

Reflections

ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM

OF FATHER DE LA MENNAIS

Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, OP

Translated by the Brothers CHRISTIAN

Richard L. & George G., OP

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	v
PRELIMINARY CHAPTER	1
CHAPTER I: Exposition of the Philosophical System of Father de La Mennais	16
CHAPTER II: The Authority of the Human Race as Recognized by the Church before Father de La Mennais	21
CHAPTER III: The Need for a Teaching and Infallible Authority Has Always Been the Basic Defense of Christianity; but This Authority Was Placed in the Church and not in the Human Race	25
CHAPTER IV: Philosophy in the Church before Father de La Mennais	43
CHAPTER V: Plato	46
CHAPTER VI: Aristotle	50
CHAPTER VII: Descartes	53

CHAPTER VIII: The Teaching of St. Thomas on the Use of Philosophy in the Church	57
CHAPTER IX: Summary of What Has Preceded and Definition of Certitude	62
CHAPTER X: The Philosophical System of Father de La Mennais Is Useless in the Defense of Christianity	66
CHAPTER XI: The Philosophical System of Father de La Mennais Contains the Most Extensive Protestantism Yet to Appear	77
CHAPTER XII: Conclusion	86
ENDNOTES	91

FOREWORD

The **Preliminary Chapter** at the beginning of this book has already appeared in *L'Univers Religieux* [The Religious Universe] (2 May 1834). We have retained it here as a Preface because it embodies the themes which moved us to publish our thoughts on the philosophical system of Father de La Mennais.

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REFLECTIONS
ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM
OF FATHER DE LA MENNAIS¹

PRELIMINARY CHAPTER

On the current state of the Church of France

Thirty-four years ago, the Church of France presented to angels and to men only extensive ruins. The remains of its hierarchy, cut down by a revolution which spared no virtue, wandered, for the most part, in exile. Its temples were converted to secular uses; some were torn down; others closed and emptied; still others given over to that schism² which had been inaugurated under Louis XIV by the men of Port-Royal,³ and which, expanded by fear at the feet of the gallows, coveted the bloody heritage of the saints. The monasteries, with which the Church had peopled cities and wilderness areas, became mills, farms, prisons, or uninhabited places. The Church retained nothing of the heritage which She had acquired through centuries of charity. Since She Herself was barren, no one could foresee Her bringing forth near the overturned altar those men, who one day would be able to help their exceptional predecessors in removing the debris.

And yet, the Church of France, now impoverished and destitute, having scarcely a chalice from which to drink the blood of its Master — the Church of France had conquered its enemies. From that very powerful Revolution, which the human spirit had prepared for through three centuries of labor and which had given birth to so many men and to so many extraordinary events, no belief could have emerged. The Revolution had taken down a monarchy, won battles, frightened Europe; it had done everything, except that which could alter the world. If the Revolution had arisen two hundred years earlier, France would have become Calvinist and republican. The limit had been crossed at which error still had enough stability to be the common belief and the link between people; indeed the point had been reached at which error could no longer join two men together, and where it remained as if overwhelmed by *its triumph*.⁴ Although the Church in France had been disturbed by an obstinate schism⁵ — which tore its insides for one hundred fifty years — it was impossible for the Revolution to establish a national belief. France did not believe in the schism, nor in reason, nor in the Supreme Being, each in turn recognized by the Republic. The solemn moment had arrived for it to believe in everything or in nothing. I say “the solemn moment” because, following the one in which truth reigns without debate, there is no other more significant time on earth.

In fact, what saves and perpetuates error is that portion of truth mixed in it, and the authority thereby conferred on it. The more error increases, the more of truth it loses, and all the more does its authority diminish, because it disturbs with greater acceleration the principles which remain in its comprehension. Minds become surprised to see error escape before them; they follow where it leads, but, as soon as they attempt to grasp it, it fades away, it escapes their grasp even more quickly, like a phantom whose reality fades before those who attempt to touch it very closely. And then, all of a sudden, error loses its substance and man finds himself alone, naked, without beliefs, gasping for breath in the face of truth. This is the moment which I called “solemn,” when God wishes to bring people back to Himself; it is by this route that He makes them follow. He pushes error to its ultimate where it is clear that it can do nothing; that, in fact, it is nothing. Or rather, He allows it to go along on its way, all alone, because, by itself, error gravitates to nothingness.

Subsequently, the destiny of peoples weighs in: forced to choose between what is and what is not, to believe in everything or to believe in nothing, people either have to die or return to the truth. Indeed, people

would not know how to live without relationships and without faith, and consequently without truth. Moreover, if they no longer live from that share of truth which error contains — because it has stopped being their link and their faith — they must necessarily live by truth itself, which is solely able to subdue, to unify, and to satisfy their mind.

This is where France stood the day after its first Revolution. The sterility of error, unable in the midst of that universal upheaval to establish a belief and a church, revealed that its final hour had arrived. Napoleon saw it with the same understanding which, fifteen centuries earlier, had revealed to Constantine the fall of idolatry. When a sect of deists approached him to ask him to recognize their worship as that of the State, he responded that, already in his mind, he had answered all those who hoped to acquire the heritage of the Roman Church: There are only four hundred of you! The Concordat of 1801, between the Holy See and the French Republic, was the outcome of that power which truth had gained in a struggle in which everything seemed to have been lost. A great captain, by the battles he had won, was elevated to be the head of the State; he tried to learn what kind of support he had in the human spirit, but found he had none, other than a ruined Church which, for a century, had become the folk tale of intelligent men.

Later on, when time had increased his power, we see him receive the imperial anointing from the hands of the Pontiff whose predecessor had crowned Charlemagne. Thus did he provide an astonishing lesson to those who could not comprehend that a “foreign priest,” according to their way of speaking, could exert any influence on the creation of thrones and on their power.

The Church of France crossed the Empire with dignity, restoring its cathedrals and its seminaries, consecrating each year at the altars of Christ a new generation of servants, who knew how to resist the man who found no resistance anywhere — a generation surrounded by relationships, by its jealous, poor, modest, and charitable foresight, and already made famous through the illustrious writers whom God began raising up as their defenders.

The Empire fell. At the first rumor of its fall, at the reappearance of the old French kings, the

eighteenth century was stirred up in its coffin. It believed that there was in its breast only one sword blow from the conquered emperor; it decided to tempt fate. As in former times, buried paganism was called up by Julian⁶ and played under the sun this curious ancient scene of which the world had kept a souvenir. In the same way, the eighteenth century emerged from the tomb with its bygone deities: Voltaire, Rousseau, d'Alembert, Diderot, Condorcet, Cabanis, and a thousand others who flocked to it. While the Church, always more fruitful, gave birth to new beings who filled Europe with their contemporary renown, this procession of the dead was sent to meet them. Unfortunately for truth, it was not alone in the presence of error: very weighty political discussions complicated the struggle. A likely fear was that the flow which carried the world toward God would be stopped for a long time when suddenly, a clap of thunder once again overturned the ancient House of France, and for a second time, provided the eighteenth century with total power over society.

Never was such an outstanding and more fabulous triumph followed by a more striking and sudden moral catastrophe. Since the eighteenth century had only fought against the ashes of the dead, it found in that triumph no spark that could enlighten anything at all.

Three components make up a social order: religion, power, and freedom.

As for religion, the eighteenth century sought in vain for one which it could provide to the people. The only one it found was the genuine one, if only that of a lowly priest who placed an altar in a shop; there, with the best of intentions, he offered to create a service which would be at the same time Catholic and French — a mockery which goes to show the depths to which error had fallen for thirty years. To be sure, the first revolution had found some bishops, some priests, a schism, a heresy; it was indeed something, and it had a name. What name will history give to the cult about which I speak? So there was a need to choose between two alternatives: allow France to enjoy quietly the religion that the eighteenth century had earlier promised itself to destroy utterly, or else overthrow from top to bottom this great country — to ask once again for the ability to bring about a resolution which neither power nor persuasion had previously been able to do. The first option prevailed. And yet, the eighteenth century destroyed an ancient church, tore down a few crosses with its icy hand, muttered a few sacrilegious prayers over some caskets, ruined the archbishop's residence

in Paris,⁷ and obtained for its illustrious men a silent and empty grave it named the Pantheon.

As regards power, the second condition for all society, the problem appeared easier to resolve. A prince of royal blood was chosen, but the eighteenth century — a bit embarrassed for having recourse to princes — shouted at him: We are the ones who made you; it is because of us that you are elevated, because of us that you rule, because of us that you are popular and revered! Barely had the suspicion arisen that the new monarch had a thought of his own — namely, that he was exercising some power — the idol of opinion fell when faced with that opinion. Left standing was simply a man guarded in his palace by some soldiers, a master of slaves, supported by the weapons of some against the hatred of others, the principal spring of a machine called *society* by philosophers, pleased with their work.

One thing remained as the principal rallying issue of the eighteenth century, which is, in fact, a necessary condition for any social order: I speak of liberty. Liberty is the collection of rights which no legitimate society can tear away from its members without violating both justice and reason. However much dispute arises about the extent of those rights, they certainly do exist. It is certain that no power, however strong it had been, ever completely misunderstood them. Christianity introduced many of them and some of great importance in the world: it took away from princes the spiritual direction of their subjects, and created, under the name of the liberty of the Church, the liberty of nations. Unhappy with this great work which it did not understand, the eighteenth century, quite to the contrary, sought to base the liberty of nations on the destruction of the Church. But up to that time, it had succeeded only in bringing forth the Republic and the Empire, those two giants of despotism. Everyone waited to see what the revolution of 1830 would produce as regards liberty. It turned out that, except for some trifles, the revolution added nothing to the civil and political liberty previously established by the former kings. At most, it applied the seal of victory. If it had done any more, the Church would have found itself unfettered; in other words, the eighteenth century was taking its own life. It stopped, suddenly afraid, when it realized how deeply God was involved in its plans.

In vain did the young of that worn-out generation cry out to have it forge ahead. They themselves could not escape the abyss that had forced their fathers to retreat except by plunging into another abyss.

Reduced to the impossibility of discovering a new liberty which was not a liberty of the Church, they brusquely declared that the issue was no longer between servitude and liberty but between one scheme and another, between monarchy and republic. Besides, tired of fighting over words, the nation called for a fundamental change in the distribution of property. It was then that a worldwide law was revealed: that liberty is not in itself the goal of man; that being negative in its nature, it merely scatters the obstacles which would impede man and humanity from reaching their goals. Clearly, one can be free and miserable; consequently, beyond liberty there is always the good and the evil that we hope to achieve by its help. Now, property being the sovereign good of those who have not heard the words: *blessed are the poor*, it follows that, sooner or later, the anti-Christian revolutions will end in an overturning of property.

Another reason presses on them: it is written about John, son of Zechariah, “When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and *the poor have good news brought to them.*”⁸ Thus did the Savior of the world draw up among the proofs for His mission, equal to the greatest miracles, the preaching of the Gospel to the poor. Indeed, since that day, teaching and help of the poor has been one of the permanent marvels of Christianity, the most eloquent sign of Christ’s divinity — this sign, which error had to undermine but was never able to imitate except to its confusion. Perhaps one day the anti-Christ will raise some of the dead to life; but what decidedly he will not do is to have the poor evangelized. Then, as soon as the world, leaning to its ruin, makes new efforts to escape the law of its Redeemer, the fate of the poor, that is to say of humanity, will become all the more to be pitied, will bear witness to the final generations that the God of the Christians was the one and only good God. This characteristic of Christianity made such an impression on the spirit of nations that no religious and political revolution would be able to survive in current times unless it improved the condition of the masses. Now, what does liberty mean for the masses, since slavery, under its diverse forms, was gradually abolished in Christianity by the ever-active power of those great apostolic words: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”⁹ What good for the poor is an electoral law which does not make him an elector, for want of money; a law of the jury

which does not make him a juryman, for lack of money; a law of municipalities which does not call him for counsels to the commune, for lack of money; a law on the press which does not allow him to write, nor to understand what is written, for lack of money? What does liberty do for the poor man when it excludes him from everything, precisely because he is poor? What does equal access to employment and unlimited competition between citizens give him, he who lacks the basic elements necessary to compete for anything at all? Money is the key to everything, the price of everything, the measure of everything, and the poor man does not have any! Precisely because he does not have any, he is unable to acquire any, except by accident; furthermore, there is a law which condemns the large majority of men from ever having any.

And yet, the people who are the instrument of revolutions have need to profit in some way. Even anti-Christian revolutions have to offer something to the people, to prevent them from noticing that only with Jesus Christ do the poor gain. The agrarian law of the ancients was nothing but covetousness; the agrarian law of moderns is itself a struggle against Christianity. When the words “blessed are the poor” have been removed from the belief of men, when destroyed were innumerable works by which these other words were fulfilled: “the poor are evangelized”; the resulting void indeed needs to be filled. The first revolution filled it with the goods of the nobility and of the clergy, and with a law which decreed in families equal rights to inheritance. But the emptiness quickly swallowed this booty. From the very fodder given to it, the revolution spawned a race of even more numerous and more famished masses, which in their turn, cry aloud, demand their share, and demand it from those who alone today have the means, those whom with frightening contempt they call the *bourgeois*.

In fact, what for the masses is a bourgeois? He is the heir of the bishops, of the priests, of the lords. He is the avaricious lord, amassing for his relatives who no longer have bondmen or love. He is the priest who shuts the door of the monastery to the poor by very quickly throwing him a piece of bread, instead of opening to him, warming him, serving him at table, then leading his guest to the church, decorated and illuminated, in the middle of the saints, with music and incense, in order to exhilarate him with a bit of joy so he can continue on his pilgrimage, praising God. He is the prevaricating bishop, who gratuitously has killed in the heart of the poor man the faith, hope, and charity which nourished him, the only advantages which he had,

and which kept him from envying others who were more fortunate. Under such circumstances, how could property not be subject to new disorders? How could the question of liberty — less than insignificant for today's masses — not have been transformed into a civil war between those who have possessions and those who do not, between the masses and the bourgeoisie? This was an inevitable danger; in disclosing it, the revolution of 1830 clearly laid bare the social powerlessness of the eighteenth century.

To this vast shipwreck, we must add a ruin, no less significant, no less sad, for those people who had placed their hopes outside of the Catholic Church, solely in the powers of humanity. I am referring to the reversals of all the popular reputations gained during the sixteen years of the Restoration. From the prince down to the lowly editor of a newspaper, no name remained as it had been. Victories which usually lift everything up, this time brought down the victorious. Error betrayed its presence in the actions of men as well as in the progress of society. Where are the orators who shook up France? Where are the renowned politicians? Those philosophers who gathered the young around their pulpits, what became of them? Those who proudly spoke of the future, who mourned with such eloquence the fallen Vatican,¹⁰ because it had been a major element of man's past, where are they? All have disappeared like Alexander at Babylon, during a banquet; they held the cup from which, after them, the human race was to drink, so immeasurable was this cup, the cup of a new covenant, of a previously unknown life; they said "Drink." Where are they now? Languages have been garbled on their graves, as they were long ago at Babel; they made known to the interpreters of the divine language the mysterious meaning of this story placed in the Bible at the cradle of civilization. It is the story of the everlasting misery of men who aspire to perfection by their own abilities, who place stones on top of mud, mud on top of stones, and who label this activity with the pompous name of progress. From the heights of heaven, which they hope to reach, God looks down upon their work with compassion; then, one day, He shatters the pride of the descendants there where He had shattered that of the fathers.

Remain silent; allow the noise of the present-day world to rise in your hearts. What do you hear? Indistinct voices which call to each other without ever answering? Unforgettable monologues in a crowd, pressed together with mouths open; the cry of the lost man, at night, in the middle of the desert; of travelers

without a goal who say to themselves: Let us go on; hearts wearied from having lived; uncommunicative mouths which speak only two words: Perhaps! Alas! No harmony, no solidarity save that of complaint. If only there were still some battlefields where people could kill each other with some kind of glory; if only there were revolutions which, while bringing fear to life, do give it some excitement; if only there were blood, from debauchery, from amphitheatres, from gladiators, something which would keep us from feeling in the depth of our hearts, the grace from heaven, which falls into them, in spite of ourselves! But no; society carries us along with an unconcerned and cyclical movement, in spite of catastrophes. Only literature, the expression of our lunacy, raises up around us a world to our liking.

This is the result of the last triumph achieved by the eighteenth century. The Church of France, always governed by the same laws in the civil order, has neither gained nor lost anything because of it; yet it did gain all that error had lost of its moral influence. The divine plan for the Church, or rather for religion, became increasingly clear. In large part, it is the same plan that, before the coming on earth of His only Son, God had used to prepare the salvation of the human race. "In past generations," said St. Paul, (God) "allowed all the nations to follow their own ways."¹¹ He gave them four thousand years to fashion the world according to their pride. He allowed conquerors, legislators, wise men, to exercise on men the power of force and persuasion. He saw to it that no fortunate circumstance was lacking to them; and, surely, no one is unaware of the degree of culture reached by minds in antiquity. Nonetheless, the more nations followed *their own ways*, the more they got lost. No power, no laws, not even reason could gather humanity together and bring it comfort. Force had produced the Roman Empire as its greatest achievement and assembled almost all the known nations into a despicable pack, under insolent masters who one day would become monsters because of their inability to maintain without self-deception the weight of their fate. Laws, which everywhere favored servitude, had created no durable and universal order. Reason, lifted up as high as it could be by illustrious men, brought about only transitory and contradictory schools, did nothing for morals, and before long pushed to the extreme, it became lost in hopeless doubt.

Many troubles had warned the world that it was not in its natural state. God had revealed Himself to it by His very absence; He had become, according to the prophecy of the dying Jacob, *the expected of*

nations. Finally, when the time marked by Providence for the fulfillment of the sacrifice, whose blood, destined for the salvation of everyone, would flood the past as well as the future, men lifted to God their humbled heads, were disposed to receive grace and truth. This is not to say that they were in the proper state to receive the Gospel, but only that their general inclination was toward the faith. Many philosophers embraced Christianity, and Saint Justin, one of them, explained to us in the narrative of his conversion the causes which at the time drew philosophy toward God.

There are godly men, it was said to those individuals who were weary of their unfruitful research; there are godly men, who, from the very origin of the world, conversed with God and who predicted from century to century events which are happening today: we call them prophets. Take them up and read them. The simple comparison of this divine word to the human word drove the philosophers of good faith to their knees. The two works having been almost totally separate, we could clearly see God, and we could clearly see man.

For a long time, the memory of this comparison remained present in all intellects. For a long time, Christianity's sovereignty went uncontested. Eventually, the people who every day saw their redemption from farther away, persuaded themselves that it was possible to preserve the benefits of Christianity while ceasing to be Christians. They even denied those benefits and accused the Savior of mankind of all the ills of humanity. They agreed among themselves that the era of reason had arrived, that for centuries the Christ had delayed His appearance, but that finally the future and time had prevailed over Him. At that moment, if it can be said without blasphemy, God found Himself as if embarrassed. He had to distance Himself from these proud generations, and allow them to flounder in their nothingness, because God, who gives all to man and receives nothing from him, cannot countenance pride. But how to leave the world for a second time? Had He not placed His Church in the world with the promise of immortality? Had He not said: *You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it?*

Before these words of the new and eternal covenant, it had been easy for Him to allow *the nations to follow their own ways*. And yet, even though they had embraced the primitive and patriarchal traditions,

no living and infallible authority retained their original purity in its heart. It was a widespread "Protestantism" which did not yet have a Bible. But the divine constitution of the Catholic Church did not allow the nations to fall so deeply into degradation. Constrained to respect His word, God chose another way to absent Himself, insofar as possible, from a society which did not recognize Him: He allowed His enemies to prevail, they and their principles, in the government of human affairs. The Church, despoiled in almost all of Europe, excluded from public counsels, weighed down by restrictions, a kind of disturbing foreigner, was reduced to the minimum of life needed so as not to belie the divine oracles, and to be present at the great spectacle which once again would reveal to men the extent of their powerlessness. This manifestation has already begun, as we have seen. How much time, and how many trials will be necessary to bring it to completion? When will the day come on which nations and kings, acknowledging their errors, will together rebuild the demolished Jerusalem? No one knows. Our duty is to act as if it were tomorrow.

