remove the system from the concept. The presentation of ideas in the form of a novel replaces the explicit organization of Comte's Catéchisme with the implicit organization of the novel, presenting similar concepts in a more natural, less overtly systematic way. As expressed in Zola's *Roman expérimental*, "Il faut modifier la théorie pour l'adapter à la nature, et non la nature pour l'adapter à la théorie"(Roman expérimental 1197).

Despite Zola's respect for Comte's humanitarian ideas, his most scathing critique of Comte is that his order eventually took precedence over his ideas. He shows his irrational support for Louis-Napoléon's regime to be directly related to a need for order in the face of truth:

Comte lui-même avait fini par le plus trouble des mysticismes, les grand savants étaient pris de terreur devant la vérité, les barbares enfin menaçait le monde d'une nuit nouvelle, ce qui le rendait presque réactionnaire en politique, résigné d'avance à la venue du dictateur qui remettait un peu d'ordre, pour que l'instruction de l'humanité s'achevât. (Paris 1314)

The truth that Comte is suggested to fear in this passage is what Zola believes to be the root of the "banqueroute de la science." According to Zola, people were disillusioned with science because they had expected it to make them happy but, as Zola pronounced in an 1893 discourse: "...la science est incapable de repeupler le Ciel qu'elle a vidé [...] Elle a promis la vérité, et la question est de savoir si l'on fera jamais du bonheur avec le vérité" (Guermès 329). By introducing the concept of love into positivism, it might be said that Comte attempted to put happiness back into science by trying to control love in a system that would subordinate it to order and progress.

In this chapter, I propose a comparison between the experiences of l'abbé Pierre Froment in Zola's *Trois villes* and the doctrine preached by the positivist priest in Comte's *Catéchisme positiviste* in order to (1) better understand the ways in which Zola's "religion nouvelle" continued to address social, spiritual, and scientific problems previously confronted by Comte and also to (2) contrast the differing methods that Zola and Comte used to express similar ideas.

Comte's *Catéchisme* and Zola's *Trois villes* are not completely dissimilar in terms of organization. Though the catechism and the novel are two very different genres, both authors choose to include a priest as the character who guides the reader through the ideas presented in each book. The *Catéchisme positiviste* is structured as a dialogue between a priest and a woman. The woman asks questions about the positivist religion and the priest answers those questions, carefully controlling the conversation in order to systematically reveal truths through dialogue, which he considers a form of "communication réelle" accessible to his target audience, women and proletariats (*Catéchisme* 18).

Throughout the dialogue, Comte's positivist priest is a source for answers. He is confident and convinced that his religion is the true religion, justifying its universality with its goal of *synthèse* and *unité*:

Il n'existe, au fond, qu'une seule religion, à la fois universelle et définitive, vers laquelle tendirent de plus en plus les synthèses partielles et provisoires, autant que le comportaient les situations correspondantes. A ces divers efforts empiriques succède maintenant le développement systématique de l'unité humaine, dont la constitution directe et complète est enfin devenue possible d'après l'ensemble de nos préparations spontanées. C'est ainsi que le positivisme dissipe naturellement l'antagonisme mutuel des différentes religions antérieures, en formant son propre domaine du fond commun auquel toutes se rapportèrent instinctivement (44)

In a word, the positivist priest has *faith* in his system. His goal is to educate the woman by methodically revealing the "truth" to her so that she too can accept positivist doctrine. The positivist priest is rational. Though he preaches the importance of sentiment as a motivational tool in the positivist religious system, the dialogue form leaves no room for an analysis of the priest's own emotions as an

individual. Unlike Pierre Froment, he has no story. The reader is not privy to the process by which the priest has arrived at this belief system. As if to emphasize his total absorption into the role of priest, he also has no name. He is simply referred to as “*Le prêtre*.” The woman, too, is denied any personalizing details. Labeled in the dialogue as “*La femme*,” she seems to represent every woman. She too is absorbed by her social role, presumably in an attempt to universalize the application of the text.

Zola’s priest character, in contrast, is humanized by the novel. The reader bears witness to his struggles with doubt. Instead of assuming the role of guide and educator of women, he finds himself constantly guided by women: first by his mother, then by Marie de Guersaint in Lourdes, and finally by another woman named Marie in Paris. Although he observes and analyzes exterior situations like a scientist, he is also incredibly sensitive, acutely aware of human suffering and easily moved by emotion. Rather than explaining the importance of emotion to the reader, Zola gives the reader a chance to feel Pierre’s emotions in context. Unlike Comte’s nameless priest, the narration regularly refers to Pierre not as “l’abbé Froment” but by his first name, separating the man from his vocation and providing the reader with a sense of intimacy with the character.

Whereas Comte’s priest represents a finished religious system of universal truths ready to be applied to society, Zola’s priest represents the process of arriving at those truths. Pierre refers to his experiences in each city as if they are experiments:

D’abord, pour retrouver la croyance perdue, il avait tenté une première expérience, il était allé à Lourdes chercher la foi naïve de l’enfant qui s’agenouille et qui prie, la primitive foi des peuples jeunes... et il s’était révolté davantage devant la glorification de l’absurde, la déchéance du sens commun, convaincu que le salut, la paix des hommes et des peuples d’aujourd’hui ne saurait être dans cet abandon

puéril de la raison. Ensuite, repris du besoin d'aimer, tout en faisant la part intellectuelle de cette raison exigeante, il avait joué sa paix dernière dans une seconde expérience, il était allé à Rome voir si le catholicisme pouvait se renouveler, revenir à l'esprit du christianisme naissant, être la religion de la démocratie, la foi que le monde moderne... attendait pour s'apaiser et vivre ; et il n'y avait trouvé que des décombres, que le tronc pourri d'un arbre incapable d'un nouveau printemps, il n'y avait entendu que le craquement suprême du vieil édifice social, près de crouler. (1178)

The experiment begins with doubt and, through trial and error, ends with a tested result that produces faith through personal experience and first-hand knowledge. As Michel Butor notes in his introduction to Zola's *Roman expérimental*, "tout le raisonnement expérimental est basé sur le doute..." (1176). This spirit of doubt is a shared phenomenon in the more liberal representations of holy men studied in this dissertation, such as the portrayal of the dissident monks in George Sand's *Spiridion* or Hugo's *Le Pape*. In contrast, Comte's priest does not allow the woman (or the reader) to discover truths for herself. Instead, he explicitly guides the woman through pre-determined logic.

### Lourdes

In Lourdes, the aspect of Catholic worship that Pierre experiences is comparable to the stage of religious discovery that Comte terms "le culte." Equated with l'Amour, the mother, the past, theology, and even poetry in Comte's interconnecting trilogies, the main redeeming quality of the "culte" as a stage of learning through "fiction" is to provide an accessible way for simple-minded people (such as children) to begin to understand universal truths (Catéchisme 331). It also

provides the sentimental base on which the “dogme” and the “régime” will be dependent.