The Church of France, which had a prominent role in the misfortunes of truth, seems destined also to have an illustrious role in the restoration of faith. The revolutions which she experienced served only to extinguish in her bosom the errors of the preceding centuries. Purified by persecution, she reduced her adversaries, unable to falsify her, with the choice of allowing her to live, or of destroying her and with her all order and all society. Unlike the Church of Great Britain, she did not have to live through centuries of oppression before glimpsing the distant light of her deliverance. Even though she does not obviously enjoy full liberty, at least she has retained that liberty which truth never loses unless it has been betrayed by its natural defenders. The illustrious writers whom God raised up for her and who up to now erected the only durable monuments of French literature in the nineteenth century, are a further sign of the designs of God in her favor. God sends men capable of leading minds to the good only to those nations He wishes to save. From another point of view, where we see appear superior minds, this is a sign that human thought leans in that direction. The genius is but a trailblazer. He is the first to show himself, that is all; like the pilot bird who precedes the colony of his flock, but is himself impelled by the general movement of migration. It would have been impossible for the eighteenth century to produce de Chateaubriand, de Bonald, de Maistre, de La Mennais, de Lamartine, just as it was impossible for ours to produce Voltaire and Rousseau. The wind which brings to the world good or evil geniuses has indeed changed direction. It is an easy fact to verify for other

countries of Europe, but a more delicate one in France, because France, having plunged faster and deeper into error, was the first to reach the furthest boundary where the lost human mind begins to discover, like a new land or new skies, the ancient truth. Consequently, the Church of France, from this point of view, still has an advantage over the other Churches of the continent. The latter struggle against Protestantism or against an unbelief which up to now has not been victor or master. The Church of France, which escaped from Protestantism, and precisely because she did, early found herself entangled with the unbelievers, lost her blood and her heritage in the combat; and now, rising from her ashes, young and virgin, she has only one error left to conquer, an error weakened by the victory, a half-dead Sybil, which has forgotten the language of the future. Finally, since by its position, by its literature, by its character, by its influence and its revolutions, France has become the most active home of the human spirit, its Church necessarily gains from this an importance which no doubt contributed to the countless blessings which she received from God in the past forty years.

This situation imposes weighty duties on the French clergy, not only for the flock entrusted to their care, but also for the influence they could exercise throughout France on the fate of Catholicism and of the world. According as France, the elder daughter of unbelief, approaches God more or less slowly, the general destinies of faith will take more or less time to be fulfilled. Even though this approach depends in large part on causes altogether unrelated to the will of men, even though the Church plays a role more passive than active in the destruction of error, and that only her immobility — which uses and exasperates the futile plots of some very powerful geniuses — is, in fact, an everlasting means of progress, nonetheless it cannot be denied that the virtues and talents of the clergy reinforce each other in the development of truth. Men have a part in all that God does for them, even though it is not the most important part. That is why the French clergy must always keep before their eyes the grandeur of their mission; never more so than today, since they have reached a decisive and very fragile stage in their new existence.

Up to now, the Church of France, ruined by the Revolution of 1789, has acted like a mother of a noble race who lost her children in service to the country and is anxious to produce additional offspring. The Church of France, by reason of repeated care and charity, with an understanding more admirable than is

generally believed, was able in thirty years to repeople the sanctuary. The result is a masterpiece of skill and of the grace of God. But, while giving to people pastors to replace those who had died, she was not yet able, despite her hopes, to offer them professors, save in very small numbers, nor to revive the divine sciences, snuffed out with the martyrs who had been their last and illustrious holders. The preaching of the Gospel, the distribution of the sacraments, this was the most pressing work; it had to be taken care of. Today, even though all the vacancies have not been filled, nonetheless the Church of France is no longer under the dominion of such an absolute need. The superabundance of clergy can be seen here and there; the surge of holy generations swells around the altar; for some, there appeared one thing that everyone had lacked: time. As soon as a Church has the luxury of time, by that very fact, She is forced to consider the restoration of religious sciences, under penalty of shirking Her duty. Absent this action, She opens herself up to the greatest dangers that any Church could face. There appears in Her bosom a vacillating multitude of minds which does not know how to manage its spare time and its activities. Unprepared for the holy ministry because God has inspired them with another calling, these minds seek in vain a haven where their energy can be fostered, purified, placed into service for common works in the Catholic journey. They grow weary or become excited apart from each other; they see themselves wasting away without benefit to God. The loss of so many minds capable of doing something good is indeed a great misfortune. Not without impunity can beings be stopped in the movement toward their goal; the river whose course has been impeded, becoming greater by reason of the obstacle in its way, will break through the powerless dikes holding it captive. Minds which have no regular outlet sooner or later meet each other in their painful searches, will join together in an unhealthy joy, will become irritated by the awareness of their present state and by the remembrance of their inaction. Lacking regularity, this society will one day fall like lightning, long stored in the clouds, on a Church without theologians, a Church which will have as Her defense only her share in the general promises of immortality.

These reflections were made for all men who busy themselves seriously with the future of Catholicism in France. Many attempts were made to reinstitute ecclesiastical studies. Bishop Frayssinous of Hermopolis tried during his administration to create a vast establishment destined for education in the sacred sciences. For as long as his means allowed, Archbishop de Quélen of Paris laid the foundation for a similar institution. The late Cardinal de Rohan, Archbishop of Besançon, left in his will certain sums for this noble

purpose. Nonetheless, there was an impediment which prevented any similar endeavor in the Church of France to achieve true success. Minds were greatly divided concerning questions of the greatest importance, and in particular, concerning instruction in philosophy.

One celebrated individual with whom we had contacts, which were later disturbed by the uncertainties of the time, wanted to build on the ruins of all the ancient philosophical systems a new philosophy, destined, according to him, to seal in their very foundations the alliance of faith and of reason. This philosophy, rejected by the body of bishops, nonetheless had made great headway among the clergy of the second order. Other discussions joined to that one, resulting in inexpressible pain. Encountering everywhere a doctrinal power foreign to theirs, in which they had no influence, and which caused great dissension among the clergy, the bishops arrived at a natural mistrust against the movement of minds. They correctly feared that if they founded something of a scientific order, its direction would fall into hands other than theirs, or that the lack of cooperation between capable men would ruin their efforts. Either directly or indirectly, these considerations led them to restrict their role to that of pastors and guardians of the faith, which, to be sure, was their first duty. On the other hand, the school, which by its own authority aspired to govern minds, fought in vain against an invincible difficulty, that of founding in the Church an institution that was independent of episcopal authority. It could not help but provoke controversy. Thus, on one side and on the other, there was in the scientific order the lack of necessary continuity. And at what a time! — when the Church of France progressed from youth to adulthood, at the moment of Her most critical new destinies, at the age when power needs to be distributed, but is not yet regulated by a judgment of equal strength. Who will be able to recount how much all of us have suffered? Our wills vacillating between bishops immobile on their seats, and the men who cast a spell on us by the magic of their personal influence; our need for strong studies and the hopelessness of satisfying that need; our limitless desire for a unity troubled in its very foundations; the feeling of the good to be accomplished and the impossibility of doing so; the mistrust, the suspicions, the low spirits, and the century growing beside us, now full of menaces, now pushed towards God by fearful experiences. And instead of teaching her, we, unhappy outcasts of the previous day, children of saints who died for the sake of truth, we wore ourselves out in discussions whose charm or calamities we knew only how to admire.

This situation lasted fourteen years.

As of yesterday,¹² the school about which we spoke was in existence. Enfeebled and divided by a word from the Apostolic See, nonetheless it had retained a chief and some disciples. Affection, remembrances, pain, respect, a thousand noble sentiments kept it together as if alive, even though it was far from being what it had been.

Today, we can announce that this school, which we long ago abandoned, no longer exists, that all the collaboration of works among its members has been broken. Faithful to the insights of his heart regarding the past, each member now knows no other guide than the Church, no other need than fellowship, no other ambition than to gather around the Holy See and the bishops which its favor and divine mercy have given to the Christians of France. We will not honor the event¹³ which led to this declaration; the Church and posterity will judge it. For us, who long ago contributed to the stimulation of intellects, we felt that we owed it to our brothers, in these painful circumstances, to raise our voice — not to strengthen them, not to tell them that they had nothing to fear, not to show ourselves as stronger or more distinguished than they, but to reveal to them the depth of our heart. A participant in all that has occurred, informed of all the secrets of this affair, I will bear witness to God, to His Church, to the Roman Church in particular, until my very last breath.

CHAPTER I

Exposition of the Philosophical System of Father de La Mennais

One hundred and fourteen years have passed over the grave of Bossuet, one hundred and three over that of Fénelon, seventy-six over that of Massillon, the only one of the celebrated men whom Louis XIV had forgotten behind him, when he cast over his reign that supreme observation, of which de Chateaubriand spoke, in order to reassure himself that he held the remnants of the *splendors of the monarchy*. To an unbelieving century which was about to open, he left Massillon as a mild and clever reproach, so that one day it could be said that the last eloquent sounds of the ancient Church of France had come from a mouth that had announced the word of God to Louis XIV. After death had silenced that pleasant voice, the Church of France had other distinguished men, some learned men, some polemicists, some preachers; it no longer had any of those names which extend into posterity. At the very moment of his fall, Father Maury¹ missed gaining great fame because all he had was a brilliant wit when, in fact, glory comes from the heart, just like noble thoughts.

And so, for all of sixty years, no priest in France had obtained renown as a writer and an outstanding intellect, when there appeared Father de La Mennais, the man of the hour now that the eighteenth century had taken up arms again. His book, intended to engage the century in combat, was an admirable revival of ancient and eternal arguments which proved to men the need for faith, arguments made new by their application to errors more extensive than those of the preceding centuries. Except for a few expressions in which the luxury of imagination revealed a kind of youthfulness which enhanced the depth of the work, everything was simple, true, energetic, attractive; it was the former Christian eloquence, sometimes a bit harsh. But error had done so much damage, had reproduced itself with so much recklessness, despite its crimes and its incompetence, that there was satisfaction to be found in seeing it punished by rigorous logic. There were no limits to enthusiasm and to thankfulness; truth had been awaiting an avenger for such a long time! In a single day,

Father de la Mennais found himself invested with the influence of Bossuet. Europe looked forward to a continuation of his work. At that point, he had not yet established the importance and the necessity of faith. Indeed, where did the real faith lie? How could it be brought to light? What was the regulatory authority over human reason? These were some of the questions to be resolved, the answers to which, impatiently desired, would later cause very intense disagreements.

After two years of waiting, the second volume of the *Essay on Indifference*, was published. Nothing could have predicted the surprise that it brought about. From the heights of the ancient defense of the faith, from the bosom of eloquence which he had spread in waves against the enemies of truth, Father de La Mennais had put aside the sterile discussions of philosophy in favor of the question of certitude, at once both the clearer and the most obscure aspect of the human mind. How this happened needs to be explained.

Just as the earth rests on deep foundations that the eye of man has not seen, that his hand has not touched, but about which there can be no doubt, so too human reasoning rests on principles that are immutable, universal, perpetual, which do not reveal themselves, but being in fact our very nature, capture and hold strongly our convictions. Once man has been settled on this base, like the earth with its poles, he, the free being, the supreme star, is not obliged to follow, in the inferior regions of the mind, a predetermined route. He is allowed to wander, to get lost, if he so wishes. Carried on immobile points of reason like wheels on their axles, he can plunge into unknown spaces, traveling there without rules and without limitations, and, like the son of a god, who one day directed the sun, embrace the totality of his follies. And yet, there is an appropriate route for man as well as for the rest of creation; being king is no worse a condition than being subject; intelligence and liberty were not provided to become means of getting lost but to give to God, their author, creatures who seek Him with love in the fields of the infinite. Thus, there is a proper route for man: who will show us what it is? By what sign will we recognize it? Where is error, where is truth?

Man was given two answers. Religion told him: "Do not stray too far from the truth. You belong to two grades of things which you need to possess successively, visible things and invisible things. As to the first, look at them, touch them, test them; you need only patience to know them and to use them. As for the

second ones, where your eyes do not help your mind, the good Lord who created you has made them known to you; He gave you visible evidence of invisible things: look, touch, test, adore this witness and follow it. Look, man! This is your fate and your law: you come to visible things by believing in invisible things, and you take to your grave the undying hope of seeing that in which you believed.”

In its turn, philosophy told him: “Truth is what is, error what is not. What is not is formless, without light, unable to be grasped, can never present any clear idea to the intellect, impress on it any sharply defined image. And so, every time the spirit sees something clearly and sharply, what it sees is not error, it is truth: evidence is the characteristic which distinguishes the true from the false. Is it evident that there exists a God, Creator of heaven and earth? Wise men are divided: some affirm it, others deny it. Is it evident that there is in man a spiritual and immortal soul? Wise men are divided; some affirm it, others deny it. Is it evident that after death God punishes evil men and rewards the good? Wise men are divided; some affirm it, others deny it. Look, man! This is your fate and your law: you move within visible things while doubting the invisible ones, and you will carry to your grave the insoluble enigma of your very self.”

There you have the two routes which Religion and philosophy have traced for man’s reason, in that space wherein freedom travels. Through actions, Religion has united the visible world to the invisible one; philosophy has divided minds and directed schools. Moreover, being separated by their methods, the two have almost always been separated by their history. Philosophy has never carried the yoke of Religion without struggling except to emancipate itself.

Accordingly, these are the two jealous authorities which Father de La Mennais, with a bold design, attempted to reduce into one, not by destroying one or the other, but by obliging both to start from the same point, to follow the same path, without mingling together, to arrive at a common goal, like the two branches of an ellipse. Just as Religion rests on facts, is an authority, has a teaching and infallible Church, Father de La Mennais wanted to have philosophy spring from the divine word, be based on facts, be an authority, and have a teaching and infallible church. He wanted these two infallible organs of truth, who told the same things to the world, to be united in Christ, in one indissoluble and eternal unity.

He claimed that the philosopher, represented by Descartes in the modern world, has established that *evidence* is the distinct characteristic of the true; but it is not so. Evidence is such an ambiguous sign that all errors are propagated in its name; that everyone invokes it in favor of the most contradictory of judgments. If yes and no are evident at the same time for different persons, how could evidence be the distinctive characteristic of the true? Moreover, it is also a fact of experience that the same man, at different stages in his life, changes his way of looking at things, sees clearly what had appeared obscure, and obscure what had appeared clear. If yes and no are evident one after the other in the same mind, how can evidence be the distinctive characteristic of the true? The fundamental mistake of philosophy is to suppose that the reason of each man is sufficient unto itself, that it contains its proper regulations, that it is independent, sovereign, the judge of last resort concerning error and truth. Once we have given individual reason such awesome power, should we be surprised if it builds up and tears down at will, if there is nothing stable in its history except for a succession of ruins, if man believes whatever he chooses, and despises whatever he chooses? No doubt truth is what the human mind holds on to, but what it holds on to everywhere and always, something which she has never changed in any place or time. Universality and perpetuity: therein lies the distinctive characteristic of the true. But where is universality save in the beliefs of all people? Where is perpetuity, save in the beliefs of all the centuries? Where are all the nations and all the centuries, save in the human race? The human race, then, is the depository of truth, it is the infallible oracle. Indeed if it was wrong even only once, no longer would universality and perpetuity be characteristic of the true. Truth would not be in each man nor in all men, it would be nowhere. Whoever refuses to acknowledge the common reason of his fellow men, whoever prefers his own thought to that of all peoples in all the centuries, that person is a maniac who denies his own reason even as he denies that of humanity. He leaves the Church of knowledgeable people and loses himself through a pride which knows no boundaries and has no justification.

That having been said, what are in fact the beliefs of the human race? It believes not only in those fundamental and immutable maxims which are the basis of all sciences, but also in the existence of a God, creator of things visible and invisible, to whom man, His work, owes the worship of adoration. He believes in the good, in evil, in the punishment of evil, in the reward of the good. He believes that man, today unhappy and corrupt, was not in this state when leaving the hands of a very good God, but that a culpable violation

of divine laws degraded his original nature. He believes that he was promised a redeemer who by a major sacrifice — of which victims sacrificed on the altars of nations were but a shadow — would reconcile man to God. He awaited this redeemer and greeted him from afar, and this redeemer did come since he has ceased waiting for him. In receiving anew through Christ the word of God, Who was the original source of these universal and perpetual traditions, the Catholic Church has confirmed the faith of the human race; and the human race, mixed with the Catholic Church spread throughout the world, to become one voice with her, uses its voice to announce to the world that there is but one truth, one God from whom it springs, one way of knowing Him: the submission of man to the highest visible authority.

This is the system on which Father de La Mennais built his defense of Christianity, and which he called: the philosophy of common sense. From its very inception, it divided minds violently. In vain, did Father de La Mennais publish successively a *Defense*, and two books in which he collected proofs from the tradition of the human race, and from his faith in the principal dogmas of Christianity. With time and public debates, the fracture did nothing but increase.

At this point, we wish to express our thoughts on this system, which preoccupied even us for ten years.

First, we will present the genuine authority of the human race, that authority which has never been denied it in the Church.

Next, we will demonstrate that it is not on the authority of the human race but on the authority of the Church that the defense of Christianity had been based up to the time of Father de La Mennais; on that score, his teaching, even before any examination, bears the characteristic of novelty.

In the end, after having studied what use the Church has constantly made of philosophy, we will examine whether the philosophical system of Father de La Mennais is useful to Religion, or whether it menaces Religion with great danger.

CHAPTER II

The Authority of the Human Race as Recognized by the Church before Father de La Mennais

Before anything else, it behooves us to learn what degree of authority the human race enjoyed unreservedly, so that the reader will not confuse in his mind what is beyond doubt and what is being contested, and that he grasp without perplexity the proper topic of the discussion.

Here, then, are the limits which the authority of the human race has always recognized.

There have always been admitted as the basis of human reason universal, perpetual, and immutable principles, which are the common fundament of all minds, beyond which it is impossible to go, and that no one can deny without separating himself from the fellowship of men, unable to hear them and to be heard by them. Some of these are: the whole is greater than the part; two things identical to a third are identical to each other. Whether we give these immutable principles the name *common sense*, or the name *axioms*, or the name *first principles*, or by personifying them, we attest to the human race that they stood always as the expression of truths beyond the realm of controversy, the columns of Hercules for the mind. No more than any others, the Christian sages did not deny this fundamental order; quite the contrary: they took men as they are, believing what they always believed and what they will always believe, and from the core of the required beliefs, they struggled to carry men to the infallible bosom of the Catholic Church by facts brighter than the day, and whose extensive authority, to be appreciated, needed no reasoning, only the simplicity of a heart in good faith.

Secondly, other than the universal, perpetual, immutable principles which no one could deny, at least in practice, without being accused of folly, other principles dear to all nations were recognized, principles

which philosophers could attack in their lectures, and even in their lives, without being accused of having lost their minds — but not without being accused of a crime against the country and the human race. These were the existence of the divinity, the worship it was due, the difference between good and evil, future penalties and rewards. Philosophy was free to attack these major social facts, without which no nation established itself or was able to survive. But the voice of mankind was heard in opposition to an outrage always present to great national devastation. As for the defenders of social faith, they demanded to know what was certain and uplifting on the earth, if it was permissible to disregard the universal conscience, and where was the voice of nature and of God, if not in the voice of the people? Christian sages spoke in the same manner. But neither one side nor the other concluded that the human race was infallible. The only conclusion is that there resides in the moral order, just as in logic, a certain number of universal, perpetual, immutable principles, which are the basis of all duties, just as the general axioms are the foundation of reason. This is what Catholic theology teaches, when it says that there is no invincible ignorance among men concerning the first principles of the natural law.

“A creator God, who, possessing the fulness of being and the source of life, has given existence to everything which makes up this universe; a conservator God, who governs all by His wisdom, after having created everything by His power; embracing all beings in the care of His universal Providence, from the starry worlds to the flowers of the field, without being any greater in the least of things, nor any lesser in the greatest ones; a supreme legislator God, who, commanding all that is good and forbidding all that is evil, manifests to men His holy desires by means of conscience; finally, a God, sovereign judge of all mankind, who in a future life is to render to each according to his works, by allotting punishments for vice and rewards for virtue. Here you have a belief acknowledged by the most pure reason, the awareness of which, no doubt to very different degrees, is as universal as mankind; this knowledge we find in its purest state among the Hebrews, and further developed among Christians; it could have been diminished by pagan superstitions, *never eliminated* in any nation on earth.”¹

Finally, there could be found spread throughout the universe a certain number of traditions similar to each other, although distorted in different ways; they do not belong to *necessary beliefs*, nor to *social beliefs*, such as the hope for a future redeemer, but, by their particular resemblances, seemed to have come from a common source, to have had a primitive and divine model. Plato and all the religious philosophers made extensive use of these fragments which floated in the human memory, like planks from a major shipwreck. By means of these fragments, the philosophers were able to transcend the thoughts of their eras, thereby proving that, in fact, these fragments were the sacred dust of a lost wisdom. When Christianity appeared in bright daylight, it was easy to see what the origin of these altered traditions was. Some Fathers of the Church compared them to the mysteries contained in the holy books; they penetrated their more or less vulgar trappings, and revealed the surprise that nowhere did the divine word disappear wholly, that Christianity had arrived at the right time so that the world would retain some traces of the original light.

“Since the beginning of the human race,” says St. Augustine, “Christ has never ceased being prophesied, there more dimly, here with greater pomp, depending on God’s regard of the times. There was never a lack of men who believed in him, from Adam to Moses, and subsequently in the people of Israel, which in an unusual mystery was the prophetic nation; and in other nations as well, even before His Incarnation. Indeed, the holy books speak of several men, who from the time of Abraham, while belonging neither to the race or the people of Israel, nor united in its destinies as proselytes, played their part in the great mystery. Why, then, should we not believe that there had been others in the dispersed nations, even though the same authorities make no mention of them?”²

But while collecting all these characteristics of truth scattered in the world, while finding in them a proof of divine revelation, in that it was preserved by two different avenues, one unmixed, the other corrupted, and thus had in its favor a twofold testimony, nonetheless the Church Fathers did not uphold that the human race was and is the infallible guardian of traditions, which could not fade, alter themselves, or be lost even in its hands. They never said anything like that, but, rather, arrived at a conclusion through the means of knowing antiquity at their disposal; they interrogated the pagans, the poets, the Sybils, the sky, the earth, and the underworld about the Christ. They took hold of the lightest breath, the softest sound which

seemed to measure the name of the Savior of mankind. They made of all these voices, of all these noises, of all these laments, from all the centuries a startling and triumphant hymn. For all that, they did not say that the lips of humankind were inspired or infallible, and yet the hymn was even more beautiful on lips which perhaps no longer understood it — lips which perhaps would have lost it if the breath of God had not come to reanimate it and make it immortal.

The contribution which the Church made to the human race is significant, as we can see. She did not impart to it what belongs strictly to herself, a teaching and infallible authority; rather, she respected in it the *common sense* and the *moral sense*. In addition, she used as a counter-proof some traditions, more or less altered, which Providence had preserved in its bosom.

We now have to see how the Church used this to establish its proper authority. Saint Augustine will enlighten us.

CHAPTER III

The Need for a Teaching and Infallible Authority Has Always Been the Basic Defense of Christianity; but This Authority Was Placed in the Church and Not in the Human Race

“Just as there is no holy and happy life outside of the true Religion, in which men adore a single God and acknowledge Him, with unblemished piety, as the universal principle of things, in Whom all is contained, begun or perfected — in all this we see clearly how serious was the error of nations which preferred to adore many gods rather than the one true God, Master of the universe. This was the fault of their wise men, called by the name *philosophers*, who directed schools, wherein they were not in agreement with each other, yet shared temples with the masses. Indeed, both the people and the priests were not unaware of the diversity of their opinions concerning the nature of the gods, since each of them professed his belief openly and fearlessly, endeavoring to convince all the world, as much as possible. And yet, they and their followers, imbued with such opposing views, did gather around the same public altars, with no one being barred. At this point, I will not investigate which philosopher approached closest to the truth: I wish only to remark, what appears obvious to me, that in the temples, they yielded to the thoughts of the people, and that, outside the temples, they taught something else to the same people.

“For all that, it is said that Socrates, bolder than the others, invoked in his oaths everything that crossed his mind — a dog, a stone, whatever else — intending to show by this conduct, if I am not mistaken, that the works produced by nature, under the governance of divine Providence, more valuable than those of even the most skillful workers, were more worthy of veneration than the usual objects of Religion. No doubt, Socrates did not think that the wise men ought to venerate dogs or the stone by

which they pronounced oaths; but, rather, it was a way of teaching to whomever could understand, that in the deep superstition in which men had fallen, it was good to show, beyond them, a degree of reason which, by making them blush, shamed them from living at an even more dismal level. By this, he also called attention to the philosophers who, from the unworthiness of their thoughts, took the visible world as the supreme God, because in their desire to be consistent with their teaching, they had to adore the first stone which appeared, as if it were a portion of the divinity, and further, if they were horrified at this consequence, they had to change their opinion and look for the one and only God, the only one placed above the human mind, creator of souls and of the universe. Then came Plato, more pleasant to read than powerfully persuasive. Indeed, not one of these men was born to convert his nation from the superstition of idols and the vanity of the world to the worship of the true God. This is why Socrates himself, with the masses, worshiped vile images. After his condemnation and his death, no one dared to swear by a dog, nor to call a stone by the name of Jupiter, but did retain for posterity only the memory of these bold actions. Was it out of fear, or by the influence of the times? It is not up to me to judge.

“But what I can say with confidence, for the sake of those who cherish the books of those sages with an obstinate affection, is that today, in the centuries of Christianity, there is no doubt as to which Religion should be embraced, nor of the way which leads to truth and to happiness. In fact, if Plato were alive and would not object to being interrogated by me; or rather, if, during his lifetime, one of his disciples had questioned him, after he had heard from the teacher’s mouth that truth cannot be seen by the eyes of the body, but only by the mind; that every soul which embraces truth becomes happy and perfect; that the greatest obstacles which prevent us from knowing truth are a life given over to licentiousness and false images of tangible things, transmitted from the exterior and imprinted in us through the senses, give rise to opinions and errors; that, accordingly, the soul needs to be healed if it wishes to contemplate the immutable form of beings, a beauty that is one and everlasting, which is not subject to the variations of time and place, but

which, being always the same, even though unrecognized by men, remains the only true and sovereign lasting thing. The rest appears, dies, passes, and changes, borrowing from the eternity of God its changeable existence; and among all those borrowed things, only the soul, rational and intelligent, has received the gift of contemplating divine eternity, of being affected and perfected by it, and thereby is also able to merit an eternal life. But, weakened by the love and the pain of transient things, given over to the habits and to the senses, the soul fades away in empty images and laughs at those who tell it that there is something that cannot be seen by these eyes, that does not present itself to our thoughts in a corporeal form, which can be grasped by the mind alone. If, as I say, a disciple of Plato having heard him speak in this way, were to have asked: Would you have judged worthy of honors the notable and majestic man who could persuade the people to believe what you have said, even if they could not see it for themselves, or who, as regards those who would be able to understand him, could tear them away from the base opinions of the masses and from common errors? I think that Plato would have responded that it was not possible for a man, unless he were born of nature itself, as if of a mother; a man enlightened from his very birth, not by the teaching of men, but by an interior illumination; a man in whom the power and wisdom of God would confer such grace, such courage, such majesty, disdaining all that men desire, suffering all that they hold in horror, doing all that they admire, that this man would lead the human race to such a wholesome faith, by reason of influence and authority; that as regards the honors due to him, the question was useless, everyone understanding clearly which honors the wisdom of God deserves — that wisdom by which the man would accomplish, for the salvation of humanity, something so grand and so beyond himself.

“If, then, this has happened, if its remembrance remained glorious in books and monuments, if from a part of the world which alone adored the one God, and where it was fitting that such a man be born, other men, chosen and sent throughout the world, by their virtue and their teaching fed the flames of divine love; if, by establishing among nations a discipline of high perfection, they left to their descendants a brightly lit world; and, to my

keeping silent on past events, lest someone calls them into question, if today I preach to all the nations: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.* [John 1:1] If, so that the healed soul might understand this word, love it and rejoice in it, so that the sound mind might plunge into that light; we say to the covetous: *Do not amass for yourselves treasures in the earth, where worms and rust destroy them, where robbers dig them up and steal them; rather, amass for yourselves treasures in heaven where worms and rust do not destroy, where there are no robbers who dig up and take away. Where your treasure is, there is your heart.* [Mt 6:19] To the voluptuous: *Whoever sows in the flesh reaps corruption from the flesh; whoever sows in the spirit will reap from the spirit life eternal.* [Gal. 6:8] To the proud: *He who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.* [Lk 14:11] To angry men: *You have received a blow, turn your other cheek.* [Mt 5:39] To the revengeful: *Love your enemies.* [Mt 5:44] To the superstitious: *The kingdom of God is within you.* To the curious: *Do not seek the things that can be seen, but those that cannot be seen; for the things that can be seen are passing, and those that cannot be seen are everlasting.* [II Cor 4:18] Finally, to everyone: Do not love the world, nor what is in the world; for everything that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and passion for the century! [See I Jn 2:15]

“If these things are made known to nations around the world, listened to willingly and with veneration; if after so much blood, so many pyres, so many crosses of the martyrs, the Churches multiplied themselves even to the barbarian regions; if thousands of young people and maidens who scorned marriage, in order to live chastely, ceased to be admired, it was because Plato, having done this, feared so much the defiled opinion of his time, that he was said to have offered sacrifice to nature in order to abolish the memory of his virtue, as if that of a crime; if, on the other hand, it was an advantage to discuss in favor of such a belief, today it is indeed a boon to dispute against it; if to those who promise to follow it the Christian mysteries are distributed daily in various parts of the earth; if, every day, it is read in Churches and explained by the priests; if those who struggle to fulfill it strike their

breasts; if their number is sufficiently large so that the formerly deserted islands and the isolation of continents be peopled by men who have renounced the riches and the honors of the world, in order to consecrate their lives to God; if, in the cities, the castles, the towns, the fields, the isolated dwellings, there are those who persuade, those who practice openly the disdain of earthly things in favor of the true God, and that every day, in the universe, the human race answers as if in one voice: *We have lifted our hearts to the Lord*. If all that has happened, why do we hesitate to reject that dissoluteness in yesterday's errors? Why are we still looking for the divine oracles in the dead flocks of philosophy? And when we will have need to speak about God, will we prefer to have lips uttering the name of Plato, rather than to have hearts fired up by the truth?

“Those who find it useless and wicked to despise the outside world, to purify the soul by virtue, to submit it to the yoke of God, those persons need to be refuted by other arguments — if, indeed, they are deserving of our attention. But those who think the contrary, let them acknowledge God, let them submit to God by whom the nations were persuaded to believe what they do. They themselves would have been the ones to persuade the nations, if they could have; and if they could have but did not, that would have been a crime against humanity. Let them submit, then, to the one who had achieved what they were unable to do; let not curious knowledge or useless pride prevent them from recognizing the difference between the timid guesses of a small number of men and the general knowledge which saves the masses. If those whom our philosophers glorify were brought back to life to witness the churches filled, the temples empty, the human race summoned and embracing passionately visible and transitory goods, rather than the hope of eternal life, of spiritual and understandable goods, they would perhaps cry out — if they were really what they were said to be: This is what we dared not preach to the people; we subjected ourselves to their customs rather than converting them to our way of thinking, and having them submit to our will.

“That is why, if those prominent men had been able to begin their life anew with

us, they would have recognized which authority, theirs or ours, was the more powerful for human salvation; by changing very little in their lectures and in their thoughts, they could have become Christians, as did many of the Platonists of our times and of earlier times...¹

“Now, I want to tell you, insofar as I can, about the road that I followed when I myself was seeking the true Religion, about the frame of mind, which I delineated, in which it was to be sought. I was already filled with much doubt and hesitation, when, on crossing the sea, I separated myself from you. I could not decide which belief to retain or to abandon. This uncertainty increased in me, day by day, after having heard that man² who had been introduced to us, as if he had come from heaven to erase our doubts, and whom I found similar to others in everything, except for a certain eloquence. Once settled in Italy, I experienced in myself much deliberation and great struggles, not to find out if I would remain within the sect that I repented of having joined, but to discern the way of truth, to which I aspired with so much love and tears — as you have not been unaware. Often, it seemed to me impossible ever to find it, and I was carried away by the ebb and flow of my thoughts towards the skepticism of the Academy. Often, in my limited capacity, I considered the human spirit to be very alive, very probing, very astute, and I could not understand how truth remained hidden from it, unless it was that the appropriate manner to seek truth was hidden in the truth itself. I thought that this secret method had to be learned from some divine authority. The problem was to learn where this authority lay, since, in the midst of the feuds of heresy, everyone invoked it in his favor. It was a dense forest in which I feared to enter, and yet my soul was restless in its passion for the truth; I distanced myself more and more from those whom I had already resolved to abandon. In such great peril, what was I to do, except to pray tearfully and with the voice of an unhappy man, for divine Providence to come to my rescue? I did this resolutely. Some public lectures by the Bishop of Milan disturbed me to the point that I had the desire, mixed with hope, to ask some questions about the Old Testament, which my sect disparaged, as you well know. I had also resolved to become a catechumen in that Church which my parents had given me from my childhood, until such time as I found what I wanted, or that I be persuaded that it was

useless to search any further. Thus I had entered into a state of docility favorable for instruction, in case I found someone given the task of teaching. That is why, if, like me, you have been disturbed for a long time by concern for your soul, if you are tired of being uselessly tossed about, and you wish to put an end to this difficult task, do like me and follow the road to the Catholic faith, which, having come down from Christ to us by the apostles, will be passed by us on to posterity.

“That is ridiculous, you will say, since all the heretics claim to hold the Catholic faith. They do profess it, I cannot deny, but only by promising to those whom they seduce explanations for even their most obscure teachings; their principal accusation against the Catholic Church is that She demands faith from those who enter into her bosom, while they themselves glory in the fact that they do not impose the yoke of faith, but open up the sources of knowledge. What greater praise, you will say, could I have offered them? No, mine is not a compliment: they promise something that is not in their power to give, in order to pacify some members, in the name of reason — the human soul naturally rejoices as soon as the word *reason* is uttered. In this way, they, the heretics, prevent the soul from seeing the weakness of their arguments. Consequently, the soul, moved by the desire for nourishment which is available only to sound minds, swallows the poison of the seducers. Indeed, true religion cannot enter the soul except at the command and with the weight of authority. Religion convinces the soul of the truths which later it will perceive, provided it earns its worth.

“You will perhaps ask why one needs to be instructed by faith before being so by reason? You will easily understand, if you are willing to be open-minded. Do you think that all men are capable of understanding the acts of reasoning which lead the human mind to the knowledge of divine things? Is the majority capable of this, or is only a very small number of men? It is a small number, you say. Do you believe yourself among this small number? It is not up to me to affirm that, you reply; it is up to me simply to believe it, and consent to it. But remember that I have faith in you when you tell me uncertain things, while

you do not wish to give credence to my religious advice. Granted then, that you were seeking the true Religion with a sincere desire to embrace it, and that you were among the very small number of men capable of understanding the reasons by which the divine power of the mind reaches a definite knowledge of truth: tell me, what will we do with the other men who are not endowed with an equally sharp mind? Will there be no religion for them, or will they need to be taken, step by step, to the infinite heights of truth? Right away you can discern which group is more religious; you cannot exclude even one man from the strong hope which animates you, you cannot abandon even one of them. On the other hand, do you not believe that it is impossible for them to gain possession of truth — even when they believe themselves able to achieve it, when they seek it with a petitioning mind, by a life in conformity with the precepts necessary to purify themselves? Surely, this is what you believe. If, then, the members of the group to which you belong — as I believe you do — are able easily to penetrate divine secrets by reason, and have followed also that voice of obedience and faith, what disadvantage would they suffer? No disadvantage at all, it seems to me. But, you say, why would they follow that voice? Why would you slow them down on their journey? Because, even though they do not hurt themselves, they would hurt others by their example. Few men can truly assess the degree of their strength; some believe themselves too feeble: they must be encouraged. Others believe themselves too strong: they must be curbed, so that the first not perish in despair, and the second in their boldness. It is, in fact, easy enough to prevent this twofold danger if those persons who can take flight are constrained to walk on the common road, lest they excite others to dangerous imitation. In this is found the Providence of the true Religion; this is the order established by God, as we have received it from our fortunate ancestors, and which He has preserved throughout time to us. To disturb or corrupt this procedure is to seek Religion through a sacrilegious route. Those who attempt this, even when they receive all they ask, never reach it, or pretend that they did. Whatever the excellence of their genius, if God does not help them, they grovel on the ground. It is true that God helps the men who seek Him, but only when they themselves have pity on the human race. No more sure route to arrive at Him can be found in the heavens. . .

“This is why God, while providing us with the remedy to heal our corrupt behavior, achieves His authority by working miracles, merits fidelity by reason of His authority, attracts the multitude by faith, obtains gravity from the multitude, and from this standing consolidated Religion in such a way that it was not disturbed by either the clumsy and fraudulent novelty of the heretics, nor by the nonchalant and violent error of the pagan nations. .