Using Pierre as a witness to events at Lourdes, Zola offers the reader scenes that consider the current state of the cult of the Virgin while including Pierre’s memories of the stages of his own life which recall his own personal “cult” stage as a boy dominated by his irrational, theological mother. Though Zola does not make the explicit connections claimed by Comte, he does tell a story that implicitly links the mother with sentiment, theology, and a distant past. The narrator reveals that the priest’s familial base was unstable from the beginning. The family unit that Zola constructs for Pierre is a house divided between religion and science. His mother actively sought to hinder his knowledge of science by locking away his deceased father’s scientific library. Pierre’s mother, in comtean terms, represents a negative force that hinders advancement to the positive dogma of science. Pierre’s experience in Lourdes is tied with settling disharmonies that have grown out of his past and the *Trois villes* can be viewed as a process of reuniting the Froment family. For Comte’s positivist priest, “la véritable Eglise a toujours pour base primitive la simple Famille” (104). For Zola, as well, the Family is the cornerstone of Humanity: “le grand mouvement des nationalités était l’instinct, le besoin même que les peuples avaient de revenir à l’unité. Partis de la famille unique, séparés, dispersés en tribus plus tard, heurtés par des haines fratricides, ils tendaient malgré tout à redevenir l’unique famille” (OC 1008). Pierre’s mother provides the sentimental background endorsed by the Catéchisme’s positivist priest but she does it in a negative way that disrupts the harmony between the “cult” and the “dogma” and later causes Pierre’s spiritual crisis.

Pierre is only able to access his father's knowledge (what becomes his "dogma") after his mother has already pushed him into the priesthood. Pierre cannot grow beyond his religious vows. He is trapped in a state that the positivist refers to as "une éternelle enfance" (Comte 116). In Lourdes, the faithful are also described as childlike. Pierre is constantly drawn to the idea of Bernadette Soubirous as a child-like woman. Marie is even physically frozen in time in what the narrator repeatedly describes as the body of a child.

Lourdes is furthermore entrenched in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception which, declared by Pope Pius IX in 1854, officially declared the Blessed Virgin Mary "preserved free from all stain of original sin" (Pius IX 1). Though viewed as progress in the eyes of the Church, since an "age of Mary" was supposed to precede the second coming of Christ, Thomas A. Kselman argues that "The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception can be viewed, from the perspective of the history of the Church, as another move designed to counter the rationalism and irreligion believed to be characteristic defects of the modern world" (90). For Zola, who valued fertility as a nearly sacred concept, such a doctrine is perversely contrary to nature:

Ce dogme de l'Immaculée Conception, que son rêve de fillette souffrante était venu consolider, souffletait la femme, épouse et mère. Décréter que la femme n'est digne d'un culte qu'à la condition d'être vierge, en imaginer une qui reste vierge en devenant mère, qui elle-même est née sans tâche n'est-ce pas la nature bafouée, la vie condamnée, la femme niée, jetée à la perversion, elle qui n'est grande que fécondée, perpétuant la vie ? (586-7)

Through rational observation of humanity participating in a primitive religious activity, Pierre experiences an equivalent of the fictional or theological first stage of religious education outlined in the *Catéchisme*. At times, he even envies the divine

ignorance of the faithful, showing that he feels the inability of science to produce happiness: “Il aspirait à la foi, de toute la joie de sa jeunesse, de tout l’amour qu’il avait eu pour sa mère, de toute l’envie brûlante qu’il éprouvait d’échapper au tourment de comprendre et de savoir, de s’endormir à jamais au fond de la divine ignorance” (Lourdes 39). But ultimately, though the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception seems to hinder spiritual and intellectual growth for its believers, it actually helps sow the seed of doubt in Pierre whose indoctrination into the cult of reason has taught him to weigh evidence with a critical eye. Through doubt, Pierre is able to perceive important truths that will germinate in his mind throughout the trilogy. Pierre witnesses the flaws of fetishism while actually experiencing the “contemplation” phase that the positivist priest recommends in place of it. The *Catéchisme* teaches that instead of seeking spiritual satisfaction in an external object, the positivist should develop truths from the inside out: “Car le positiviste ferme les yeux pendant ses effusions secrètes, afin de mieux voir l’image intérieure; tandis que le théologiste les ouvrait pour apercevoir au dehors un objet chimérique” (Comte 83). In a sense, Zola’s method of presenting the “religion nouvelle” through the novel actually comes closer to achieving the positivist goal of approaching the world from the inside out through Comte’s own systematic *Catéchisme*.

### Rome

In *Rome*, Marie de Guersaint, who was so central to Pierre’s quest for faith in Lourdes, seems dead to his present life. She is barely mentioned in the book. Love that does not pass to order and progress (fecundity) cannot survive. What Pierre retains most from the Lourdes experience is the understanding that faith in miracles is

infantile, deciding that all mysteries are “des rites nécessaires à l’enfance de l’humanité” because of the severity of human misery (525). Upon discovering a statuette of the Lourdes grotto in the papal gardens, Pierre seems to want to forget the part of his life spent at Lourdes like a man who has grown out of his childhood toys.

Pendant quelques minutes, Pierre resta immobile, silencieux, devant cette reproduction, ce joujou enfantin de la foi. Des visiteurs, par zèle dévot, avaient laissé leurs cartes de visite [...] Et ce fut pour lui une très grande tristesse,..., la tête basse, perdu dans une rêverie désolée sur l’imbécile misère du monde. (678)

Pierre, who once sought childlike “divine ignorance” at Lourdes, has evolved into a man who seeks genuine understanding.

The system laid out in the *Catéchisme positiviste* is likewise a process of gradual enlightenment that operates from the inside out. According to the positivist priest, the unity of *sentiment* and *esprit* is achieved when “l’ordre extérieur peut devenir l’objet du sentiment intérieur” (47). Consequently, the positivist religious system begins with an interior foundation (*le culte/l’Amour*), through a childhood bond with the mother, for example, and gradually moves to a dogma that is taught from exterior sources, namely science and literature books in the “*Bibliothèque positiviste*.” As the meticulously organized *Catéchisme* illustrates, order is the core of positivism. Harmony between order and progress are essential in positivism since “le Progrès est le développement de l’Ordre (209).

Pierre’s second stage in the *Trois villes*, his excursion to Rome, also deals with dogma. In contrast with the atmosphere in Lourdes dominated by the sentiment of human suffering and the female figurehead of the Virgin, Rome is equated to the “croyant intellectuel, l’esprit qui a besoin de certitude, qui se satisfait, en goûtant la

haute jouissance de ne plus douter” (582). If Lourdes represented sentiment and femininity, Rome is its masculine, more intellectual counterpart. Pierre, who is hungry for certitude, attempts to come to terms with his own belief system by writing a book, *La Rome nouvelle*, which exposes ideas that have grown inside him out of his previous experience of doubt:

En deux mois, il écrivait ce livre, qu’il préparait depuis un mois sans en avoir conscience, par ses études sur le socialisme contemporain. C’était en lui comme un bouillonnement de poète, il lui sembler parfois rêver ces pages, tandis qu’une voix intérieure et lointaine les lui dictait (525)