“It is in this, believe me, that authority is found, whence comes salvation; authority is the cause which first raises our soul above its earthly dwelling, and, wresting it from the love of this world, converts it to God. Authority alone stirs up ignorant men and leads them to wisdom. No doubt, for those who on their own cannot attain the truth, it would be a catastrophe to be deceived by authority, but it would be an even greater catastrophe not to have been touched by authority at all. Indeed, either the Providence of God does not manage human affairs, and therefore it is useless to be bothered with religion, or else Providence does preside, either by the order of creation, which apparently flows from some ineffable source of beauty, or else by some kind of interior voice of consciousness. The latter, publicly just as privately, warns the better minds to search for God and to serve Him. Consequently, we should not despair that God Himself had established an authority which was to be for us a sure way to lift us up to Him. This authority, leaving aside reason, which the masses of men, as we have said, have insufficient understanding to be able to use, disturbs our conviction in two ways: in part by miracles, in part by the number of its followers. The wise man has no need of these two things: who can deny it? But the issue is precisely how to become wise, that is to say, how to learn the truth, without which there is no wisdom; a corrupted soul will never get to know the truth. By a corrupted soul, to explain myself briefly, I mean that soul which loves something other than itself and God. The more the soul becomes purified, the more accurately it gazes on and faces the truth. To wish to see the truth in order to purify the soul — when one must rather purify the soul in order to perceive truth — is to reverse the order; it is authority which restores the order, by helping

man to become purified and, consequently, able to contemplate the truth.”³

The passages from St. Augustine that we have just read contain the principal elements of the defense of Christianity, as it was understood through all the centuries up to Father de La Mennais. These elements are reduced to three: the inability of philosophy, that is to say, of reasoning, to unite men in the truth; the need for a divine instruction by way of authority to achieve this goal; the existence of this teaching and infallible authority being solely in the Catholic Church.

The obvious inability of the wise men of antiquity, whether to assemble superior minds in a unique and universal school, or whether to pull nations from the abyss of superstition, served Catholic writers as an everlasting proof, basic to establish the necessity of another teaching of truth. Unless no Providence ruled the world, unless man was condemned to ignorance by his fate and his duties, it was impossible that there not be on the earth a teaching other than that of the philosophers, a way other than that of reason to penetrate the secret of invisible things since, after such a long time, with minds of such diversity, with the East and the West confounded by wars and by journeys, all of this ended only in creating barren disputes, in sowing here and there in the solitude of doubt some famous names who were to deliver to the ultimate posterity the *magnificent testimony* of human impotence. In the days of the Fathers of the Church, this witness sparkled in all its brilliance; men lived on the ruins of the society anterior to Christ; men knew from experience the insignificance of *philosophical efforts*. Moreover, there were few schools whose remnants did not escort the creative march of the Church through the decadence of the times, so that all the earth, on seeing the parade of the living and of the dead, was able to judge wherein lay the everlasting breath of the truth. Several of the Fathers of the Church had themselves worn the mantle of philosophers; they had sought the truth in school after school, and when they repeated to the world, echoing St. Paul: . . . *The Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified*, the infinite power of God spoke on their lips in a tone of undeniable conviction, and the nations cried out with them: *Where are the wise men? Where are the theologians? Where are the debaters of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Since even with wisdom, the world did not recognize God in the wisdom of His works, God decided to save believers by the folly of preaching.*⁴ Today we are beginning to understand anew the power of this demonstration, which will always continue to increase in minds, as long as a revived philosophy succeeds in presenting to us the expanded view of its nothingness.

Indeed, every time that an experience is repeated with the same success, it gains more rights in the empire of the mind. And this time, philosophical experience had singular characteristics, even more capable of plunging human wisdom into despair. Unlike in previous times, the philosophers, in fact, did not have to search painfully for the truth. Guided by the light of the Gospel, they had only to strip Christianity, to divide among themselves the robe of Jesus Christ. And yet, they did not equal the ancient philosophers either by the eminence of their genius, or by the purity of their teaching, or by the longevity of their schools. They had no Socrates to die for a truth greater than all his century. Minds envious of Christianity, they gloried in descending lower than their time; their ashes had barely cooled down when humanity, avenger of Christianity, whistled over their graves. The followers who despised them do not themselves know what to do; they do not have a school to speak of in all of Europe. The lowliest pastor of a village is more powerful than a philosopher. Everywhere, from the depths of souls, hungry for teachings, there arises a plaintive cry, like that of a bird which seeks on the shores of the sea its offspring, carried away by the waves.

Given that philosophy could not destroy and replace Christianity, more than ever, Christianity has the right to affirm that, if there is not in the world another teaching of the truth, then truth is but a venerable word, powerless to heal the soul and to unite mankind. In using such language, Christianity is not professing skepticism, as it has been accused; far from holding that there is nothing certain, it simply notes that never were intellects healed and joined together by way of evidence. No doubt, the existence of God can be demonstrated in a philosophical way, but this demonstration, however elegant it may be, will never draw two men together, will never prevent philosophers *from having schools where they disagree with each other, and from having temples shared with the masses*. This is because reasoning, however powerful in establishing, is a thousand times more capable in dividing; nowhere does it ever occupy the first place without losing everything. In the study of nature, let the corps of scientists dethrone experience, and suddenly you will no longer have a group of scientists, you will have no more science, only a useless mass of contradictory systems. Allow this corps to govern society, and, instead of nations united as a family, you will have only armed factions intent on destroying one another. Among them, only experience will present here and there on the battlefield a semblance of peace. In all things, experience is the foundation of order; this is why God did not save the world by reasoning, but by the experience of the cross, the most appropriate and the most conclusive experience ever produced here below.

If now we try to find out why experience is the foundation of science, of society, of Religion, of order — we will probably find, in a word, that reasoning is a completely human work, while experience is a work in part divine; that man, by reasoning, seeks to draw truth out of himself, and by trial and error, he draws it from the bosom of God. In the first case, man wishes to give the truth to himself rather than getting it from life; in the second, he aspires only to receive again the truth from the hand which gave him everything. Reasoning, independent of all experience on which it relies, is therefore an act of pride, while experience, in which the mind acknowledges only what is outside of it and in spite of it, is an act of humility. Finally, man will find that pride divides people, and that humility unites them. The wise man submits to God by interrogating nature, the politician by studying the indestructible laws of society in the events of the world, the Christian by searching for and venerating the traces of the passage of God on earth. The philosopher is not concerned with nature, nor about history, nor about the divine word; by the act of reasoning, he looks into himself to find out how things ought to be, and then, he declares that they are or that they are not as they ought. Should it surprise us that God strikes him powerless, and that his lips make even the truth unproductive? Whatever the case, it is an undeniable given that philosophy has been unable to rally men around some effective demonstrations; again it is undeniable that at a certain level, philosophy loses the tracks of truth and becomes only a science of conjectures in which thought fades away, according to the expression of St. Paul. If up to our time invisible things have not been brought low, if earth and heaven have not communicated jointly, if God has not presented in time and space some encounter with eternity and with the infinite, we are left with no hope. Not for us the truth; it flies way above our heads, like those distant stars in the sky which appear to us at night, when the abundant brilliance of the sun no longer gives light to our eyes. The man who, at night, walks alone and downcast, occasionally stops, resting on his walking stick as tired as he, and lifts up to heaven his proud brow; he looks into the air for a long time at the army of the Lord; he ponders in his mind the frightful distance from which this soft light comes to him; he realizes how insignificant he is; lost in the contemplation of this vast and distant mystery which does not uplift his spirits, he gets back on the road weary and heartbroken.

A man was there, named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd, he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was

going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him,
“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”⁵

Thus it was that truth had to get down lower than man, in a manner of speaking, so that the smaller between the two had only to bend down to meet it. The history of this kneeling down of truth at the feet of man is a story so elevated, so marvelous, that nothing in the universe can be compared to it.

God made of this *a miracle of unity*. Instead of men being unable, at fifty-year intervals, to continue a work in the same spirit, and instead of the approaching century destroying the thought of the preceding one, there is in the divine word, transmitted by so many diverse mouths, a spotless unity of sixty centuries, a conspiracy of six thousand years, which each conspirator paid for with his head, or which he sanctified by his virtues.

A miracle of historic certitude. Ordinarily, nations living or dying; not one of them, asleep in its ruins, left around its tomb an immortal guard who would bear witness to every visitor of its past existence, its glory, its shame, its troubles, its traditions, its faith. By an exception worthy of being noted, Christian history, the only one which is truly historic and which goes back step by step to the depths of ages — Christian history, attested to, since Christ, by a living people, spread throughout the whole world, was witnessed to, before Christ, by a nation which is neither living nor dead, a kind of mysterious specter, burdened with centuries and with disgrace, and which travels, without tiring, to the four corners of the earth, solely to announce in all languages, to all generations: “I did exist.”

A miracle of power. What has Christianity not vanquished? It resisted dishonor, the longest and the most monstrous persecution which any doctrine suffered, prosperity, ignorance, barbarity, the revolt of its own members, human passions, science, genius, time which destroys everything, man who never respected his own works. Among diverse religions, Christianity is the only one to have upheld the testing of human reason; and the liberty of the press, which in thirty years was to overthrow the beliefs of Asia and Africa, fought for three centuries against the Gospel and the pope, without depriving them of that influence which, at the hour of death, terrorizes every man who is not an ignoramus.

A miracle of science and of philosophy. No science has succeeded in getting the Bible to contradict it: history, chronology, astronomy, linguistics, monuments, antiques of every kind, have borne witness, in spite of the wise men, in favor of the divine word; and the very first page of Genesis was in accord, more than three thousand years ago, with the secrets of geology uncovered in our day.

A miracle of civilization. Where are the nations today in which the fate of women, of children, of the poor, of all the feeble beings are the most happy? Which are the nations where science and art are fostered? Does not Europe hold the scepter of the world; and if America has escaped its sway, is it not because America has become Christian?

A miracle of holiness. One day we will see the heart of Christians. We will see the actions of the right which are unknown to the left. While awaiting the double mystery of virtue and crime in this world, it is already possible to compare Christian morality to that of the ancients, and to judge the ineffable strength of the cause which sanctified the heart of man by purity.

A miracle at the level of beauty. Within a nation small, obscure, and disdainful of other nations, there was found a book which would have become the greatest monument to the human mind, if it had not been the work of God — a book to which even its enemies were forced to render homage. Homer never equaled the story of the life of patriarchs in *Genesis*; Pindar remained below the sublimity of the prophets; Thucydides and Tacitus cannot compare with Moses as historian; the laws of *Exodus* and *Leviticus* have left far behind them the legislation of Lycurgus and Numa Pompilius; Socrates and Plato had been surpassed, even before the Gospel, by Solomon, who bequeathed to us, in the *Song of Songs*, the most admirable hymn of divine love, inspired by created lips; and in *Ecclesiastes*, the everlasting melancholic canticle of fallen humanity. In completing the destiny of this incomparable book, that nation placed the seal of a beauty previously unknown, and which, remaining inimitable, has on earth — like all of Christianity — no term of comparison.

The ancients used to say that the wise man, in the silence of the night, could hear the music of the celestial spheres as they fulfilled in space the harmonious laws of creation; just so, the heart of man, when

passions are quieted, can hear, in the midst of the world, the eternal voice of truth. Religion is an aeolian harp suspended in the sky; moved by divine breath and by that of men, it produces sounds as mournful as those of a suffering soul, and as joyous as those of an angel — but sounds always superior to humanity, which only ingratitude fails to perceive.

Accordingly, there is on the earth a teaching which goes beyond all human rules: a divine teaching. Whoever believes in Providence and feels the need to be enlightened, naturally turns his eyes to Christianity. Among all things, Christianity is the most important matter. It is to human reason what the horizon is to man's eyes: the higher you go, the more impressive it becomes. Since most men are incapable of lifting themselves on their own up to the truth, and certainly not in childhood, the truth must necessarily be given to us by way of authority. We are not the ones who ought to be first in looking for the truth, rather it is the truth that must first seek us. And if, later, some minds, strengthened by practice, learn to philosophize, they are nonetheless subject to the common law, so that pride not swell them up, and that others not be discouraged by their example. Divine knowledge belongs to everyone; everyone has an equal right to draw from it. Faith is nothing other than a sublime level which lowers the small number of superior minds to the level of mediocre spirits, so that authority might raise them up, together, towards God, and that only virtue distinguishes one from the other. Let the wise men, the rich, the strong, conspire against the holy reality of faith, at the appropriate moment; but then, let them not vaunt their benevolence so highly, and allow the human race, composed after all of ignorant persons, the poor, and the crippled, to hear this word of its Savior: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants." ⁶

What, then, is the authority charged with teaching the truth to mankind, to communicate to it the divine word? Is it the human race? But it is the human race itself that needs to be taught. Philosophers have not been able to enlighten authority, and the latter has not been able to enlighten individuals. Only the Catholic Church has assembled the wise and the masses, not only in the same temples, but also in the same faith. She alone has transmitted to posterity an *enlightened world*; she alone has replaced *the timid speculations of a small group of men with a general education which saves nations*; she alone has acquired authority by *miracles, has merited faith by authority, has attracted masses by the faith, and has obtained from them long-*

life; she alone *has healed souls and drawn them together*; she alone, animated by a spirit other than human, as infallible depository of the divine word and visible organ of the truth, she alone has preserved the sources of faith and of salvation, has spread them throughout the world with her perspiration and her blood, and like a mother, has nourished humanity, ever replacing itself, has taught all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; she alone, sooner or later victorious over all teachings opposed to her own, has obtained here below the *fullness of authority*.⁷

This, then, is the teaching of St. Augustine and of the Church as regards the general defense of Christianity. I have presented two translations, as you have just seen: a literal translation so that I not be accused of having St. Augustine borrow my thoughts; and another intended to show that Christian ideas, while always remaining the same, are nonetheless confirmed simply by the passage of time, and that, with the centuries, they acquire renewed youthfulness. How many issues have gained strength from the proclamations of St. Augustine, since 304, when he died at his see in Hippo, in the sight of some barbarians who were destroying the Roman Empire and Christendom! How many reversals have shaken and reaffirmed the faith of men! How far has spread *this immense series of tasks accomplished in an orderly fashion from the beginning!*⁸ How much more does *this admirable connection of periods in which the present attests fidelity to the past* stand out.⁹ What power the Catholic Church has developed in its luck, good and bad, and how much has everything changed except Her! If St. Augustine *could relive his life among us, if he revived that great man* (to use the same expressions he had used when referring to the early Platonists), if his ashes woke up *under the golden sky* of Pavia, not far from the places where he was converted — and nearer to which it seems that Providence wanted to bring his relics — how strongly would he again say, with more eloquence than before: Everything can be read in the past, seen in the present; what is left, which has not yet been achieved, will be verified in the future.¹⁰ Thus it is that each century prophesizes to the one which follows; thus, each century is faithful to the preceding one; from the dark clouds of the future, the past appears all the more shining.

Sometimes we are surprised that there is no overall defense of Christianity. The reason for this is that, in part, time which marches ever on keeps multiplying proofs; and, on the other hand, the objections which reasoning brings up, infinitely variable, by the end of fifty years are disregarded by the human spirit. By

necessity, then, in the defense of Christianity, a part always remains incomplete, while another becomes ineffective; but it is precisely in this that its truth sparkles. Indeed, the part that has become ineffective proves the vanity of reason, which, after a small number of years, no longer understands the objections it had raised nor the rejoinders given it; while the part that remained incomplete demonstrates the logical strength of a Religion whose confirmation increases with time.

Nonetheless, whether in its changeable aspect, or in its advancing one, the defense of Christianity has always rested on the three fundamental points we have seen, namely: the impotence of reasoning to unite men in the truth; the need for a divine teaching by way of authority to arrive at that end; the existence of a teaching and infallible authority found solely in the Catholic Church. The unending multitude of considerations and developments which constitute the consequences of the Catholic controversy, clearly fall under four headings, no matter the era being focused on: whether the primitive centuries, represented by St. Augustine, the centuries of the Middle Ages, represented by St. Thomas Aquinas, the centuries of Protestantism, represented by Bossuet and Pascal, or finally, the last century, represented by Bergier.¹¹ Never was the authority of the human race invoked by a doctor of the Church, as the logical foundation for Religion. To support this position, I have no need for a longer exposition than the one which has preceded. Father Gerbet, in his *Coup d'oeil sur la controverse chrétienne*,¹² a work of erudition and good faith, formally attests that, up to Father de La Mennais, the dispute about Christianity had not gone beyond the limits that we ourselves have indicated.

“If now, says he, we coalesce into only one point of view the observations which we have just made concerning the dispute among Christian professors, we will discover that this position rests on two principal points: first, that the way of reason, insufficient to provide man with a sure possession of truth, leads to the chaos of beliefs and thereby even to doubt; secondly, that it is necessary to believe by way of revelation and tradition, and that Christianity, as well as the Church which is its depository, hold within their ample bosoms the elements of a much more extensive authority. These are the dominant thoughts to which analysis reduces this remarkable controversy. . . . If some persons, fully occupied in finding in the arguments of the Fathers points of conformity with the teaching which we are defending, suspected that we, in fact, do not recognize the differences which distinguish one

point from another, those persons would be mistaken. Indeed, far from attempting to deceive ourselves as regards this teaching, this very interest obliges us to call attention to these differences. *We understand it, indeed, as we will later explain, as a major and powerful development of ideas which have always been the essence of the general logic of Christianity. Now, the one who says 'development' also says 'relationships and differences.'* As a result, it is necessary, at one and the same time, to show both these relationships, to prove that all their roots lie in antiquity, as well as the differences, to explain how, by its new existence — if I may so speak — which was provoked by questions asked for three centuries, Christian logic finds itself perfectly suited to the current needs of minds.”¹³

Father Gerbet takes great care to repeat this observation a bit later and at other times when he summarizes the Catholic controversy in the diverse eras of St. Thomas Aquinas, of Bossuet, and of Bergier.¹⁴

The *infallibility of the human race* is an expression previously unheard of in the Church. We find that on every page of her writers, the Church is infallible, that God teaches, enlightens, converts through her the human race. Nowhere do we find that the human race is the source and the prophet of the truth.

We have just presented, with all the accuracy we could, the journey followed by the Church towards the general defense of Christianity, up to Father de La Mennais. Even before any close examination of his system, there is no question that he embraced another direction. Our ancestors in Christian knowledge had attributed infallibility only to the Church; by attributing this quality to the human race, as well as to the Church, de La Mennais changed the axis of the Catholic discussion. He crossed the line where his predecessors had voluntarily stopped, and, descending to the very foundations established by the hand of God, he thought that, underneath, he felt another hand stretched out to support the building. Whether this thought was useful, we will not examine at this time; but the ancestors never did have such a thought.

CHAPTER IV

Philosophy in the Church before Father de La Mennais

Even though philosophy does not serve as foundation to Religion, and to the contrary, that its impotence is one of the foundations for the defense of Christianity, nonetheless, philosophy has played in the Church a very important role which needs to be evaluated, so as to keep us from getting tangled in our thoughts, and to help us conceive properly the innovation introduced on this subject by Father de La Mennais.

As we have already said, the impotence of philosophy to establish the truth did not arise from the inability of obtaining through reasoning a sufficient illustration of some invisible things, such as the existence and nature of God, the spirituality of the soul, the difference between good and evil, etc. Far from it, the Christian sages concluded that these principles were accessible to the mind of man, and gave proofs of them whose exemplar we can see in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Contra Gentes* [Against the Nations]. What, then, was the basic fault of philosophy? We have already called to mind that, after St. Augustine, error consisted in the fact that the philosophers operated *schools where they did not agree with each other, and attended temples common with the masses*; that is to say, that philosophy had not even tried to assemble the people in the truth by the power of reason, and that in vain did it try to unite the sages by the same method. Why did philosophy not attempt to unite the masses in the truth by reasoning? St. Augustine told us why: because the people are *not able to grasp the thoughts which lead the human spirit to an understanding of divine things*. Why did philosophy, in vain, try to unite the wise men in the truth by reasoning? Again, St. Augustine tells us: because even though the wise men, considering only their intellectual culture, were primed *to fly to the truth, God had constrained them to use the common road, lest they incite others to dangerous imitation; moreover, because the soul has to be purified in order to see the truth, and that only authority helps man to become refined, and consequently capable of contemplating the truth*. Thus, the impotence of philosophy as regards the people had only one cause, the very impotence of the masses. As regards cultivated spirits, impotence had two causes: the impartial will of God and the corrupt will of man. God willed that in the world, in the matter of

truth and salvation, there be neither Scythian, nor Greek, neither slave nor freeman, but rather that Christ be impartially for everyone, *sed omnia et omnibus Christus*.¹ The wise men admirably served divine impartiality, by using their will to push back the light, "... who by their wickedness suppress the truth."² It is especially by the will that the wise men were disjoined; it is especially the will that prevents philosophy from becoming a science like the others, that is to say, having a body of knowledge that is uniform. Never will philosophy, however exalted, overcome this radical fault because it addresses only the mind, whereas to teach men the truths that deal with their duties, hearts must first of all be healed. If tomorrow Religion became susceptible to being demonstrated mathematically, tomorrow mathematics would be a science as divided as philosophy because no certitude can resist the mind of man when he wishes to resist. Those who would doubt this have only to consider what has happened to history. Nothing is clearer and more certain than history, taken as a whole; and yet, everywhere that Religion and history have met, the former has been darkened, disfigured, shamelessly denied. The absurd chronologies of Egypt and of India have been preferred over the books of Moses, so admirable in their effects, their connection, their natural character, and by their relationships with all the monuments of antiquity. Is there, in fact, nothing impossible to the prejudiced mind? Do we not see every day that what happens under our very eyes is distorted or contested? And that never is man less powerful than when he is against God? Indeed, God is the focal point where all our passions meet each other. He is like the sun: His very splendor attracts the clouds; moreover, if He were less bright, He would be attacked less. *Peace on earth to men of good will!* This is where salvation comes from, where certitude originates; the rest belongs to the mind, to philosophy, to the wind which separates leaves even as it rustles them.

That being the case, what role could philosophy have played in the Church? It was the role of a stranger admitted into the family home, who becomes, in gratitude, a faithful servant. Jesus Christ left in the Church no other philosophy than the Gospel, instituted no other school than the one which we enter through baptism, never clarified the question of certitude except by purifying the hearts of men through the omnipotence of divine grace. He healed souls so as to unify minds. His disciples did likewise. They transmitted the grace and the word which they had received, continuing to unite the masses despised by philosophy which also divided the learned men. In this way, the disciples proved that a new element from heaven had penetrated the innards of humanity. Nonetheless, when, despite all the efforts of imperial power,

the divine word rallied nations under the cross, when the blood of martyrs became more rare, it was then that philosophy began to flourish in the Church. Some converts from Platonism recalled lovingly their former teacher; they thought to find in Christianity the fulfillment of the most beautiful of Plato's ideas — either because he himself conceived those ideas, or because he drew them from an ancient tradition. From their own experience, it seemed to them that philosophy, being the search for truth, drew some men from their crass indifference to invisible things and prepared them for the faith. Moreover, if philosophy was useless as a foundation for truth, nonetheless it could confirm truth, once truth had become known. Indeed, it is one thing to reason about something established, and quite another to reason about something not established. Before Michelangelo, after raising the cupola of St. Peter's in Rome, had transported into the sky the Pantheon of Agrippa, it was easy to discuss endlessly the worth of such an enterprise. Today, the newest arrival kneels before the immensity created above his head by Michelangelo, and discovers effortlessly a thousand convincing reasons to admire it. Christianity, indeed, contains in its divine fullness the most refined thoughts, the most noble, the most necessary, those best expressed in the world. It is the Pantheon of human reason, built by the hand of God and bound together with His blood. Before the eternal geometrist had worked at it, the wise men worked in vain to construct it. The stone set by one was removed by the other: it was the confusion of Babel. But now that it has been built, what is to prevent man from measuring its length, its width, and its depth? Who would prevent reason from recognizing itself in its works?

And so, impotent as a fundament of truth, philosophy was judged to be useful to the Church as *a preparation for faith, as confirmation and explanation of faith*. This is its role in the Church; it never had any other. A glance at philosophy's history, in its relationships with Christianity, will convince us.

CHAPTER V

Plato

Plato, that mild and marvelous stranger, was introduced into the Christian schools in about the same way that the Romans, conquerors of the world, had introduced into their homes some Greek grammarians and artists.

Where else would Christians have obtained a philosophy? No other name had been given them to instruct and redeem them except that of Christ, no other knowledge than this: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*¹

Christians could then apply to themselves these verses of the Roman poet: "Others will mold the bronze with greater softness than you; they will draw life out of marble; they will surpass you in eloquence; they will describe the laws of the stars and of the heavens. But you, Rome, do not forget that the empire of the nations belongs to you, that you have to decide on the peace of the world, on pardoning the vanquished and on conquering pride. These will be your arts."²

For lack of a non-existent Catholic philosophy, a philosophy which could not exist, because nothing is Catholic except what arises from tradition by way of the Church, there was need to resort to strangers, and this very need was itself fortuitous. Since, in the Church, philosophy could only be a *preparation for the faith*, a *confirmation* and an *explanation of the faith*, it was better to rely on support from the outside rather than from the inside. The authority of Plato came from a philosopher whom the authority of Christ did not yet agitate.

Nonetheless, one should not believe that the philosophy of Plato was taught in Christian schools as a complete body of knowledge. “What I call philosophy,” said Clement of Alexandria, “is not that of the Stoics, of Plato, of Epicurus, or of Aristotle, but instead the choice derived from what each of these parties had said that was true, favorable to morals, in conformity to religion.”³ To be sure, in this kind of eclecticism, the influence of Plato was way ahead of any other, because of his fundamental distinction of the invisible world, seat and source of truth and of the visible world, a simple reflection of the former — and also because of his eloquence, the unquestioned superiority of his reputation, and the influence he continued to exercise on a great number of minds.

Nor should it be believed that philosophy, even in the second rank where it had been placed, was protected from often-bitter reproaches. Just as Descartes is attacked nowadays, as Aristotle was in his time, so too was Plato in the period of his renown.

“In good faith, I feel sorry for Plato,” St. Epiphanius used to say, “in that he became the salt of all heresies.”⁴ And St. Augustine, after having said of that philosopher, “that he had been the wisest and most educated man of his time, and that he spoke in such a way that he elevated every thing that came out of his mouth.”⁵ toward the end of his life regretted having accorded too much honor.⁶ Already, in his *Confessions*, we find a rather antagonistic passage concerning the impression he gained in reading the Platonists:

“It pleased you, Lord, to show me that you resist the proud, but give grace to the humble, and that you displayed infinite mercy in teaching men the way of humility by allowing your Word to take flesh and live among them. You obtained for me through a certain man, swelled up in pride, some books by Platonists which had been translated from Greek to Latin. I read them, and saw that they sought to persuade by many reasons, though not always in the same words, that in the beginning was the Word, that the Word was in God, and the Word was God; that in the beginning he was in God, and that all was made by him, and without him nothing was made; that what was made in him was life, and that life is the light of men, that the light shines in the darkness, and that the darkness did not overcome it; that the soul of man, even though it bore witness to the light, was not itself the light, but

that the Word is the true light which enlightens every man who comes into the world; that he was in the world, that the world was made by him, and that the world did not know him. I read those words, but I did not read that the Word had come to his own, and that his own did not receive him, and that he gave the power to become children of God to those who received him and believed in his name. I read also that the Word was God, that he was not born of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. I did not read that the Word became flesh and that he lived among us. . . . After this reading, which informed me, O my God, to seek incorporeal truth, I noticed your invisible nature present in my mind by everything you had made; but I felt myself plunged into the dark recesses of my soul by something which would not allow me to contemplate you. I was certain that you existed, and that you were infinite, inhabiting no space whether limited or without limits; I was certain that you were indeed always the same, immutable, and that everything came from you, by the very fact that something exists; I was convinced, and yet I could not rejoice with you. I spoke like someone capable, and, if I had not found in Christ, our Savior, the way that you marked to lead us to you, I would have perished, in spite of my ability. I wanted to appear wise, I was full of my own punishment while being full of myself; and I did not weep; quite the contrary, I was proud of my knowledge. Indeed, I was lacking the foundation of humility, which is Christ Jesus, and I was lacking charity, which builds on that foundation. Would I have learned the one and the other from the Platonists? I believe, Lord, that you allowed their books to fall into my hands before your Scriptures, so that I would preserve within myself a memory of the impression which they had produced in me, and that, later, having become gentle by your books, healed of my wound by your touch, I would understand the difference which exists between presumption of the mind and confession of the heart, between those who know where to go without being aware of the road, and that very road to our happy country, which you destined not only to be seen from afar, but also to be inhabited. If I had first been instructed by your holy phrases, if from my childhood you had nourished me in their familiarity, and that subsequently I had learned about the books of the Platonists, perhaps they would have deprived me of the foundation of your love, or if they had not, perhaps I would have

believed that through these books I could have come to love you.”⁷

This passage of St. Augustine is worthy of our attention because it reveals in an altogether straightforward way the work of Christianity in souls, and also because it shows how the teaching of that learned man, concerning the impotence of philosophy, was closely tied to his personal experience. He was not afraid to say that the Platonists had spoken like St. John in the opening of his famous Gospel: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God*. Augustine admits that after having read these words, *the invisible nature of God was present in my soul*; and yet he had not changed, he did not praise nor did he love this invisible and present God; *he felt himself plunged into the dark recesses of his soul by something which would not allow him to contemplate God*. Indeed, there is in the will a distinct force, independent of the lights of the mind; the marvel of Christianity lies not so much in enlightening man as in affecting him. This is why we have always heard in the Church a few voices to protest against philosophy. What good is it to philosophize? Is philosophy the clarity which truth lacks? Did not a group of angels perish in the splendors of heaven? Is philosophy clearer than Christianity? Was its impotence remedied when it was assigned a secondary role? Was it purified of the venom of pride when it was draped in the linen vestments of the sanctuary? Was it not a source of quarrels, of fine distinctions, of useless questions, and like the *patriarch of heresies*?⁸

Enough! Let us preach Jesus Christ and leave science to whom it belongs, trouble to trouble, vanity to vanity! Nonetheless, in spite of the complaints of some of its teachers, the Church does not reject philosophy. Greater than that proconsul who was afraid of the shadow of Marius, sitting on the ruins of Carthage, the Church did not banish from the ruins of the world the humbled remnants of human wisdom; she respected the reason of man even in his reversals, and to him, in the depth of the abyss, she held out a hand worthy of eternal love. Since God had given man moral liberty, at the risk of seeing him stray, because from liberty arises virtue, the Church left them philosophy at the risk of their abusing it. Why? Because philosophy testifies to truth by its avowals, and to the Church by its inability to convert to the truth.

CHAPTER VI

Aristotle

After the invasion of the barbarians, the Church was again reduced to its own devices; philosophy was extinguished along with literature, science, and the arts. On despoiling Christianity of all that was not itself, it was as if Providence, on such major occasions, wanted to show that everything else was but an ornament which becomes useless on battle days. Thus, the virgin, who will die and conquer for Jesus Christ, has no further need for necklaces and bracelets. But when Europe, thanks to Christianity, began to be settled on new foundations, it was then that philosophy reappeared in the Church. Of the old schools, only that of Aristotle remained, the favorite of the Arabs, who had spread copies of it in the West. At that time, Aristotle had an inestimable advantage: his work was an encyclopedia of antiquity, a resurrection of knowledge that the barbarian centuries had destroyed: logic, metaphysics, morals, politics, rhetoric, poetry, physics, natural history. Aristotle had dealt with most of the objects of thought methodically, in an open way, conducive to teaching. Professors had only to open his books and to explain; almost all of human knowledge, saved from shipwreck, was contained therein. Accordingly, the Christian schools embraced Aristotle, just as after the deluge, structures spared by the torrents from on high were taken over.

Contrary to Plato, who had placed in the invisible world the explanation for the visible world, the seat and source of truth, Aristotle upheld that *there was nothing in the mind that had not been first in the senses*; that is to say, that what we know, instead of coming from heaven, came from the earth. This principle, so discordant with Christianity, so opposed to the philosophical doctrine which had excited the admiration of the Fathers of the Church, presented no danger at a time when the Church no longer feared a rival power, and when all human affairs were decided by her authority. Moreover, this danger was as if lost in the immensity of the logic of Aristotle, which was much less a search into the foundations of truth than a stunning analysis of the form of reasoning — or, in other words, the art by which the mind draws from a principle the consequences therein contained. This was exactly what the Christian schools needed; they did not need to bother with the foundations of truth, since they found them whole and entire in Christianity, but rather they

had need of a strict formula for argumentation, which helped them to deduce from Christianity all its possible consequences. Scholasticism, if we may use this comparison, was a vast alchemy in which Christianity was the gold and Aristotle the crucible.

But something unexpected came up, as most things do in this world. With time, Aristotle became an irrefutable authority whose works were taught and were cited in matters of philosophy and science in about the same way Holy Scripture was taught and cited in the theological order. Two volumes would have contained all the knowledge of mankind: the Bible and Aristotle; human life would have flowed peacefully between meditation and explanation of the one and the other. Today, with the yoke of Aristotle broken, now that the mind has breached the dikes where our predecessors had hoped to block it, and that a tireless investigation has been agitating the material world for three centuries, it is possible to understand the thought which instinctively led our ancestors to circumscribe the human sciences by fixed boundaries, just as God had fixed in revelation the confines of the divine sciences. No doubt they were mistaken, because *the world was handed over to the quarreling of men*; just as what exists in time is subject to change, so too what is in eternity belongs to rest. Humanity has to turn the grindstone of science, even though it may gain nothing in knowledge and happiness, because no consensus can destroy the nature of things, and because at the risk of stifling sharp minds and even happenstance, science advances with the discoverers. But it is not wise to disdain on that score the great hopes for rest which sometimes come upon minds, and which lead them to drop anchor in an ocean without shores of truth. More than once Las Casas regretted the genius of Christopher Columbus. He who has never had the temptation to regret it, either does not know the history of the conquest of America, or, if he does know it, he has little regard for the blood and the tears of man. Yet God has allowed discoveries at such a price, and strangely enough, those same theologians who would not allow going beyond Aristotle under the mistaken desire for an absolute and peaceful organization of science, disputed fiercely within the interior of the camp they had set up around themselves — so much does war come naturally to minds as soon as they extend their research outside of faith, even while remaining subject to it.

At the end of the sixteenth century, Bacon overthrew the authority of Aristotle in the scientific order. He called for the observation of nature as the foundation for certitude and for the advancement of sciences. Yet the authority of Aristotle persisted in logic and metaphysics until such time as finally, after several

fruitless attempts, he who was to complete the ruin of that widespread domination came upon the changing scene of philosophy.

CHAPTER VII

Descartes

A young military man of twenty-three, at a halt in winter quarters in Germany, and reflecting upon himself, concluded that he had in his head many more words than things, and that he had been forced to admit, based on faith in the ancients, an array of principles whose truth his mind could not clearly perceive. Not knowing which principles to abandon, which to retain, he resolved to reject them all, and to begin anew, from top to bottom, the education of his mind. The only exception he made to this universal ban was religion and the common rules of life — shielded, at least provisionally, because of their indispensability. Given this decision, and the better to destroy the false opinions with which he was imbued, as also to amass the materials necessary to rebuild his intellect, he believed that he had to encounter men and to read from the great books of the world. For some time, he wandered amid the tumult of arms, and then in solitude. He viewed war, activities, the morals of people, just as famous sages had done previously. Seasoned as much by the spectacle of people and of events as well as by the passage of time, he dreamed that the time had come to build the edifice of his knowledge.

His first reflection on initiating this great work was that he would not introduce into his understanding any thought that led to the slightest doubt, so as to see if, after having rejected all that it was possible for him to do, there would not remain in his convictions something firm and inflexible. Thus, he rejected the existence of bodies. For what are bodies? Are they not the effect of illusion? Do we not in our dreams, as regards objects which do not exist, experience sensations similar to those we experience as regards objects we believe do exist? Nonetheless, he found a reason to doubt the most basic notions of geometry, of principles known from simply having been expressed. But when he excluded from his beliefs external nature, geometry, the general principles of reasoning, namely, everything, it seems, that was outside of him and in him, he observed that something still remained: his very doubt. And he told himself: at the very least, this doubt exists. Instead of the doubt excluding the certitude of objects to which it related, it affirms its own proper existence. Every time an effort is made to conclude that this doubt may be an illusion, it is impossible

to admit it. Now, to doubt means to think; and since nothingness does not think — since it is nothing — there necessarily arises this truth: *I think, therefore I am*. If the mind seeks to know why it holds onto this proposition so strongly, it will find no motive other than that this proposition is perfectly self-evident. Accordingly, every time that the mind will understand a thought with as much clarity as this one: *I think, therefore I am*, it could then rightly affirm that such a thought is true. Based on this principle which, by forcing man to deny his own existence whenever he wishes to deny an evident proposition — linking in a way egoism to truth — Descartes raised himself with a single bound up to the necessary Being, infinite, perfect, whose existence seemed to him as clear as his own. From God, he came down to the body and to the first principles of judgment, and recognized in them the truth, on the foundation that God could not have deceived men by giving them erroneous senses and principles. And so, the soul, God, and bodies: this is the order of evidence and of the certitude of the world which revealed itself to this young gentleman who had dared to philosophize without Aristotle, for whom he was preparing, in a few words, a burial shroud very different from that in which Plato, in all his glory, nobly laid himself down. With the Roman Empire, Plato had fallen under the blows of barbarians, because only the light of Christianity was meant to float over the abundant darkness which was preparing the Christian civilization, just as the spirit of God had covered the primitive waters of chaos. Retrieved by the Arabs from long negligence and placed on a throne by the theologians of the Middle Ages, Aristotle fell from the pinnacle of power because of a contempt he did not deserve, even though his reputation had been overblown.

For all that, the triumph of Descartes was strongly contested; moreover, his triumph was surviving because of one point only: the overturning of the authority of Aristotle in philosophy. Outside of the Church, Descartes was quickly replaced by Locke and Condillac, very different from himself. In the Church, Bossuet, Fénelon, Malebranche, the School of Port-Royal, the leading men of the 17th century, were, it is true, Cartesian — but each one in his own way. Finally, the methodical doubt, Descartes' particular viewpoint on philosophy, as we shall see, has long been abandoned by Christian schools, according to the acknowledgment of Father Ventura, in his *Méthode de philosopher* [Method for philosophizing].¹ Rome had placed on the Index the *Méthode* and the *Méditations* of the reformer-philosopher. In fact, the Church could not admit, that, in order to arrive at the knowledge of truth, it was necessary once in a lifetime to doubt all the principles received from tradition, including those first principles which are the basis of human reasoning, and which

Aristotle, even though he made everything be revealed through the senses, had borne witness to in these remarkable words:

“There is no doctrine, no discipline of the spirit which flows from previous knowledge. It is enough to analyze all the beliefs with their evidence: mathematical sciences and the diverse arts cannot otherwise be established. The same is true for analyzing in general, whether we reason by syllogisms or by induction; in both cases, we start from antecedent principles, with this difference that, in the syllogism, the principles arise from the seat of intelligence itself, while in induction, we go back to an unknown universal by particular matters which are manifested.”²

The general doubt of Descartes was but just one reaction against Aristotle — the act of independence of a child for whom the paternal power has been tyranny, and who, tired of the yoke, wishes to create for himself from nature and society a vast solitude where he can breathe freely, and where there will be no kingdom other than his own. Descartes himself had been aware of the dangers, and had declared that this road was suitable for only a small number of superior minds.³ But it is not useful for anyone to reject the immutable base of intelligence, the axioms which are the necessary point of departure for reasoning. It is not useful for anyone to isolate his mind from the society of reasonable beings, to reject everything which we receive from God through men, to aspire to truth with no other support than the self.