Reminiscent of Lamennais’ real life attempt to reform the Church through his writings, Pierre endeavors to present the ideas in this book to the presumably progressive Pope Leo XIII, nicknamed “the people’s pope” for his support of the working class and for championing Catholic socialism. Pierre hopes to help modernize the Church by promoting support for the Pope’s socialist rhetoric. What he discovers in Rome, however, is that nothing has changed. Leon XIII’s “people’s pope” persona is a scheme designed to make himself popular with the masses. Rome itself is presented as a closed city, completely detached from and uninterested in the outside world that it seeks to control. Pierre finds that Rome cannot progress because its dogma, or order, is restricted from development, hopelessly rooted in the past. Throughout his stay in Rome, Pierre is met with resistance from clergy and other Romans. In response to Pierre’s suggestion that everything evolves and the world must change, the cardinal Boccanera, in denial, seems to speak for all of Rome and the Church when he dramatically replies:

Et si, comme ses ennemis le prétendent, le catholicisme est frappé à mort, il doit mourir debout, dans son intégralité glorieuse [...] Mais, le soir où le ciel croulerait, je serais ici. Au milieu de ces vieux murs qui s'émiettent, sous ces vieux plafonds dont les vers mangent les poutres, et c'est debout, dans les décombres, que je finirais, en récitant mon *Credo* une dernière fois. (583)

In keeping with the theme of sterility criticized in the doctrine of Immaculate Conception in *Lourdes*, *Rome* depicts the Church itself as infertile. Rome's potential as a center for intellectualism is crushed in a willful decline. Given the choice between regeneration and death, the Church chooses death. Rome's decadent suicide is like the virgin Benedetta Boccanera who dies in a carnal embrace with her lover near the end of the novel. Reminiscent of the Church's refusal to evolve, Benedetta defends her virginity, waiting for the wedding day that never comes, and ends up simply throwing her naked body on her dying lover, Dario. Here, death replaces orgasm in a sterile cycle of degeneration instead of the regeneration intended by nature. The couple never consummated their love because Benedetta was waiting for a Church annulment of a failed first marriage before she could marry Dario. This is but another example of man-made systems blocking nature with unnecessary bureaucracy. Here, Zola seems to be in agreement with Victor Hugo who, as we saw throughout *Le Pape*, contrasted human law with the higher authority of natural law.

Throughout *Rome*, Pierre is increasingly occupied with the concept of charity. Becoming aware of "l'inutilité dérisoire de la charité" due to the suffering he has witnessed, Pierre dreams of rebuilding society on a justice-based system (522). Benedetta, as the most notable female character in the novel, is used as an example of

the impotence of charity. Just as Our Lady of Lourdes seemed to bless only a select few with her grace, Benedetta's minor acts of charity are useless against Rome's large population of poverty-stricken people. Pierre suspects that Benedetta, like Rome, has the potential to be charitable:

Une idée continuait à l'enflammer, celle qu'il catéchisait l'Italie elle-même, la reine de beauté assoupie encore dans son ignorance, et qui retrouverait sa grandeur ancienne, si elle s'éveillait aux temps nouveaux, avec une âme élargie, pleine de pitié pour les choses et pour les êtres [...] Puisqu'elle avait des yeux si profonds de tendresse, puisque d'elle entière émanait le bonheur d'aimer et d'être aimé, pourquoi donc ne reconnaissait pas avec lui que la loi d'amour était l'unique salut de l'humanité souffrante, tombée par la haine en danger de mort ? [...] Et, en somme, l'élevé ne faisait guère de progrès, elle n'était réellement touchée que par la passion d'aimer qui brûlait si intense chez ce prêtre, et qu'il avait chastement détourné par la créature, pour la reporter sur la création entière. (713)

All of Benedetta's potential power of charity is wasted. Benedetta is barely able to shed a tear to advance humanity but is capable of dramatic self-sacrifice to her lover, who has become a sort of idol for her. Benedetta's dying vow "Nous serons morts. Nous serons mariés tout de même et pour toujours" echoes cardinal Bocanerra's vow to die with Catholicism reciting his *Credo* (OC 903). The stagnant state of Rome is again the opposite of what the *Catéchisme* prescribes for the "dogma" or "order" in the positivist system. According to the positivist priest, this second stage should be devoted to preparing for reproduction. Positivist priests are actually required to get married during this phase of their education (270). In the "trois lois d'animalité" outlined by the positivist, "dogma" and "order" are linked to the second law during which animals reproduce and evolve (203)

## Paris

While Rome refuses to evolve, Pierre undergoes an important evolution in the reorganization of his priorities as a result of his experience in Rome. The question of charity versus justice becomes Pierre's most pressing preoccupation in *Paris*, the final installment of the *Trois villes*. Having established in *Rome* that a hybrid Catholic socialist dogma is impossible without the cooperation of the Church, Pierre resolves to retract his hope in the Church and put his faith in the poor.

C'était alors, rendu au doute immense, à la négation totale, qu'il était revenu à Paris, rappelé par l'abbé Rose, au nom de leurs pauvres, pour s'oublier, pour s'immoler, pour croire en eux, puisque eux seuls restaient, avec leurs effroyables souffrances ; et c'était alors qu'il s'était heurté, depuis trois ans, à cet effondrement, cette banqueroute de la bonté elle-même, la charité dérisoire, la charité inutile et bafouée. (OC 1178)

It is not surprising that Pierre focuses on charity and justice in the final stage of his enlightenment since, for Comte's priest too, this third and final part of the cycle ("le régime") is dedicated to actions, specifically to achieving the ultimate goal of positivism: "vivre pour autrui." The *Catéchisme*'s "régime" or "progress" phase is centered on actions: reproduction and good works. Suppressing egotism is vital to progress. "L'unité morale reste donc impossible, même dans l'existence solitaire, chez tout être exclusivement dominé par des affections personnelles, qui l'empêche de vivre pour autrui" (48).

It is also notable that Pierre's journey ends in Paris since Comte's priest establishes Paris as a Mecca of positivism.

Il faut donc que toutes les parties de la planète humaine, les temples du Grand-Être soient dirigés vers la métropole générale, que l'ensemble du passé-fixe, pour longtemps, à Paris. Le positivisme utilise ainsi

l'heureuse ébauche de l'islamisme envers une précieuse institution, qui, par la commune attitude de tous les vrais croyants, fait mieux ressortir la touchante solidarité de leurs libres hommages. (126)

Zola and Comte seem to choose Paris, however, for opposing reasons. Comte appreciates its rich history as a location where the future can progress from the past. Zola, who would rather move towards progress without being held back by the past, seems rather to choose Paris as a setting because of its immensity and potential for growth. At the end of the first chapter, Pierre “rêvait d'un grand soleil de santé et de fécondité, qui ferait de la ville l'immense champ de fertile moisson, où pousserait le monde meilleur de demain” (1191). This image of a sun nourishing a fertile land is a recurring dream of Pierre's throughout the novel. Such an enlightened, healthy and fertile place would stand in direct contrast to Lourdes and Rome precisely because it is less entrenched in archaic religious practices.

The basilica of Sacré-Cœur, however, looms over Paris as a reminder of the opposition to reason that has characterized France since the “bankruptcy of science.” Ironically, in the shadow of a monument that is supposed to express Jesus' mercy on humanity, Pierre and l'abbé Rose must covertly participate in acts of charity since charity is actively discouraged by Church officials. According to Raymond A. Jonas, however, the basilica was also a powerful political symbol for monarchists subscribing to the Moral Order, a plan for restoration with its roots in the writings of de Maistre, de Bonald and early Lamennais (Jonas 483). Interestingly, these are the same Catholic theocrats whose organizational theories were admired by Comte. Like Comte, Moral order sought to synthesize the past as a foundation for the present: “Moral order was a historiosophy: a logically consistent and internally coherent

vision of the past” (Jonas 487). “The basilica of Sacré-Cœur holds a special place in the history of the era of Moral Order. Indeed it is arguably Moral Order’s most enduring accomplishment and certainly its most tangible” (Jonas 484).

In the post-commune political scene, the basilica of the Sacré-Cœur represents the failure of the commune and the triumph of the bourgeoisie. In a pivotal moment near the end of the novel, Pierre (who is pondering the merits of *le travail*, hoping that one day the working classes will be rewarded with justice and happiness) passes by the basilica with his brother. The basilica seems to crush Pierre’s hopes and incite a quiet rage in his brother:

Tout d’un coup, comme les deux frères gravissaient le flanc raide de la Butte il s’aperçurent, en face d’eux, au-dessus d’eux, la basilique du Sacré-Cœur, souveraine et triomphale. Ce n’était plus une apparition lunaire, le songe de la domination, dressé devant le Paris nocturne. Le soleil la baignait d’une splendeur, elle était en or, et orgueilleuse, et victorieuse, flambante de gloire immortelle.

Guillaume... la regarda de ses yeux brûlants, il la condamna.  
(1501)

Zola repeats several times that the anarchist revolutionaries have arrived at desperation because they put their faith in so many utopian systems that sought to replace traditional religion in French society. The anarchists, who began by imagining an ideal anarchy of brotherly peace, end up resorting to terrorism in order to make their minority voices heard by the self-absorbed, insulated bourgeoisie who rule Paris. The depiction of Parisian bourgeoisie is comparable to that of the Catholic elite in *Rome*, steeped in egotistical decadence.

Pierre’s brother, Guillaume, is eventually driven mad by his own anarchist desire to clear the world of a decadent humanity and start society over *tabula rasa*.

Pierre is able to break through to his brother to see the error of his illusion precisely because Pierre himself has experienced the loss of faith in religion – the original illusory ideal. Through the opposite but comparable faith crises of the clergyman and the scientist, Zola is able to show that faith in any system is an erroneous path setting man up for disappointment since no system can achieve the ideal and all systems are eventually replaced. Each of Guillaume’s anarchist friends subscribe to more than one utopian system but no system is capable of satisfying Guillaume: “Théophile Morin, avec Prouhon et Comte, Bache, avec Saint-Simon et Fourier, n’avaient pu satisfaire son désir d’absolu, tous les systèmes lui apparaissent imparfaits et chaotiques, s’exterminant les uns les autres, aboutissant à la même misère de vivre” (1540).

The fear that anarchy will replace Christianity as the new extremist opposition to logic is reflected in the Christ-like persona of the anarchist Salvat whose martyrization inspires his disciples with meaningless acts of vengeance rather than with any constructive sense of true justice. The question of Charity versus Justice resurfaces throughout the book, calling attention to the failure of both. Christians have failed to provide the charity they promised and France has failed to provide the justice promised by democracy. Guillaume, in his moment of madness, admits that he wishes to destroy the Palais de Justice for its failed justice system along with frivolity embodied by the Opera and the vain glories of war symbolized by the Arc de triomphe (1539). Ultimately, Guillaume settles on targeting Sacré-Cœur because he views the church as an offense to a city that has long supported the sciences. From a scientific point of view, Paris is a sacred city. Guillaume’s act of terrorism suggests a sort of religious war:

Je te l'ai souvent dit, on n'imagine pas un non-sens plus imbécile, Paris, notre grand Paris, couronné, dominé par ce temple bâti à la glorification de l'absurde. N'est-ce point inacceptable, après des siècles de science, ce soufflet au simple bon sens, cet insolent besoin de triomphe, sur la hauteur, en pleine lumière ? Ils veulent que Paris se repente d'être la ville libératrice de vérité et de justice. Non, non ! [...] Et que le temple croule avec son dieu de mensonge et de servage ! Et qu'il écrase sous ses ruines le peuple de ses fidèles, pour que la catastrophe, telle qu'une des anciennes révolutions géologiques retentisse aux entrailles de l'humanité, la renouvelle et la change ! (1593)

For Comte, Guillaume would have embodied the unsettling trend of disorganization that he condemned in his utopian contemporaries. In the preface to the first edition of the *Catéchisme*, Comte explains why he felt compelled to invent “la théorie la plus systématique de l'ordre humain”:

Depuis trente ans que dure ma carrière philosophique et sociale, j'ai senti toujours un profond mépris pour ce qu'on nomma, sous nos divers régimes, l'*opposition*, et une secrète affinité pour les constructeurs quelconques. Ceux mêmes qui voulaient construire avec des matériaux évidemment usés me semblèrent constamment préférables aux purs démolisseurs, en un siècle où la reconstruction générale devient partout le principal besoin. Malgré l'état arriéré de nos conservateurs officiels, nos simples révolutionnaires me paraissent encore plus éloignés du véritable esprit de notre temps. Ils prolongent aveuglément, au milieu du XIXe siècle, la direction négative qui ne pouvait convenir qu'au XVIIIe siècle, sans racheter cette stagnation par les généraux sentiments de rénovation universelle qui caractérisent leurs prédécesseurs. (4)

In light of Pierre's horror in the face of violent anarchy, one must wonder if Zola too harbored a desire to find the perfect order that would harmonize dogma and nature. After having experienced the madness of the two extremes of the hyper-organized Catholic Church and the violent destruction of anarchy, Pierre is finally able to advance to accepting a balanced existence.

In a jarring shift from chapter IV to chapter V of the last book of *Paris*, Guillaume's aborted terrorist attempt is followed by the utopian final chapter, supposed to take place fifteen months later. By the end of *Paris*, Pierre establishes "le concours intime et continu des deux sexes... du cœur et de l'esprit" envisioned by Comte (244). Guillaume recognizes that Pierre has finally managed to reconcile the opposing forces represented by his parents:

"Ah! petit frère, dit Guillaume doucement, te souviens-tu, quand je te disais que tu souffrais uniquement du combat de ton cœur contre ta raison, et que tu retrouverais la tranquillité lorsque tu aimerais ce que tu comprendrais ? Il te fallait réconcilier en toi notre mère et notre père, dont la querelle, le douloureux malentendu continuait au-delà de la tombe ; et c'est fait, les voilà qui dorment en paix, dans ton être pacifié. " (1563)

Pierre's reconciliation with his past is a process of putting them behind him in order to grow into a new philosophy ("tu aimerais ce que tu comprendrais"). In the course of the book, Pierre reconciles with his politically radical, atheist, scientist brother; marries a perfect, atheist woman named Marie (who is not the Marie from Lourdes), learns a trade, and has a child. The new religion must be a system of creation instead of a system of destruction: "Ce n'est pas en détruisant, c'est en créant que vous venez de faire acte de révolutionnaire!" (1565). The family is living in sublime harmony now that they have supposedly broken free of the constraints previously imposed on them by Christianity:

Pendant deux mille ans, la marche en avant de l'humanité aura eu pour entraves cette odieuse idée d'arracher de l'homme tout ce qu'il a d'humain, les désirs, les passions, la libre intelligence, la volonté et l'acte, toute sa puissance. Et quel réveil joyeux, lorsque la virginité sera méprisée, lorsque la fécondité redeviendra une vertu, dans

l'hosanna des forces naturelles libérées, les désirs honorés, les passions utilisées, le travail exalté, la vie aimée, enfantant l'éternelle création de l'amour ! (1560)

The final chapter implies that Pierre, after having played the role of “priest” for the Church, finally achieves a legitimate status as a “holy” man only after he secularizes his lifestyle and belief system and moves on. Even some Parisian Christians do not entirely discredit Pierre on account of this self-defrocked status. In general, Pierre is still socially accepted and still called “l'abbé Froment” by certain characters as he greets them in his street clothes. L'abbé Rose, at the end of this life, in bequeathing his “pauvres” to Pierre, recognizes that Pierre's charitable nature is more important than his standing in the Church (1553). Putting his faith in Pierre, l'abbé Rose furthermore implies consent to Pierre's new beliefs, putting good actions above dogma and reinforcing the theme that the concept is more important than the system.

After having spent so many chapters decrying the dangers of substituting systems for other systems, however, Pierre's final vision for “une religion de science” still contains elements of the old utopians. In a way, Zola himself seems to fall into the very trap that he has so thoroughly warned the reader against:

Une religion de la science, c'est le dénouement marqué, certain, inévitable, de la longue marche de l'humanité vers la connaissance. Cette dernière y arrivera comme au port naturel, à la paix mise enfin dans la certitude, lorsqu'elle a passé par toutes les ignorances et tous les effrois. Et déjà cette religion ne s'indiquait-elle pas, l'idée de dualité, de Dieu et de l'univers, écartée, l'idée de l'unité, du monisme, de plus en plus évidente, l'unité entraînant la solidarité, la loi unique de vie découlant, par l'évolution, du premier point de l'éther qui s'est condensé pour créer le monde ? Mais, si des précurseurs, des savants, des philosophes, Darwin, Fourier et les autres, ont semé la religion de demain, en confiant au vent qui passe la bonne parole, que se siècles il

faudra sans doute pour que la moisson lève ! On oublie toujours que le catholicisme a mis quatre siècles à se former, à germer en un long travail souterrain, avant de croître, de régner au plein soleil. (1561)

Faith in evolution, then, is what justifies the inclusion of old utopian ideas into the new religion of science. Instead of perceiving the new religion as held back by history, the final chapter of *Paris* hypothesizes that the religious history of the world was simply evolving towards this final stage, just as Ballanche, Saint-Simon, Sand and others had already suggested earlier in the century. Even though the old systems have been proven ineffective, Zola attempts to place hope in the idea that these imperfect concepts were building blocks in a long and slow revelation. But Zola's vision at the end of *Paris* is arguably quite similar to Comte's own dream of harmony in which Humanity is the global family.

[L'homme] s'en croit d'abord redevable à sa seule famille, qui le nourrit, le soigne, l'instruit, etc. Mais il ne tard point à distinguer une plus haute providence, dont sa mère n'est envers lui que le ministre spécial et le meilleur représentant. La seule institution du langage suffirait pour la lui révéler. Car une telle construction surpasse tout pouvoir individuel, et résulte uniquement du concours accumulé de toutes les générations humaines, malgré la diversité des idiomes. D'ailleurs, l'homme le moins doté se sent continuellement redevable à l'Humanité d'une foule d'autres trésors matériels, intellectuels, sociaux, et même moraux. (276)

The positivist's prophecy of Humanity's bountiful future anchored in the stabilizing force of the mother is repeated in the final scene depicting Pierre's family at the end of *Paris*. Marie, as the ideal mother, is the center of a household of men. Her child, Jean and Guillaume's three children are all male representatives of the future of Humanity.

Despite the fact that Comte is criticized in Paris as the creator of a female-oriented system<sup>37</sup>, a closer analysis of the *Catéchisme* reveals that Comte's vision for the role of women in society is very similar to Zola's. Despite Comte's radical stance against the institution of marriage, which he saw as keeping women "entre la misère et la prostitution," women in the positivist religion are only venerated as symbols of certain principles (love, order, and progress) and as necessary tools for the regeneration of humanity. Comte's system remains a patriarchy with male priests as the bearers of instruction and a reading list of male authors and scientists constitute the dogma. Women are purposely kept limited in their instruction. The priest in the *Catéchisme* explains: "Dispensées de la vie active, les femmes doivent se borner, en mathématique, à une étude plutôt logique scientifique..." (262).

In the positivist religion, venerating women becomes a convenient way to remove them from power. Even though progress is created *through* them, they are prevented from participating in it. As sentimental guardians of past tradition and physical bearers of the future, they are recognized by positivist religion but only on the condition that women submit to being controlled by men. Comte insists on a presumably charitable motto that "l'homme doit nourrir la femme" but such a system keeps the woman dependent on men, regardless of her "divine" status (*Catéchisme* 33). Comte's attempt to subordinate women and love to male-dominated order is a prime example of a system that imposes the kind of unnatural constraints on humanity that Zola passionately rails against throughout most of the *Trois villes*. The female ideal in Zola's "religion nouvelle" nevertheless exists to serve the family and

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<sup>37</sup> "Comte, qui créait la méthode et mettait la science à sa vraie place en la déclarant l'unique souveraine, ne soupçonnait même pas pas la crise sociale dont le flot menaçait de tout emporter, finissait en illuminé d'amour, terrassé par la femme" (1559).

produce offspring in much the same way that Comte had envisioned. Pierre's utopian family is only possible because Marie accepts a rather comtean contract to fulfill her destiny as a fertile woman and pursue revolution through creation.

The positivist priest aims to convince the woman that positivism will “ennoblir et consolider toutes les affections domestiques en les rattachant toujours à leur destination social.” The positivist religious system is dependent on the woman's willingness to cooperate in self-sacrifice. From the beginning of the *Catéchisme*, the priest begins an argument that will eventually arrive at requiring women to accept subordination, despite the fact that they are venerated as the highest ministers of positivism. From the introduction, the priest introduces the concept of a partial sacrifice as a rejection of selfishness: “l'unité altruiste n'exige point, comme l'unité égoïste, l'entier sacrifice des penchants contraires à son principe, mais seulement leur sage subordination à l'affection préponderante” in the service of “vivre pour autrui” (49). By the end of the *Catéchisme*, the positivist priest reveals that the priesthood (men) in service to the family (Humanity) will inspire women to subordinate themselves:

Telles sont les familles au sein desquelles un sacerdoce librement vénéré de tous leurs membres s'efforcera sans cesse de prévenir ou de réparer les conflits mutuels résultés des mauvaises passions. Il y fera sentir aux femmes le mérite de la soumission, en développant cette admirable maxime d'Aristote : « La principale force de la femme consiste à surmonter la difficulté d'obéir. » (295)

Until the introduction of *Paris'* Marie, the *Trois villes* is consistently populated with women who have chosen to obey some other force than the reproductive role that Zola is so centered on praising. They participate in sacrifice but

to the wrong principles, the wrong “God.” Marie in *Lourdes* sacrifices her reproductive power for what she believes is a great cause, the possibility of regenerating Pierre’s faith. She is able to “vivre pour autrui” but her childish devotions hinder her from progressing. Benedetta in *Rome* sacrifices her life and her *pudeur* for her lover (who she also adores as a cult-like figure) but this is a selfish sacrifice with no charitable goal. She has also made the mistake of not giving in to Dario’s sexual advances. The preservation of her virginity, in the end, is shown to be useless and ridiculous. Finally, in accordance with Comte’s plan for women, the final Marie in Paris sacrifices her freedom in order to care for the future of humanity. Most importantly for both Zola and Comte, she reproduces and is therefore participating in human progress.