It is true that the latest defenders of the methodological doubt deny these consequences and confine the doubt to a simple refusal of the mind to adhere to any proposition which cannot be known by itself, or clearly tied to primary principles.⁴ But it was not there that Descartes' doubt lay; indeed, it is, after all, to annihilate his original and sublime concept, to reduce it to that. Descartes had pushed skepticism to the utmost with a generous faith in the reasoning power of man, convinced beforehand that there would remain in him something unshakeable — but he wanted to know what that was. Yet only the doubt remained; and there, the abyss he had willingly created for himself, and which other men before him had dug around themselves, did not lead him to despair of the salvation of reason, as it did them. He even made the doubt his stepping stone; he seized within the pulsating depths of thought: life, the soul, certitude, God. Coming out of the tomb like

a giant, he drew from an astonished Europe a cry of admiration, which the greatest of men repeated with envy. Here he is, here is Descartes; and if his work perished because of this issue, it is not because his work was without genius, but that truth should not be sought by feats of strength, and that God did not establish doubt as the natural way to truth but, rather, faith.

It is my contention that the work of Descartes perished, in large part, along with methodical doubt, long before the attacks of Father de La Mennais because, once methodical doubt has been set aside, what is left of the general philosophy of Descartes? Some will say that there remains the concept of evidence which he developed into the distinctive characteristic of truth. But in that, Descartes simply recalled philosophy to what it had always been, a matter of reasoning; we do not engage in reasoning to conceal things but to cast light upon them, to spread the light from the known over to the unknown. "Human reason, said M. de Bonald, can cede only to the authority of evidence or to the evidence of authority."⁵ This play on words explains perfectly the nature of philosophy and the nature of Religion, the difference between reasoning and faith. In philosophy, which advances by way of reasoning, there is no other reason *to submit one's reasoning power* except the authority of evidence. In Religion, which advances by way of divine manifestation and tradition, there is no other *reason to submit one's reason* except the evidence of authority. This is why Descartes is no more culpable than any other philosopher in having made of evidence in philosophy the distinctive character of the true. This remark is important because the point was to persuade others that Christian schools, in acknowledging the rights of evidence, substituted by Descartes to the particular authority of Aristotle, had introduced in teaching a new and fatal principle. That is not quite exact; even in the time of Aristotle's prominence, evidence had been admitted as the power and the goal of all reasoning, as the ultimate reason for things. St. Thomas will provide us with a celebrated proof, at the same time as he will confirm, by the weight of his authority, what we have already said on the use of philosophy in the Church. Listen now to this eminent man.

CHAPTER VIII

The Teaching of St. Thomas

on the Use of Philosophy in the Church

“Among all the occupations of men, the most perfect, the most sublime, the most useful, and the most satisfying is the study of wisdom. It is the most perfect, because the man who cultivates wisdom already possesses something of true happiness. That is why the wise man said: *Happy the man who applies himself to wisdom*. It is the most sublime, because it gives man the greatest resemblance to God who made all things in His wisdom. Moreover, since resemblance is the cause of love, it is the study of wisdom which principally creates union with God. As a result of this, the wise man has said: *Wisdom is for men an unending treasure; all those who possessed it became the friends of God*. It is the most useful, because it leads to the realm of immortality. *The desire for wisdom*, said the sage, *leads to the eternal kingdom*. Finally, it is the most pleasing, because, according to the sage, *its conversation is not bitter, but full of joy and of contentment*. Having received from divine mercy the confidence of becoming involved with the activities of wisdom, even though they are beyond my abilities, I intend to elaborate, as much as I can, the truths taught by the Catholic faith, while casting aside the errors which oppose them. To use the words of Hilary,¹ it seems to me that the principal duty of my life is to render glory to my God, in all my lectures and in all my works. But it is difficult to combat each error singly for two reasons.

“First of all, since the writings of those who have blasphemed the truth are not sufficiently known by us, we are unable to seek in their very reasoning the downward path of their errors, as did the ancient teachers regarding the gentiles, whose situation they could have known, either because they themselves had shared their wanderings, or because, at

least, from having lived among them, they had become familiar with their beliefs.

“Secondly, many of the enemies of truth, such as the Muslims and the pagans, do not agree with us concerning the authority of whatever sacred scripture which could serve to convince them, as the Old Testament does for the Hebrews, and the New Testament for freethinkers: to the contrary, Muslims and freethinkers reject both Testaments. Thus, in order to combat them, it is necessary to have recourse to natural reason, which is the law of all minds, but which, as regards divine things, is unable to grasp the truth to its full extent. . .

“In fact, the truths that deal with God and which faith confesses, are of two kinds: ones which surpass all the faculties of human understanding, such as the unity of God in three persons; the others, which are accessible to natural reason, such as the existence of God, His unity and other similar dogmas, which philosophers themselves, aided solely by the lights of natural reason, arrived at by induction. . .

“Accordingly, it clearly follows that the sage must busy himself with both kinds of divine truths, the one kind which he can attain by the research of the mind, the other inaccessible to all his efforts, and then destroy the errors which oppose them. I say: two kinds of divine truths, not in relationship to God, Who is truth complete and pure, but as regards ourselves who understand the nature of God in different ways. Indeed, we proceed to the manifestation of the first type of these truths by *some demonstrations* which convince adversaries. As for the others, since they cannot be established by acts of reason, we should not attempt to ascertain them in this way, but only to answer the objections proposed by adversaries — since, as we have shown elsewhere, natural reason is not opposed to the faith. The only direct manner of convincing minds about this kind of truth is the authority of Holy Scripture, confirmed by miracles, because we believe in things beyond human reason only with the aid of revelation. Nonetheless, it is possible to elaborate them with some reasonable information, useful for the activity and the

consolation of the faithful. But these should not be used with unbelievers, lest the insufficiency of these insights confirm them in error and does not persuade them that we have no other ways to consent to the truth of faith.

“Accordingly, I have the intention of moving forward in the way I have just outlined. First, I will attempt to *make manifest the dogmas professed by faith, at the same time as reason discovers them*. I will base them on data drawn from the writings of philosophers and of saints, who, by confirming the truth, will convince its adversaries. Moving on, then, from clearer matters to more obscure ones, I will attain the unfolding of dogmas which surpass the powers of reason, and I will show the truth of the faith by resolving the objections of its adversaries, insofar as God allows, by means of information and authority. Thus, my aim will have been achieved: to seek by way of reason all that the human mind can discover about God.”²

We have just seen in this very simple and clear summary, the use that Christian schools made of philosophy and of evidence before Descartes, and the use still in force this day. If, in our schools, we substituted the *Contra Gentes* [Against the Nations] of St. Thomas for the tracts of philosophy being taught there, only a few individual items of information would need to be changed. In fact, the Church gains from all the new information which time inspires to the genius of its friends and its enemies. The words of Clement of Alexandria³ have always remained ours:

“What we call philosophy is not that of the Stoics, of Plato, of Epicurus, or of Aristotle, but rather the choice derived from the truth that each of these schools was able to speak, what was favorable to morals, what was in conformity with Religion.”

On this score, the only difference between the current era and the previous centuries, is that formerly the names of Plato and of Aristotle dominated *Christian eclecticism*, while, since Descartes, no philosopher has been persuasive enough in the Church for his name to become synonymous with philosophy. Neither Descartes, nor Malebranche, nor Leibnitz, nor Mr. de Bonald — the four major Christian philosophers in

modern times — raised a monument sufficiently complex and attracted a following numerous enough for them to become the fathers of the third philosophical age. Indeed, all four have rendered memorable services to truth: Descartes, in abolishing the restless philosophy, and by drawing from the very doubt evidence about the soul and about God, which are the best arguments against skepticism; Malebranche, by disclosing with consummate skill the causes of our errors; Leibnitz, by honoring Christian mysteries with explanations which his genius and vast knowledge imprinted with a seal that no one could disdain; Mr. de Bonald, by showing that language, the necessary instrument for thought, had been given to men by God, and that society, depository of the word, is also the storehouse of primordial and invincible truths on which rests the life of nations. Apart from the errors which the Holy See noted in Descartes, the works of these great men stand among the most wonderful gifts which God has given to truth; they can never be read too often by those who seek God. If the names of Plato and Aristotle represent in the past a vast unity of beliefs and recall a more general glory, they owe this perhaps less to genius than to the times.

Today, philosophy can no longer produce schools; it penetrates silently in some isolated intellects; it goes about here and there, seeking to find minds, like grain which ripens in the sun and falls from the plant. Carried away by the vagaries of the wind, the grain goes out to sprout under a thousand different skies, while the stalk which carried it dies far from its issue with not one of them close by to decorate its tomb. If Mr. de Bonald had lived in antiquity, his old age would have been surrounded by an abundant progeny; he would have lifted up his head in glory above his children. But he lived in our times, in which only the Church *brings together her little ones under her wings*. The man who had revealed to his century such deep truths, who drew so many minds from questionable routes, lived in solitude in the mountains; only from the hand of God was he to receive the double crown of genius and of virtue.

The major error of Father de La Mennais, following the example of all those eminent men — his major error, whatever would have been his philosophy, was to wish to found a school of philosophy and to hope that this school would be a link between minds, the basis for religion, and the salvation of society. Since the time of Jesus Christ, there has been no more deceptive an error than this one. Up to de La Mennais, as we have seen, philosophy had only been a *preparation for faith*, by the demonstration of religious truths accessible to the mind, a *confirmation of the faith* by some credible insights about the truths inaccessible to

reason. Philosophy in the Church had never strayed beyond this; nor could it, since all the Fathers and all the Christian sages taught as one the impotence of philosophy and the need for a divine word, transmitted and taught by the authority of the Catholic Church. Father de La Mennais was the first to want to *establish the faith* through philosophy itself, using it to unite disconnected minds. He mustered all the powers of his mind and of his temperament to ground the peace of the world and the salvation of the future on a school of philosophy. Well! What have we gained from such efforts? Could we not stop here and be satisfied with invoking the laments which emanate from all hearts on this matter? But, after we have summarized all that has preceded, we will need to examine more closely what kind of support the new philosophy would have brought to the defense of Christianity.

CHAPTER IX

Summary of What Has Preceded and Definition of Certitude

We have seen in the preceding chapters what has always been the teaching of the Church regarding the defense of Christianity, and the nature of the system which Father de La Mennais sought to substitute to this venerable and unshakeable doctrine. In the enduring thoughts of the Fathers and the sages, man's reason rests on universal, everlasting, immutable truths which require the adhesion of individual minds by invincible evidence, and that each mind discovers in all minds — except for a small number which is adjudged of folly — by the very fact that it did not possess this common foundation of truths. These truths are called *axioms*, *primary principles*, *common sense*; they have also been designated as *beliefs of faith*, which is not to deny that there exists between them and faith, properly so-called, an infinite difference, since faith, properly so-called, presupposes an obscure belief held because of external testimony, whereas faith in first truths is nothing else but adhesion to an irresistible internal light. Nonetheless, they have been given the names *beliefs* and *faith*, because they are not established by way of evidence, given that there is nothing clearer in the human mind than demonstration, and that all explanation consists essentially in spreading the brightness of what is known over the darkness of what is unknown.

Beyond the universal, perpetual, immutable and necessary truths there begins the realm of human liberty. The universe was handed over to the quarreling of men who understand each other even when they disagree, because, in their contradictory opinions, they resolutely begin from common sense. But who, then, will reconcile them now that necessity is no longer present to do so? Who will bring peace among innumerable minds, which, distanced from common sense by the long chain of their deductions, only vaguely perceive the light of first principles? In the physical order, that would be facts; in the moral order, it would be the experience of society, doomed to die if it has no God, no worship, no faith in good and evil or in punishments and rewards in another life. In the philosophical and religious order, it would be the Church

which delimits the intellectual world with a horizon even more brilliant than the sky of first principles by which it began, but luminous in a very different way. Why? Because the first principles require intelligence, while the Church is the place where the greatest freedom is joined to the brightest light, in such a way that man who starts from necessity perceives, as he lifts himself up to God, a more brilliant light and deeper chasms where it his own fault if he loses himself. What a wonderful arrangement by which God has made it a virtue even to possess truth.

Consequently, in this belief of our ancestors, the intellectual world resembles a vast ocean, illuminated from one horizon to the other by two immense and enduring lighthouses that all the furor of the waves which surround them will never shake or obscure. As we distance ourselves from the first one, and as its light becomes less ardent because of the distance, the other becomes more radiant — just as, when they pass from one pole to another, the stars which brighten the new world replace those of the old world. Between the two lighthouses, on the roiled waters of intelligence, there float some ships and simple leaves fallen from the tree of life, the ships are the human societies, the leaves are the men who have separated themselves from the company of their peers by a debased will. Enemies of the divine light, they would not like to stray too far from the first lighthouse; but the winds carry them, in spite of themselves, and therefore, so as not to see the light which they fear, the leaves plunge into the waves where they argue with each other and where there is still enough light for them to count the drops of water. The large ships cannot plunge into the abyss in the same way; they would perish because of their weight; and that is why, when they wish to flee from the divine light, all they know how to do, on account of habit, is to plunge into the scattered passages, behind rocks battered by the tempest where they always perceive a reflection of the holy light, but enfeebled and altered by the shadows which intermingle with it.

In other words — and to set aside these images whose aptness could be contested — the intellectual world is set on four diverse authorities, namely: in the fundamental order, or logic, on the *authority of necessity*; in the physical order, on the *authority of facts*; in the moral order, on the *authority of society*; in the philosophical and religious order, on the *authority of the Catholic Church*. Moreover, these four authorities themselves rest on their evidence and verify each other by the union which they bring about in minds. Indeed, it is from them that arises on earth the coming together of all minds. The authority of

necessity, in the logical order, gives rise to the union of minds, which we call the *common sense*. The authority of facts, in the physical order, unites minds in what we call *science*. The authority of society, in the moral order, brings about the union of minds that we call *honesty*. The authority of the Catholic Church, in the philosophical and religious order, unites minds in what we call *faith*. Consequently, certitude is composed of three elements: evidence, authority, and union of minds. Evidence recognizes authority, which then produces the union of minds which verifies simultaneously the authority from which it flows, and the evidence on which authority originally rests. From this, it follows that we can define certitude as: *the union of minds in the diverse orders of thought, under the laws of diverse legitimate and evident authorities*.

For a moment, Descartes shook up, in the logical order, the authority from which flows the potency of first principles.¹ In his time, Aristotle had shaken up, in the physical order, the authority of facts to substitute it with his own. Other than these two fleeting exceptions, the Christian professors always recognized, as the source of the union of minds and of certitude, the four evident authorities mentioned above. As for philosophy, they had concluded that it was powerless to unite minds — not because it lacked evident proofs, but because it lacked authority, and yet, if perchance it did not lack authority, in this case, the corrupted will of men would prevent it from having its natural effect. From this, the sages also reached the conclusion that there was a need for divine teaching to unite minds in the order of duties and in invisible matters. By placing in all of this the defense of Christianity, philosophy had been nothing more than a *preparation for faith*, and a *confirmation of faith*.

What did Father de La Mennais do? He reversed from top to bottom, so to speak, the ancient organization of truth. Certitude resulted from three elements: evidence, authority, and union of minds. First of all, Father de La Mennais denied the rights of evidence and forcibly placed authority ahead of reason. Then, in place of the four different authorities that we have seen corresponding to the diverse orders of thought, he substituted a single one, namely, *general reason*, of which the Church would be only one manifestation and one element of the package. Finally, instead of having the union of minds as a characteristic of certitude — to the degree that it referred to a legitimate and evident authority — Father de La Mennais saw in this, everywhere and always, the exclusive sign of truth. Declaring the human race infallible, since it is the greatest and most obvious union of minds, he based the entire defense of Christianity on that infallibility. We

are left with the need to appraise the usefulness of this concept.

CHAPTER X

The Philosophical System of Father de La Mennais

Is Useless in the Defense of Christianity

In giving the infallibility of the human race as the basis for the defense of Christianity, Father de La Mennais had been attracted by a strong religious desire. He hoped to push to the limits the resistance which man opposes to the light of truth and to force him to accept Christian beliefs, under penalty of losing all certitude, all reasoning, all humanity even, — and, as a result, convicted of madness. If his aim had been reached, there would have been on earth only two kinds of humans: Christians and lunatics. Since passions are not strong enough to be always satisfied by madness, the freedom which exists for the mind as well as for the heart lost half of its dominion; men were saved from error by logic, in a kind of necessity. But freedom cannot be shackled in this way; the very chains forged for it sometimes serve to extend its empire. The man who resists history to the point of persuading himself that the author of the Gospel never existed, who denies the authority of the Church, to escape the remorse of conscience; that man is not likely to be embarrassed by the philosophy of the common sense; he will argue against it for a hundred years with as much facility as a throng of Christians have done for the past fourteen years. Indeed, who would be able to convince him of the truth of this philosophy, if not his evidence, or the evidence of necessity, that is to say, always evidence? Since he denies the facts of Christianity, which are obvious, why would he not deny a philosophy, even an evident one? He denies the authority of the Church, which is evident; why would he not deny the authority of the human race, were it even evident? If he is not a lunatic in the first instance, why would he be one in the second? But if he who denies the philosophy of Father de La Mennais is not out of his mind, that is enough. De La Mennais did not place human reason between Christianity and madness. Just as before, reason remains between the evidence of truth and the darkness of passions. It follows, then, that the philosophy of the common sense did not serve the purpose of its author which was to lift up error with a lever more powerful than evidence, and to introduce tenacious souls, so to speak, into the sanctuary of truth. Were philosophy of the common sense true, were the human race infallible in fact: this had to be established, and

consequently, called for some kind of evidence. *For the human mind can submit only to the authority of evidence, or to the evidence of authority*, to use again the profound play on words of Mr. de Bonald. What is an authority that is not evident in some way? What motive would a man have to submit his thoughts and his actions to it? Authority is but an intermediary between the finite light of man and the infinite light of God. Authority is similar to a body situated between two unequal suns; reflecting the rays of the one and the other, it would mingle the two hemispheres together in itself. In matters logical and spiritual, man moves from light to light, *a claritate in claritate*.¹ Light is his support and his rest stop. If he did not rely on the light, how could he recognize the true authority?