### Conclusion

Although the two works are distinctly different in form and message, Zola’s *Trois villes* and Auguste Comte’s *Catéchisme positiviste* both capture the nineteenth century trend towards a focus on love in religious thought as well as the growing desire to reconcile science and faith. In the *Catéchisme*, Comte modifies his “Order and Progress” motto of the *Discours sur l’esprit positif* to include love. Comte’s conception of a positivist Church is founded on “l’Amour pour principe, l’Ordre pour base et le Progrès pour but.” Although the author touts his religion of humanity as a progressive alternative to Catholicism, familiar Church structures, notably the clergy and the trinity, are left intact.

The final installment of Zola’s *Trois villes*, *Paris*, looks back on similar spiritual, social, and scientific themes explored by Comte. Zola, however, in choosing the

novel as his tool for exploring those themes, addresses them implicitly rather than explicitly. His approach is a much less systematic one than Comte's structured trinitities in the *Catéchisme*. Zola's characters, for example, are significantly more humanized than the "priest" and the "woman" dialoguing in the *Catéchisme*. In the spirit of scientific experimentation, Zola allows his religious ideas to be subject to more vulnerability. Comte's religion, in contrast, presents itself as a tried and true system of universal truths. Like other depictions of "reformed" clergy and "fallen" angels we have explored in this dissertation,<sup>38</sup> Zola's Pierre Froment cultivates doubt as a path to truth. Rather than simply switch from one ready-made system to the next, he discovers his own personal truth through experience.

Zola's *Lourdes*, which centers on the popular nineteenth century cult of the Virgin Mother, portrays Pierre Froment as experiencing a stage of religious discovery analogous to the "cult" stage of Auguste Comte's religious system. In the cult stage, children or other naive people begin to understand universal truths through "fiction" or legends which teach foundational spiritual ideas through simple symbolic representations. For Comte, the cult stage is associated with motherly love and it thus provides a sentimental basis for the positivist trinity: "cult, dogma, regime."

Throughout *Lourdes*, Pierre's frequent memories of his childhood and his mother support this connection between early life, tenderness, and mysticism. Pierre is only able to reach Comte's dogma stage by destroying some of innocence when he reads forbidden books in his father's library which had been locked away by his mother.

This scene is reminiscent of the discoveries made by Alexis in George Sand's

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, chapters on "Fallen Angels in Restoration Literature," on George Sand's *Spiridion*, or on Hugo's *Le Pape*.

*Spiridion* when he dared to enter the monastery's library of heretical texts. Zola, however, adds to the conflict by associating religious mysticism with feminine influence while associating positivism with the masculine father. In this way, the scene is reminiscent of Michelet's conclusions in the *Bible de l'humanité* which blames women for society's failure to embrace reason. The fanaticism inspired by the Virgin Mother and her largely female supporters seems to warn against the influence of feminine imagination. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is depicted by Zola as an unnatural perversion. For Zola, Comte, and Michelet alike, fertility is sacred and the perpetuation of humanity is woman's destiny.

In *Rome*, Pierre is shown as having grown spiritually and intellectually as a result of his experience in Lourdes. He is prepared to seek genuine knowledge rather than faithfully accept divine ignorance. In this stage, the priest turns away from the glorification of ignorance which we have seen in the works of Ballanche, Chateaubriand, and de Maistre. The positivist priest in the *Catéchisme* likewise calls for the unity of "sentiment" and "esprit" which has surfaced in liberal religious thought since Mme de Staël. Pierre's second stage in *Trois villes* parallels his stages of progress as a young man as he grew from believer to thinker. Similar to the true story of Lamennais, however, Pierre discovers, that Rome's dogma is stunted because it is wholly rooted in the past, refusing to progress. Rome, like Lourdes, is infertile because it embraces a doctrine of death, a culture in which the afterlife overshadows life on Earth.

Throughout *Rome*, Pierre, again reminiscent of later Lamennais and Hugo's *Le Pape*, is increasingly concerned with charity. Bernedetta, though generous, is depicted as

providing her generosity within a system of grace reminiscent of Our Lady of Lourdes. Zola, like Michelet, seems to draw a comparison between Christian grace and the fickle favors of desirable women. Bernadetta's willingness to sacrifice herself to the lover she idolizes but not to the whole of humanity is furthermore reminiscent of the messianism condemned in the *Bible de l'humanité*. Because Froment's Rome is stagnant, it cannot progress according to Comte's system whereby "dogma" or "order" leads to a progressive "régime." In the *Catéchisme*, these stages ideally foster reproduction – an activity which is impossible for the Catholic clergy.

In *Paris*, Pierre continues his meditations on charity but expands his outlook to include a consideration of justice. Again like Lamennais, the priest breaks with the Church in order to place more effort on helping the poor. This third and final stage of Pierre's growth corresponds to Comte's *Catéchisme* in that Comte's third stage, "le régime," likewise emphasizes reproduction and good works or the concept of living selflessly in service of humanity. The basilica of Sacré-Cœur looms over Paris as a symbol of the reactionary opposition to reason in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The basilica represents the triumph of the Moral Order promoted by the ultramontanes whose sense of structure was actually admired by Auguste Comte despite a their obvious conflict in philosophy. The differences in Comte and Zola's approach to a religion of humanity are apparent. Whereas Comte's *Catéchisme* is, in structure, the positivist version of Moral Order, Zola's *Trois villes* rejects all order imposed upon man outside of his natural life cycle. Faith in any system, even faith in science, Christian charity, or democratic justice, ends in disillusion. Despite what seems like a condemnation of utopian ideals, however, *Paris* ends with a scene

which, in the spirit of Comte, harmonizes man and woman, heart and mind. Pierre's new philosophy is the very definition of philosophy – a love of knowledge. The portrait of the atheist family emphasizes liberty and creation. Pierre, like Comte, envisions a “religion of science” which also incorporates some elements of utopian systems seen throughout the century. Evolution surfaces as the justification for incorporating old ideas into new theories. As Ballanche, Saint-Simon, Sand, Hugo and others had suggested, the world in *Paris* is evolving towards a final stage of human history. Both Comte and Zola rely on women for this regeneration. In both systems, love, charity, and reproduction – progress itself – is dependent on woman's self-sacrifice to humanity.

## Chapter 16: Conclusion

I began the research for this thesis on a hunch that references to religion which I had noticed in nineteenth century French literature might be indicative of some larger dialogue concerning the role of religion in nineteenth century society. My research throughout the dissertation process has shown that indeed notions of religion were being redefined by a variety of authors united by common themes such as justice, love, and progress as well as the virtues celebrated in the French Republic's motto, "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité." Although the authors' interpretations of these themes were often contradictory, their shared interests indicate a unified effort to respond to the increasingly divergent paths of organized religion and modern society.

A discussion of whether or not authentic religion originates inside the individual (in his "soul," or his "conscience") or outside of the individual, in the form of an external religion remains constant throughout the century. With few exceptions, the general trend in these texts shows a march towards a valorization of sentiment and individualized spirituality. Beginning with Rousseau, knowing oneself and living in tune with the conscience despite society becomes the key to a moral lifestyle. For the Savoyard Vicar, internal sentiment brings man back into touch with what it means to be human and consequently connects the individual with the whole of humanity through shared human sentiments which are presented as universal truths. The individual thus becomes a more sympathetic and charitable member of society. Mme de Staël likewise looks to sentiment as an internal regulator of morality. In *Corinne*, spiritual sentiment, which is often associated with artistic expression, is shown to be a

unifying power. Recognizing the palingenesis of religions which historically contributed to Christianity, Corinne is comforted that sentiment itself remains a constant throughout the evolution of religious systems.

Although Ballanche insists on the necessity of external religion, he nevertheless relies on sentiment, which he defines as an innate knowledge of God, in his attempt to prove the veracity of Christianity in *Du Sentiment*. His *Essai sur les institutions sociales*, however, condemns individualism as dangerously subjective. The *Essai* insists that society itself is a divine institution responsible for man's moral education.

Chateaubriand, too, rejects solitude and promotes the Church as a regulator of dangerous human passions, notably in *Atala* and *René*. For Chateaubriand, the conscience is reinforced through social duties and external religious structure. In these stories, individuals without external spiritual support fall prey to their own destructive emotions. Despite their support of the Church as a necessary moral institution, Ballanche and Chateaubriand nevertheless incorporate sentiment into their religious reflections and depict Christianity as hopeful and even forgiving. Joseph de Maistre, in contrast, insists on Christianity as a wholly external. The dialogues in his *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg* argue for the doctrine of Original Sin which renders man incapable of judging morality for himself.

The romantic authors studied in this thesis tend to support the power of the individual conscience as a source for authentic moral truth. As we have seen, Vigny's journal considers the idea that the conscience was divine. His *Éloa* exercises free will, sacrificing herself for the noble cause of compassion for another being – even though that being is depicted as unworthy of her charity. Lamartine's Cédar likewise falls

willingly, exercising “moral liberty” by following his conscience to support humanity on Earth.

Lamennais’ incredible transformation from ultramontane clergyman to anti-Catholic poet serves as a dramatic illustration of the changing nature of religious thought in a century characterized by progress and revolution. The anti-individualism expressed in *De la religion* is comparable to the extreme conservative thought found in de Maistre’s writing. For early Lamennais, any individual religious interpretation is deemed dangerous. He insists on the pope’s necessary role as a dominant spiritual guide and as a unifier of the people. In *Paroles d’un croyant*, Lamennais completely reverses his stance on the Church, demonizing its leaders as decadents who have twisted the true Christian message of charity in order to support tyrannical monarchies. Interestingly, however, Lamennais still upholds social unity over individualism, even in his new liberal religious thought. Along with Saint-Simon, he promotes charity and unity but without appealing to the conscience of the individual as Rousseau and Mme de Staël had done. Saint-Simon’s creation of the *Nouveau christianisme* confirms that for him and his followers an external system was necessary for the organization of religion in cooperation with society. For Saint-Simon, love, which is obviously associated with internal sentiment, is the supreme and universal law. Nevertheless, the *Nouveau christianisme* reinforces the idea that this love must be supported and promoted by religious institutions. Clearly, individualized interpretations of love are insufficient for Saint-Simon who envisions social unity and harmony as his goal. The industrialist nevertheless reveals throughout his work that religion should make people feel happy.

Auguste Comte's positivist religion, obviously somewhat inspired by his familiarity with Saint-Simon's work, likewise insists on external religious structure as essential to the application of morality in society. Though his ideas are purely secular, the system he proposes in the *Catéchisme* grafts secular thought onto a Catholic structure. While Comte's system views individuality as a necessary foundational building block in the "cult" stage of his system, the individual ideally grows to give himself over to humanity in a completely selfless existence aimed towards the continuation of the human race. It must be noted, however, that even the liberal systems which insisted upon community stressed love and charity towards humanity, sentiments which undoubtedly originate the hearts of individuals.

Towards the end of the century, Zola's Pierre Froment serves as an illustration of the progressive movement away from organized religion and towards a natural religion of humanity which likewise revolves around the regeneration of the human race.

Individual meditation in the *Trois villes* creates doubt in existing faith systems which in turn leads to liberation from superstition. Froment's concern with charity, however, and his participation in humanity through procreation in the end suggests that unity, not individualism, is the path to progress.

The concept of the evolution of religion seems generally appealing to a good number of the authors studied in this dissertation. Mme de Staël's *perfectibilité* in *De la religion* envisions humanity as improving from generation to generation as people become ever more in tune with their sentiments. The theory of perfectibility provides hope for social progress by negating the ultramontane insistence on primitive man as ideal. The idea that human spirituality could be perfected also denied the doctrine of

infallibility upheld by the Catholic Church. Ballanche, despite his ultraconservative leanings, supported the idea that Christianity is a religion in flux, constantly adapting to changing times. The *Essai sur les institutions sociales* maintained, however, that these changes should take place in step with God's will. Ballanche's notion of palingenesis, which argued for the continual rebirth of society, influenced Saint-Simon's progressive social system in the *Nouveau christianism*. Saint-Simon, however, further embraced progress by proposing a religion supported by science. By casting philosophers, moralists, and metaphysicians out of the utopian society, scientists, artists, and intellectuals would become the new spiritual leaders.

George Sand's *Spiridion* imagines spiritual progress according to the *Évangile éternel* which hypothesized that Christianity would undergo a series of three different stages of growth. In accordance with Saint-Simonian notions of religious progress, the radical monks in *Spiridion* look for truth in knowledge. By opening their minds to both sacred and profane texts and by sharing knowledge from generation to generation, the monks achieve a state of enlightenment which prepares them to embrace the final state of spirituality coinciding with the turn of the nineteenth century in which faith is placed back into the hands of the people. Hugo's *Le Pape* likewise imagines the possibility of humanizing the Church by removing the pope from his isolation and placing him amongst the people. Through the experience of fraternity, Hugo's "dream pope" realizes that liberty of the people is the will of the Infinite. Like later Lamennais, Hugo's pope concludes that democracy is a part of the divine plan.