We agree with Fr. de La Mennais that the road of authority is the road set up by God to arrive at knowledge of the true; we agree even more willingly because the Church says exactly the same thing. But which authority should we follow — the authority of the human race, or the authority of the Church, or other authorities? That is the question; who will answer it? Up to Father de La Mennais, the belief was that, in the philosophical and religious order, evidence would decide in favor of the Catholic Church, which, by a string of marvels, had obtained here below *the fullness of authority*, according to the expression of St. Augustine. Father de La Mennais thought he had discovered in this doctrine a dangerous and hidden venom. He said that it was not up to evidence but to the human race to resolve the question — that is to say, he invoked the authority of the human race to establish the authority of the Catholic Church. Grant him, for a moment, that he did well. But we insist, and we demand: how are we to know that the authority of the human race is the first authority, that of which all others are but a consequence and a manifestation? Is it not by means of some evidence or other? Accordingly, it would seem that, in the system of Father de La Mennais, as in ordinary belief, evidence is the final explanation of matters. Beyond authority, this question always comes up: why this authority rather than that other one? Meanwhile, beyond the evidence, we can see only skepticism, or else this ridiculous question: why this evidence rather than that one? Which is to say, why this light rather than another light?

Father de La Mennais recognized this fundamental question very well, and boldly took his stand: he declared that one had to admit *without proof* the authority of the human race. Here are his words:

“Insufficient attention has been paid to the necessary link which exists between certitude and infallibility. Something which can be true or false is not fixed. All that can be affirmed as true by a reason which can be mistaken, could be false; all that could be affirmed as false could be true. Accordingly, nothing affirmed by a mind which can be mistaken or fallible is determined. Thus, to seek certitude is to seek an infallible mind; moreover, its infallibility must be believed, or admitted without proof, since any proof presupposes truths already established, and consequently, the infallibility of the mind which affirms them.”²

Well, we give our provisional assent to all that. But, since we must admit *without proof* a mind or an infallible authority, why not admit similarly *without proof* the mind or the infallible authority of the Church, rather than a mind or the infallible authority of the human race? Why should one be preferred over the other? Why begin with one rather than the other? Evidently Father de La Mennais thought that the authority of the human race was clearer, less controversial, easier to know than the authority of the Catholic Church. Evidently, he told himself: between man and the Church there is a gulf. No doubt, God has projected infinite marvels; He poured the blood of His only Son, and a thousand nations have passed by that route. But if the route could be further shortened; if the distance which separates the human mind from the divine mind were no more than the distance which separates the mind of each individual man from the mind of all men; if between man and God there were a road no longer than the one between one man and many men; in a word, if the infallible authority of the human race led to the infallible authority of the Catholic Church; if even the Catholic Church were but a manifestation, a development of the general reason, would it not be an invaluable advantage to be able to say to the man who denies Christianity: you deny the human mind, and consequently, your own? Father de La Mennais necessarily reasoned in this manner, or in an analogous manner. For him, it must have been a question of evidence for the subordinate connection that he established between the authority of the human race and that of the Church. For now, that is all that we claim, and it suffices to affirm that in his system as in ordinary teaching, evidence is the ultimate proof of things.

It is important to understand him correctly. Between the teaching of Father de La Mennais and the ancient doctrine, the question is not whether we should reject or admit authority, but which authority we

should acknowledge. Whether we consider the logical order, the physical order, the moral order, the philosophical and religious orders — in every case, the Christian professors recognized there could be no point of certitude without *union of minds*, and that *minds bind themselves together only by authority*. All of them judged philosophy powerless for the simple reason that it did not unite minds. In fact, they judged correctly that this was not for lack of evident proofs, but rather for lack of authority, that such a union had no place in philosophy. It was with the hope of definitively establishing philosophy, by basing it on authority, that in the Middle Ages they asserted the supremacy of Aristotle. When Father de La Mennais published the first volume of his *Essai sur l'indifférence* [Essay on Indifference], the cause of his prodigious and unanimous success was that he admirably demonstrated a principle admitted by all Catholics, namely, *the necessity of authority*. Minds drifted apart only after the publication of the second volume, in which Father de La Mennais had substituted for the ancient authorities a singular authority, a term which no one had ever heard expressed before with this attribute. The problem, then, is to decide if this substitution was appropriate and legitimate, if indeed it is the regulating authority of the human mind, whether there be one or many, and what they are. But how to learn this, save with the help of evidence? How to learn this without the application of these words of Mr. de Bonald, translated from St. Augustine: *the human mind can cede only to the authority of evidence or to the evidence of authority?* In fact, St. Augustine said — and that saying is fundamental: *reason and authority were never completely separated, because it is reason which decided which authority is to be believed.*³ This is why evidence is the basic reason of matters, why no system places man between Christianity and madness; why, in the end, it is not exact to say that *authority must be believed or admitted without proof*. To the contrary, it has to be evident to be believed.

At this point, it is our intention to compare the new doctrine with the old, in regard to the respective evidence of each. We intend to show that this new teaching, which was to shorten the route to the invisible world and make it level, encompasses many difficulties; and that, in addition, it contains by way of consequences unknown to the author a new Protestantism, wider and deeper than the original.

We also intend to show that, from the ashes of the human race in which sleep pell-mell with the centuries both the good and the bad, darkness and light, detestable and magnanimous passions, our descendants will obtain with self-assurance all the dreams of their own mind, more than they will extract the

truth, like the Oracle of Endor, who only once called up the specter of Samuel, but no fewer than a thousand times called up all the specters of the underworld. We have in mind to show that man, finding himself too powerless before the Church for eighteen hundred years, will henceforth only attack her with the whole army of his equals. The weapons will be the ashes of the deceased tossed up to heaven, the eras destroyed in opposition to eternity, the authority without spokesman of the human race against the authority of the Church, abstract universality without catholicity. If we succeed, it will be established that by adopting the philosophical system of Father de La Mennais, that is to say, by endorsing the infallibility of the human mind, the Church would have signed with its own hand its death warrant.

We will again take up these thoughts, but in an orderly manner. At first, we said that it was more difficult to arrive at Christianity through the philosophy of the common sense than by the way used in the Church up to that time. Before offering proofs, I will speak of my own personal experience.

I had lived nine years in unbelief, when I heard the voice of God calling me back to Him. If I plumb the depths of my memory for the logical causes of my conversion, I find none other than the historic and social evidence of Christianity, evidence which appeared to me as soon as age allowed me to resolve the doubts which I had breathed in with the air while at University. I indicate the source of my doubts, even though I resolved to allow no hurtful word to fall from my pen, because deprived early of a Christian father, and raised by a Christian mother, I owe it to the memory of one and to the love of the other to declare without fail that I received religion from them along with life, and that I lost it among strangers who were imposed on them and on me. Later, when I reached the age when reason begins to hold sway, reading and discussion about Christian material easily persuaded me of their veracity; since that time, their evidence has become so compelling in my mind that they could deprive me of the merit of faith, if faith were not a mystery of the will, in which the mind plays only an inferior part. Subsequent to my conversion, when I read the works of Father de La Mennais, that famous man, the defender of my revived faith — works which I had so many reasons to peruse, two things happened: I thought I understood his philosophy, even though I did not at all, as I learned later; and when, with time, I understood it better, it aroused innumerable doubts in me. I dealt with them for six consecutive years, from 1824 to 1830, without being able to arrive at some resolutions, despite being pressed by my friends, several of whom were also those of Father de La Mennais. It was only on the eve of

the year 1830 that I finally made my choice, rather from weariness than full conviction. Even during the intense work at *L'Avenir*, now and then there came to mind some enemy philosophical specters. Today, I see clearly the falsity of the opinion I had so laboriously embraced. Having easily arrived at Christianity by the ordinary route, I remained in it without trouble; the certitude I had of its truth reached its zenith. If I had followed the route traced by Father de La Mennais, I would not yet be a Christian. To be sure, a personal experience proves little; it could be due to a particular bent of the mind; but you will see, I do believe, that mine was based on the nature of matters.

In fact, every authority needing to be verified by previous evidence — the authority of the human race like that of the Catholic Church — it follows that it is more difficult to acknowledge one over the other depending on the ease of obtaining evidence for either of them. Now the authority of the Church is proven by historic and social evidence, that is to say, by the evidence of facts which bear on the senses, while the authority of the human race rests on the evidence of pure reasoning, concerning the most profound problem of the human mind, the problem of certitude. Every man of good faith can be convinced, after very little effort, that the linking of Christian facts lies beyond human powers, if we suppose them to be false, and likewise beyond human powers if they are true. Consequently, we cannot explain their existence except by recognizing the finger of God. On the other hand, men of good faith could spend centuries arguing about the particular mind and the general mind because in this it is not a question of seeing what is, but of seeing what ought to be. Moreover, to misunderstand what is, presupposes a blindness a thousand times more profound than that needed to repel what ought to be. Reasoning is nothing but our own mind; facts are something which is not us, which speak to us, which pursue us, which persist after we have passed, which we cannot destroy by an act of our will, like we stifle our thought when it pleases us to do so. Each one of us is the sire of his reasoning, and could be its killer; but we are only witnesses to facts. If humanity in its entirety denied the sun, voluntarily plucked out its eyes so as no longer to see it, the sun would still continue its course, giving its light to the newborn child who, in his crib, would harbor no anger against it. In the end, there is a decisive proof on this point: every day, in the sciences as in life, facts reconcile minds that reasoning has divided.

You might say: what is easier than to submit the particular mind to the general mind? I answer that nothing is less simple than an act of reasoning, of whatever kind, because one act leads to a thousand others.

It is the Hydra of fable with its heads ever being replaced; to complete the comparison, facts are to the act of reasoning what Hercules' club was to the Hydra. When God connected the facts of the visible world to the invisible world, He threw down from heaven to intellects the sublime bridge of the cross. He accomplished a miracle of logic as well as a miracle of charity; for all eternity, every philosophy will be powerless to add anything.

You might say, further, that the authority of the human race cannot be established by the act of reasoning, but that it is a fact just as much as the authority of the Church.

“When we are asked, says Father de La Mennais, how we can prove authority, our answer is very simple: *we do not prove it*. Well, if you do not prove it, how then do you establish it? On what basis do you believe it? We establish it *as a fact*, and we believe in that fact, just as all men believe in it, and as you yourself believe in it, because it is impossible not to believe in it. We believe without proof that we exist, that we feel, that we think, that other men exist, endowed like us with the ability to feel and to think, that we communicate with them through speech, that we hear them, that they hear us — and thus, we compare our sensations with their sensations, our feelings with their feelings, our thoughts with their thoughts. No man has the ability to doubt these things, even though they are impossible to prove. Indeed, the thought or the individual act of reason of each man, manifested in speech, this is the testimony; the agreement of testimonies or of individual acts of reasoning, these are the general reason, the common sense, the authority; each one of us without proof believes in the existence of authority just as in the existence of testimony. Thus, to repeat, authority is for us a fact; moreover, it is in the nature of a fact that a natural bent leads us to judge about what is true or false according to common agreement, or to a higher authority. If this agreement is widespread, and especially if it is universal, we stop listening to the adversaries and trying to convince them. We ignore them as mad, sick minds, intellects in delirium, like monstrous beings who no longer belong to the human race.”⁴

That the authority of the human race, in the sense given it by Father de La Mennais, is a fact which affects our senses, we do not believe. If this were true, every man who denied the philosophy of Father de La Mennais would actually be confined in Charenton,⁵ where are kept all who deny the real authority of the human race, that is to say, the first principles of reason. But that is not the point at issue. Father de La Mennais can be granted all he wishes on this matter; grant him that the authority of the human race, as he understands it, be it a fact as visible as the authority exercised over a multitude of intellects by the Catholic Church. The question is to learn on what is based this authority of the human race, and this authority of the Church. Indeed, it is not sufficient to be an authority, to exercise an influence on minds, to be, by that fact, a depository of truth. According to the words of St. Augustine, it is necessary for *the mind to decide which authority it ought to believe*. Moreover, Father de La Mennais, while frequently repeating that he does not wish to ponder on the infallibility of the human race, reasons endlessly on that infallibility, and his first act of reason is that *it is to be admitted without proof, under penalty of being a skeptic*.

“The infallibility of the human mind cannot be proven directly, says he, because the proof adduced, either would not prove anything, or would presuppose the very infallibility to be proven. *But if we do not suppose human reasoning to be infallible, certitude becomes impossible, and to be consistent, everything without exception would need to be doubted.*”⁶

To be sure, if in the five volumes of the *Essai* this would be the only act of reasoning, by itself it would nonetheless produce a thousand others, not only because it is *marvelous*, but by the very fact that it is an act of reason. To the contrary, when we ask the Church what her authority rests on, she does not reason, she recites, she acts. She acts like that philosopher before whom movement was denied: he was pleased to walk. She acts like her divine founder who taught with authority, *quasi potestatem habens*,⁷ and who proved his authority not by arguments but by *signs*. For the authority of the human race to be based on facts, and be equal in clarity to the authority of the Church, it would have had to perform some miracles: restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, heal lepers, raise some dead persons, and itself would have come out of the tomb.

Indeed, where is the human race? Who has seen it? Who has heard it? Where are its missionaries? Who is its spokesman? We are barely born when the Church approaches our crib; she opens our ears and our eyes; she make us hear the first sounds of the universal language, depository of divine truths; her ceremonies strike our senses, startled, besides, to be alive; her monuments announce, by their grandeur, the unlimited power which moved men to erect them; everything reveals to us her life and her activity. If it is a question of people yet buried in error, the reputation of Catholic civilization, carried over all the oceans by European ships, comes incessantly to trouble their ignorance. Ambassadors sent by the Church, known by the simple name *missionaries*, bring them, without ever tiring, and with the gift of the holy word, the knowledge of authority which is her living and infallible agent. Situated in the most famous place in the world, the father of Christians, the vicar of Jesus Christ raises there a voice which the savage hears in his forests, the Chinese person at the ends of the earth, the Hindu beside his rivers, the Tartar in his deserts, the Arab in the middle of the sands of his country, the islander in the depths of his island where the sea rumbles in vain, kings in their palaces, the poor man under his roof, the prisoner in his cell, the voyager everywhere. Both the light of the sun and the voice of the Church make their daily rounds over the earth. But once more we ask: who has seen, who has heard the human race? Where are its missionaries? Who is its spokesman? Humanity lies indistinct in the past and in the future; the place in the world where it is most visible is in libraries, those other tombs. The Church is the first to seek us and to speak to us; when interrogated, the human race remains in an everlasting silence. The Church is living; the human race is dead, or was never born; the generations which are restless between these two tombs, condemned to ignorance, know neither their sires nor their posterity. Is it what no longer exists? Or what does not yet exist? Is it the dust of books and the dreams about the unknown that God has given us as the rule for our judgments, and as the shortest way to reach Him? Recall why St. Augustine thought it necessary that truth be transmitted by way of teaching and authority: it was so that the sages, purified by the action of the Church, become able to contemplate the truth, and that truth be placed within the reach of the masses. Will the human race purify the heart of wise men? Will its voice of death, emitted from the dust of libraries, be understood by the masses? It is only too easy to say: the human race believes this or that matter, here is the word of the human race. Come now; in good faith, is it not rather your word? The human race has no voice, no more than the Church would have a voice if it were composed of simple faithful, if the priests and the bishops themselves did not have above them a unique chief, living agent of the entire body. The human race has members all of whom have need of instruction and direction;

it does not have a leader who instructs and directs its members; and its prophets, if it produces any, are like the attendants of the Sibyl, or like the leaves of the oak of Dodona, carried by the wind.

Suppose, if you will, that the authority of the human race could be established as clearly as that of the Church, what a difference in clarity would be found in the expression of their thoughts! I have only to listen to the Church to learn her doctrine; like me, the lowliest shepherd is able to learn it, as long as he remains docile; but what a task it is to disentangle the teachings of the human race! Father de La Mennais, who only traced a rather quick sketch of them, nonetheless was constrained to crowd six or seven hundred pages of citations from poets, philosophers, laws, and historians from a number of centuries and countries. When you read all that, your eyesight is regularly troubled; the human race, rather than appearing only once, like the Church, passes before you under a thousand diverse guises, while speaking a thousand languages. If you wish to verify the texts, weigh them, compare them, become aware of the adequacy of their interpretations. This is a considerable task, even for the most learned archeologist; the six hundred pages will force you to read millions more of them. If you decide to verify nothing, who can reassure you about the true meaning of the texts which pass before your eyes? Indeed, it is not a question of material exactness, but of the relationship of one or two phrases with the intimate thoughts of annihilated peoples. Given the lovely words that some poets or philosophers have said concerning the degradation of man, and of the need for a mediator between him and God; given the uses, whose mysterious and traditional value was perhaps unknown to the ancient nations, that have more or less striking resemblances to the dogmas of Christianity, does it follow unquestionably that the world and antiquity did indeed believe what we now believe? Do medals preserved in a display case prove that their owner has an idea of the objects they represent, and especially has faith in them? Most of the nations, for example, measure time by weeks of seven days; is this proof that those nations know and especially that they believe that the world was created in six days by God, and that God rested on the seventh? It is another thing to look among those relics for confirmation of a truth already established, as the Fathers of the Church did, or to place in them the basis for both certitude and truth. In the first case, it matters little whether the nations understood or not, they believed or not, the tradition of which they were the caretakers. In the system of Father de La Mennais, it is necessary for the nations to have had faith in the verses of their poets, in the statements of their philosophers, in the laws of their legislators, in the traditions whose more or less obscure traces they held, or that these verses, these statements, these laws, these

traditions had really expressed the faith of nations. There is an infinite difference between the two situations. The texts cited by Father de La Mennais are clear to me, in general, like medals of a primitive revelation; as proofs for the faith of the human race in that revelation, I do not know what to think. It is, rather, quite possible that a certain number of superior minds, priests, sages, legislators, maintained their relationships with the ancient truths and echoed them in their writings without the masses noticing it, and it is also quite possible they had learned them all without giving them any credence. To be sure, when it becomes evident, by reason of study and attentiveness, that the human race believed some dogmas fundamental to Christianity, it remains true, nonetheless, that it is infinitely easier to know the doctrine of the Church than the doctrine of the human race.

Moreover, in recapitulating what has preceded, we can see that the authority and the doctrine of the Church greatly exceeds in evidence the authority and the hypothetical doctrine of the human race; consequently, it is easier to arrive at Christianity by the Church than by the human race. For all that, once the authority and the teachings of the Church have been established, the traditions preserved in the human race stand as admirable confirmation of that doctrine and of that authority.

That should have been enough for Father de La Mennais so that he would not have needed to change the order of the Catholic discussion, as it had been understood in the previous centuries. We dare to add that his system contains a wider and deeper Protestantism than the older one; but we will concede to him that what the human race believes is true.

CHAPTER XI

The Philosophical System of Father de La Mennais

Contains the Most Extensive Protestantism Yet to Appear

Given that truth, by a gratuitous assumption, is found in the human race, since the human race has no spokesman by whom to express itself, it follows that the truth contained there is in a hidden form, just as it is contained in a book which requires a further interpretation. Even so, that is saying too much; because an accurate book — the Bible, for example — constitutes a single body whose parts are organized into a congruent whole, while the human race is an unbound book whose pages are spread here and there, some entire, others half erased by time, still others forever destroyed. It is a church without priests, without bishops, without Pope, and without Bible. It is a church of adherents only, and where, during the long night of ages, there shines only the wandering star of a tradition abandoned and all alone. If suddenly the Vatican were to fall, while expressing to humanity one last word of life; if all the bishops, all the priests, all the deacons of Christianity, assembled together in an immense and final council, and singing the creed one more time, would descend as one into the same tomb; if the last copy of the book par excellence, if the Bible placed in that extensive grave would itself become the food for worms, and that, subsequently, the centuries passed by with all their power, sweeping away our cathedrals and our memories, the mixed remains of that pitiful catastrophe of the truth would be the human race: a temple empty, save perhaps for ruins.