By the same token, Renan's portrayal of the historical Jesus in *Vie de Jésus* depicts Christianity's founder as a social reformer who was decidedly a man of the people. Renan, like Ballanche and Sand, imagined Christianity as a continual movement towards justice and liberty. For Renan, the science of history would serve to advance religion through continuous research on the history of religious figures. Renan equated the knowledge he gained through research to a sort of revelation made possible through the miracle of scientific advancement. This insistence on faith in truth through science, however, is weakened by the author's prejudices which show through in his subjective analysis of the role of the Jewish people whom he blames for the crucifixion of the Christian messiah. Renan expressed confidence that positive science would prove Christianity's true message of justice but his inability to uphold unbiased judgment in his own analysis rocks the foundation of faith in science.

Michelet, too, expressed a belief in history as the gateway to discovering the truth about religion. His *Bible de l'humanité*, in contrast to Renan's biography, focused on the broad scope of the history of world religious doctrines rather than on the lives of individual religious figures. For Michelet, justice and reason will only triumph when the "feminine" force of Christianity is defeated. While Renan saw female influence on Christianity as a positive reinforcement of the sentimental bond which unites humanity, Michelet characterizes the doctrine of grace as a feminine perversion of justice. By gendering the justice versus grace debate, Michelet brings his religious politics into the intimacy of the home where, he claims, the Church has crushed the traditionally male-dominated institution of the family by seducing the imaginations of women.

Michelet's association of Christianity with femininity was not new and, in fact, gender issues are frequently woven into the religious debate. In *De la religion*, Mme de Staël defends female influence on Roman society as morally constructive and argues that the Christian sacrament of marriage contributed to the development of equality of the sexes. In *Corinne*, Corinne's spiritual adaptability, which is also associated with her femininity, ultimately allows her to achieve a state of wisdom which remains impossible for the austere and unimaginative Oswald. Although Saint-Simon does not explicitly favor any particular gender in his *Nouveau christianisme*, followers of his work under the guidance of Prosper Enfantin would interpret Saint-Simon's doctrine of love as favorable to female leadership since women were commonly associated with sentiment. Vigny and Quinet uphold this association of femininity and sentiment by portraying their fallen angels as women. Although Lamartine's Cédar is male, he, like the young priest in *Jocelyn*, seeks universal truth through the unification of the sexes. In these poems, man's contact with a female counterpart serves as the catalyst to the discovery of universal truths. Even at the end of the century, Comte and Zola, who turn away from the mysticism traditionally associated with female power, nevertheless insist on women as essential to any religion of humanity since women hold the power to procreate. The propagation of humanity becomes sacred as the people are increasingly considered as a unified force, replacing destiny, or the will of God, with the concept of the voice of the people. As we have seen, the overwhelming concern in all of these texts is the reconciliation of religion and modernity. The law of 1905, which officially separated Church and State in France, seems to respond to the debate with the invention of a secular nation.

Whether or not any of these texts had a direct impact on the law of 1905 remains to be studied. As liberal religious thought moved ever closer to matching political ideals, the ongoing dialogue perhaps fostered a social environment which was more receptive to the concept of secularism. Alternatively, it is conceivable that the dialogue simply reflected social changes which were already underway. For John Warner Monroe, French secularism was “a crucial process of redefinition – one that did not take place at the command of a single thinker or politician, but that occurred gradually, across a vast range of different forums, in response to a constellation of specific events” (151-2). The authors studied in this essay represent some of the many participants in that “process of redefinition.” The very existence of a plurality of religious conceptions provides the foundation for an argument in favor of “the freedom of conscience” and the necessity of secular law which ideally unifies the people through common nationality rather than dividing them by excluding religious minorities.

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In celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the “loi du 9 décembre 1905,” France’s *Assemblée nationale* re-released a copy of Aristide Briand’s *Rapport fait au nom de la commission relative à la séparation des églises et de l’état*. In the avant-propos by Jean-Louis Debré, who at that time served as President of the *Assemblée nationale*, Debré emphasizes the necessity of the separation of Church and State in order to support the French Republic. In this text, Debré reaffirms the idea that the law exists to benefit all French citizens: “Un siècle après son adoption, la loi de 1905 figure au nombre des grands lois de la République, de notre République” (paragraph

3). Debré notably commends the law for its adaptability to a changing society: “la laïcité française, loin d’être un dogme intangible, sait parfaitement s’adapter aux évolutions de notre société” (paragraph 14). I found this phrasing especially powerful since the question of adaptability, the idea that religion must be able to withstand the inevitable revolutions of society, is repeatedly addressed in a number of texts in this dissertation. Especially in the works of Ballanche, Saint-Simon, and Sand, Christianity itself is envisioned as a dynamic philosophy. According to Debré’s statement, this desire for adaptability is addressed in the secular solution. By the same token, the “liberty of conscience” cited in the first article of the law implies a sort of mobility of thought which, although secular, continues to affirm the existence of the conscience as a moral authority. In her book *Reclaiming the Sacred*, Suzanne Desan explains that in the 1790s, Christianity as a whole came to be seen as a rival cultural system that prevented people from becoming true citizens of the new Republic” (7). John Warner Monroe’s study of spiritism and politics in the early Third Republic shows that the idea endured amongst 1870s republicans who increasingly viewed any kind of spirituality (not necessarily just Catholic) as a possible threat to Republican ideals (121, 142-3). In the 1870s, “Leftists previous willingness to take political discourse into the register of metaphysics became much less pronounced. Instead, writers and speakers expressed their visionary aim in the language of positivism” (121)<sup>39</sup>. The writers studied in this dissertation are perhaps the dying embers of a French political discourse which included notions of spirituality. The details of how the legal separation of Church and State continued and continues to interplay with the

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<sup>39</sup> According Graham Robb, even Victor Hugo was not immune to the criticisms of spirituality on the part of Republicans: “Even in Republican circles, it was unfashionable to pay homage: Hugo was tainted with bizarre spiritual beliefs” (496).

nation's literature is a topic which remains to be studied. After definitively deciding on national *laïcité*, for example, is the process of redefining religion still necessary in French literature? Is it possible that the morals and traditions which we term "religion" have evolved to a point in contemporary times that another term (perhaps "justice" or "human rights") has finally taken its place in the secular dialogue? Moreover, contrary to Debré's insistence that the hundred-year-old law has succeeded in adapting to social change, secularism in France has come under fire in recent decades for its inability to sufficiently adapt to the needs of an increasingly diverse French population<sup>40</sup>. Drawing on data collected in international census reports, Greg Urban's 2008 article, "The Circulation of Secularism," suggests that a nation's legal definition of "freedom of religion" impacts the way that people express their religious beliefs or lack thereof. The French dialogue surrounding religion and spirituality must inevitably have evolved (and continues to evolve) since 1905. This continuing dialogue in twentieth and twenty-first century French literature has yet to be explored but it should be of great interest to American scholars who are certainly familiar with the impact of religious issues on our own politics and society. Studying the history of changing religious thought in France, which in many ways is our sister democracy, could provide valuable insight into our own country's struggle to define the role of religion in society.

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<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Susan J Palmer's 2011 book, *The New Heretics of France* which details the 1996 Guyard Report designed to curb "cult" (*secte*) activity in France or Jennifer A. Selby's 2012 *Questioning French Secularism: Gender Politics and Islam in a Parisian suburb*.

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