To make of this despoiled temple, to make of this fallen human race the infallible prophet of philosophy and of Religion, is, as we have said, to give to Protestantism a wider base than it had before. In what exactly does Protestantism consist? — in making of a mute book the infallible divine prophet of religious truths, in taking as foundation something which is true, which is pure, which is holy, which is a divine authority in itself, but which has no spokesman, and which is silent. Now, at the most, the truth is in the human race as if in a book — supposing that it is there — while the human race has no spokesman any more than the Bible, does not speak any more than the Bible. Vainly, it has been said, have men

communicated with the human race by speech: it is by speech that men communicate with other men; they give and receive both truth and error simultaneously. But no man engages in conversation with that portion of the human race which is actually alive, nor, with greater reason, with that portion which no longer exists, before which the other is but a point in motion. I am not mentioning that portion which has not yet come to be, although, strictly speaking, it had to be consulted to ascertain the thought of the human race. Even at the Last Judgment, when all eras and all nations will truly be assembled, the voice of the human race will not be heard. Only the Church will have a spokesman in the person of Jesus Christ, its leader — unless one holds that Jesus Christ is the leader of the human race as he is of the leader of the Church, and that the non-baptized are equally her members as those who have been renewed by water and by the spirit. But then, we would need to add that today the Pope is leader of the human race, since in the visible order, as regards the Church, he is all that Jesus Christ is in the invisible order. Consequently, it is by the simple fact of birth, and not by baptism, that one becomes part of the Church. Were one to uphold these principles, so destructive of Christian theology, this would not mark much progress, the human race having been without a voice at least before Jesus Christ, and yet remaining always the infallible spokesman of the true Religion.

But if it is impossible to find a spokesman for the human race, if truth has to be drawn from its deep innards with the help of individual interpretation, we do not see any difference between Protestantism and the philosophy of the common sense, other than the fact that it is a thousand times easier to understand the Bible than humanity. Indeed, the Bible is written tradition; the Bible of humanity is oral tradition. We recognize that the word *oral* could mislead us into believing that oral tradition must necessarily speak. Nonetheless it is easy to notice that its only prerogative is to pass from mouth to mouth, silent and noisy at the same time, like the Scriptures, helpless to defend itself from outrageous interpretations, and even more helpless in that it faces abuses of memory. Today, for eighteen hundred years, the Church has worked to explain Catholic tradition and to stabilize it by her decrees; an innumerable number of discussions and decisions seems to have placed her above all the injuries of the future. Well! Would anyone believe that, if the Church stopped guarding this holy deposit, that, if right now she disappeared from the world, Christianity would remain by the sole strength of tradition? Would anyone believe that the man was not a Protestant who would say: I accept only tradition as the rule for my judgments in matters of the faith; I acknowledge it as the infallible prophet of truth? No Church, no Christianity: this is what Father de La Mennais himself has

demonstrated.¹ He brought to light that the Protestants, once separated from the Church, and even though they retained the Holy Scriptures — that is to say, the truth — gradually drifted out of bounds, and portend to fall even lower. In no way does this alter the Scriptures; they remain as a lasting whole, always pure, always holy, always truth itself. What would it be like if the Protestants had taken as their judge, instead of an unchanging book, a tradition given over to all the hazards of time? What would it be like if that tradition were not even the Catholic tradition, but the primitive one, lost in the darkness of the past? What had this tradition made of the people, before Jesus Christ? What became of their behavior, their temples, and the divinity itself? How could a nation that long ago was the ruin of Christianity be seen as the foundation of Christianity?

Perhaps someone will answer that there is found in oral tradition a means to discern the truth which does not exist for the Bible, namely, universality; by universality, one can easily distinguish genuine traditions from false ones; all that is local is false, that all that is universal is true. All right! But who will decide that this belief is part of universal oral tradition, while that other belief is not? Who will collect together all the individual testimonies? Who will assemble all the mouths into a single one? Would it not be the mind of each man, the lips of each man? Besides, it is often overlooked that a tradition is not oral except at a given moment, that it was written for all centuries before this moment, and that in the system of Father de La Mennais, it is necessary to question all times and all places. Who will ask the questions? Who will listen and transmit the answers? Evidently, it will be the mind of each man, the individual intellect of each man. If indeed one would say that it would be the mind of every man, the assumption is first made — against all evidence — that all men are capable of understanding and judging issues of the most abstruse archeology, and, secondly, that they would judge all issues in the same way. In other words, we assume that Protestantism, which has always disunited intellects, would this time unite them. In a word, this is impossible, whatever we might do to imagine an authority without spokesman; it is also impossible to imagine a spokesman for the human race. To be sure, when we worked at *L'Avenir* [a newspaper - Trans.], we were all fully convinced that the spiritual authority approved of our activity: now, I ask, if we had to deal only with the human race, would we have reached where we now are? Could we not unceasingly have invoked in our favor the authority of the human race? Could we not have consumed our lives, with all kinds of poses, in order to prove that the human race had always believed what we were defending? True, our adversaries had believed the contrary; but who had decided between them and us? Posterity, perhaps? Grant, then, that we take the future centuries as the rule

for our judgments, that is to say, let us get rid of all rules, and let each generation await at the tomb the light of the truth.

What? But that is not the way God set things up! He knew the weakness of our intellect, and just as He assembled the light which illuminates our eyes into one source, He assembled the light intended to guide our will in one unique center, without which universality is but an imperceptible chimera. In fact, it can be said of the human race, but in a different sense, what has been said of God: *It is a circle whose center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere*. Each one of us, wandering in this circle without limits, makes himself the center of humanity, proclaims his own thoughts as universal, and if he wishes, in fact, to verify their universality, he drags himself alone in difficult research; he shouts, and his voice, striking the indeterminate spaces which surround him, provide him with only an echo of his own intellect, more deceiving than improved. Should other voices answer him, he considers the distant and harmonious chorus of those minds as the universal word. Now, universality can only be expressed by unity, and there are only two unities: God in heaven, and the pope on the earth. Or rather, God alone is truly one, and He has given us His vicar as one representation of unity, so that we are enabled to understand the universal word, and *that we not be like little children, carried by every wind of belief*. Any other universality, any other authority than that whose place, leader, and spokesman is the sovereign pontiff, is a sterile universality, an authority without foundation, all the more dangerous because it has the trappings of authority, and that it gives error a stand greater than man. Protestantism consists precisely in that, to give to error the support of a divine authority within oneself, but without a spokesman.

Even if the human race would have had the truth within itself, it was not necessary to make it an infallible judge in controversies — no more than the Bible, which contains the truth in itself, is an infallible judge of the discussions arising between Christians. Just as Protestants argue endlessly about the Sacred Scriptures, so too we can discuss endlessly the belief of humanity. As a result, humanity is no more the basis for all reasoning and for all faith than Sacred Scripture.

We know full well that Father de La Mennais does not want us to stop at the human race, that, for him, the human race is but in a land of transition, and that he establishes the Church as the highest visible

authority because, in its fullness, it merges the primordial authority of the human race to its own.

“Since the time of Jesus Christ,” says he, “what authority would dare to compare itself with that of the Catholic Church, heiress of all the primordial traditions, of the initial revelation, and of the Mosaic revelation, of all the truths known in antiquity? All of these are but a development of her doctrine, which thereby goes back to the origin of the world; in her authority, she offers us all authorities combined. *Could this be the authority of the human race attesting to the truth of primitively revealed truths?* To be sure, the Church teaches all these truths, which she received from tradition. That tradition belongs to her with all its proofs, with the authority which is their foundation, and which has become part of her own foundation.”²

It is especially here that we notice the abyss involuntarily excavated by Father de La Mennais under the building of Christianity. Since he declared the human race infallible in matters philosophical and religious, we have a right to say to him: We need go no further, we have the certitude, the truth, the faith; that is enough. What does he have to do? He is obliged to show that the authority of the Church is greater than the authority of the human race. But how can an authority, of whatever kind, be greater than an infallible authority? Infallibility is the final limit of authority. It is easy to understand that very early, the primitive tradition of the human race had been expanded in the Church; but that does not advance us very much. Indeed, the human race, prophet and infallible guardian of traditions which had need of development, of promises to be fulfilled, since it had no spokesman to verify either the ones or the others, each human being remains as judge to learn what those traditions were, what were the promises, and whether they were effectively developed and accomplished. Every man remains free, by a Protestant interpretation, to turn the human race against the Church, to invoke against the authority of the Church the infallible authority of the human race. What answer could be given to the man who would say: the human race is infallible; now, the human race did not believe the mediator, therefore the mediator did not come. The answer could be that the human race did believe the mediator; one could cite to him texts of poetry, of philosophers, of historians, just as texts of Sacred Scripture are cited to Protestants. But who does not see that the obstinacy of one would be as natural as the obstinacy of the other, and a thousand times more dangerous, since the concession would have been made that the

human race is an infallible authority — while the Protestant is shown that the Holy Scriptures are not an infallible authority, given that they do not speak, not having in themselves a spokesman.

After having established the infallibility of the human reason, we would search in vain how to subordinate it in a solid fashion to the infallibility of the Church. The only transition point, or joint between both is the faith of the human race in a mediator to come, a faith which, since it no longer subsists today, proves — it is alleged — that the mediator has already come. Even should we engage in discussion on this point, the reciprocal links have been broken. Christianity floats in the midst of the human race which surpasses it in grandeur just as sixty centuries surpass eighteen, as the expanse of the ancient world and the new surpass the size of the Church. Like everything else, this point depends on individual interpretation, and consequently, we keep finding Protestantism always given as the foundation for Catholicism.

On this matter, Father de La Mennais got only one word wrong. In trying hard to unify the two elements of his system, namely, the human race and the Church, he has said that Christianity had been the domestic condition before Jesus Christ, and after him, passed to the social condition. The true word was this one: at first, Christianity was in a *Protestant or individual state*, then, through Jesus Christ, it passed to the *Catholic state*. This is to say that God, having endowed the first man with the truth, did not deprive him of it after the Fall, but left it in the world, bereft of all guardian authority, except with the Hebrews. This truth, abandoned daughter of the heavens, whence it came, was received in the tents of Job and the patriarchs, pursued by the Canaanites, despoiled by others of part of its clothing, leaving here and there traces of its passage, etching its name on a pyramid or in a tomb, its lips sealed, save in Jerusalem. It did not even have the power to defend itself against the involuntary blows of those who loved it, until the predetermined moment when it opened its mouth to say: *Come to me all you who labor and are tired*; since then, it has never remained silent. In creating the Church, God did only two things: he gave a mouth to truth, and a hand to charity. Without these two agents, the truth was dying under Protestantism, charity by egoism. The human race, without voice and without movement, was like one of those magnificent statues of gods who *enriched the religion of nations* by their majesty, but in whose name promises against mercy and against truth were made.

Do we want to see a terrible example of this, a contemporary example, one which will justify what we have said, *that one day our descendants, with authority, will bring forth from the human race all the dreams of their own individual mentality?*

One sect arose which calls God all that exists, which adores matter, which, under the pretext of doing away with a dualism incompatible with the peace of the world, denies the existence of good and of evil, which seeks to free man from the yoke of the devil, the woman from the yoke of man, the pauper from the yoke of charity, in order to found on this religion a new society. Come now! Do we know what is the logical base for the disciples of Saint-Simon? Do we know where they believe to read the promise of their dreams? It is in humanity, which they proclaim infallible, in the past history of man, in the present hope of the human race. There where Father de La Mennais saw the Christian beliefs successively developed by primitive revelation, by the Mosaic revelation, and by that of Jesus Christ, exactly where the disciples of Saint-Simon saw the development of their beliefs, which in a fourth revelation, were bound to receive again a new development. According to them, they grasped in humanity a law of progress, by which the struggle of good and evil, of light and darkness, of the good and evil principles, of the spirit and of matter, of God and of the creature, of man with man, which is continually diminishing so that finally universal pains arise — as with a long and painful birth process — a spotless unity of the future, the joining of good and evil, of matter and spirit, of God and man, of man and woman, of the pauper and the rich man, of the king and the subject, of everything with everything, of everyone with everyone. When, in their presence, we express our astonishment at such a remarkable teaching, they respond coldly that there is nothing to discuss, that humanity has spoken, and that it is infallible. Humanity, they say, favors us in its three stages: it favors us in the past, because there was in the past a continuing progress to a future union; it favors us in the present, because the present pushes aside the old beliefs of Catholicism; it favors us in the future, because we believe that the future belongs to us, just as the first Christians felt in the catacombs. That these are ridiculous approbations of matters, that the past, the present, and the future of the human race have been incorrectly interpreted by the disciples of Saint-Simon, I do assuredly believe, just as I believe that the Protestants erroneously explained the Sacred Scriptures; but it is no less true that the infallibility of the human race is today the logical foundation of one of the most dangerous errors to have yet appeared in the world.

How many are the threats that can occur in bringing about the slightest change to the ancient doctrine! All the Fathers of the Church, all the doctors, have felt, like Father de La Mennais, the need for authority; all had admired the divine goodness which had suspended between the sky and the earth the *immense light* of the Church, to use the expression of the Count de Maistre, and who made Her an authority all the more capable of uniting the disparate intellects, that She was the only one endowed with a spokesman, the only one which encompasses the characteristics of unity, of universality, of antiquity. Apart from Her, men were able to reassure themselves concerning the basic principles of their reasoning faculty by the indomitable necessity which forces them to believe in them, and by the approbation of their peers. They were able to establish the knowledge of visible things by the observation of facts and the assent of the sages. They could reach up to God, up to the notion of good and evil, not only by the warnings of their conscience, but also by the view of human societies, none of which lives without God and without moral laws. Having reached this point, they could easily have philosophized, become aware that in the world there remained some shreds of a primitive wisdom; but philosophy and the human race both lacked the authority to assemble the sages and the people in the truth; this is where the link between the visible and the invisible worlds was broken. Jesus Christ renewed this link by founding the Church: catholic, apostolic, and Roman; and it is on His authority, one and universal, linked by antiquity to all times, sole and infallible voice, that there reside forever in the order of the highest truths: the faith, the certitude, and the destiny of the world.

Whoever *does not listen to the Church* stagnates, like the ancient philosophers, in private guesses, which are unable to satisfy other minds than his own, unable even to satisfy his own unceasingly. After many unfulfilled hopes, he finally chooses the dark recesses of doubt to console himself, or the brutality of vice, or the illusions of mysticism, or the stagnant peace of indifference. Whoever sincerely looks for the Church finds Her and recognizes Her by the characteristics which only She possesses, and the first of them is Her absolute necessity. "Either the Providence of God does not preside over human affairs, and therefore it is useless to be occupied with Religion, or if Providence does preside, one should not lose hope that God Himself had established an authority, providing us with a sure way of our reaching up to Him." ³ The necessity for authority is the first link of the chain which leads and attaches men to the Church. Solitude and doubt are the penalties suffered by those who misunderstand Her sacred authority. Now, the philosophical system of Father de La Mennais, by establishing an infallible authority other than the Church, actually

destroys the absolute necessity of the Church, relieves of their solitude the spirits who are opposed to the Church, and nonetheless opens the door to a new Protestantism. We believe that this is what we have demonstrated; we believe that we have given sufficient reasons for the pertinacity with which this system was rejected by the body of bishops.

CHAPTER XII

Conclusion

Here I stop. And yet, these considerations are far from complete. There remains to re-examine in itself, in its logical bases, that philosophy whose newness, uselessness, and danger I have displayed. The diverse arguments on which its author established it need to be addressed. For those persons who are accustomed to this kind of thought, the resolutions have been sufficiently indicated in what has preceded. Father de La Mennais has placed in perpetual opposition to the human race, one individual man, helpless in his private evidence, relying on himself and rejecting all authority. And yet, this is not reality; man is never alone. If it is a question of the first principles of the human mind, man is in communication with his peers. If it is a question of the first principles of morality, man is in communication with society. If it is a question of the sciences, man is in communication with the facts recognized by the sages. Finally, if it is a question of philosophical and religious matters, man is in communication with the Catholic Church. Father de La Mennais's error consists in not wanting the evidence to point to authority, in having reduced all the elements of certitude to authority, then all the authorities to a single one: the human race, of which the Catholic Church would be only an unfolding. Remove this chimerical assumption from a man placed between the human race and the most absolute solitude, and not one of the arguments of the second volume of the *Essai sur l'Indifférence* can stand.

And so, here I stop: *long works frighten me*. I am satisfied with having indicated to my brothers a subject of reflection, worthy of them. If I am able to help a few of them give up their state of doubt, whose pain I was very familiar with; if I have warned the Church that war was being prepared and has already begun against Her, in the name of *humanity*; I have done enough. Allow me, at least, to present the conclusions I have drawn for myself concerning the philosophical torments in which I was tossed about. It is not up to me to offer advice; and yet, we can always admit, without pride, that we have been mistaken, and render glory to God, Who *calls from darkness to His admirable light*.

After ten years of efforts to understand the actual role of philosophy in the Church; after disturbances of the mind, whose consequences I can barely imagine, with so many waves having succeeded each other, with storm following upon storm, where does that leave me now? With the same thoughts harbored without anxiety by those persons who had relied more on the spirit of the Church than on their own. Just and holy Providence, you rock gently in the truth your most docile children! Others wander around the world; they look for something more than a fatherland; but the realm of minds is like the one that begat us, the only place in the world where thought rests. Great was my admiration when I became aware of the superiority of the Church, the ineffable instinct which motivates Her, that divine judgment which wards off from Her the shadow of an illusion!

A philosophy flows from the eloquent pen of a renowned writer. It attracts disciples, it is defended with a wonderful zeal during a period of anarchy when no one defends anything, because each individual believes he has something to defend; it sets up a school, which develops into some kind of force. The entire world is shaken; it admires this innovation, the likes of which it was no longer accustomed to seeing, something which appeared to be alive and to spread. To the world, this is something impressive. It acclaims the writer and Christian philosopher as the only savior of the Church, if the Church can in fact be saved. It is surprised that the Church does not agree; it accuses her of ingratitude; it predicts her ruin, since she has been unable to recognize her last defenders. O city of God! It is you who will keep pushing aside to the end the vain arguments of men. This is how they spoke of you! As for me, I pay you homage; never before have you appeared more divine to me.

Without a doubt, there is an aspect of feebleness in all things that happen in time, even holy things, since humans are involved. God has allowed them this weak feature to test our faith. But, unlike human affairs which at first have an appearance of grandeur that quickly diminishes, the Church grew with the centuries; to obtain vindication, She has only to wait. A little while, *adhuc modicum*, and all has changed.

I reflected again, asking myself how a philosophy, whose error I see so clearly today, could have been able to delay my judgment for so long. I understood that, my fighting against an intellect superior to mine, and my wishing to fight alone against it, made it impossible for me not to be defeated. Truth is not

always a sufficiently strong helper to restore the equilibrium of forces, otherwise error would never triumph over truth. And so, there has to be in the world a power which supports weak intellects against stronger ones, to deliver them from oppression; there is, and it is the strongest power of all: the spirit. This strength, in fact, did come to my help; I did not free myself, it was that power which delivered me. Having arrived at Rome, at the tomb of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, I knelt down and told God: "Lord, I am beginning to experience my frailties; my sight dims; both error and truth escape me equally; have pity on your servant who approaches you with a sincere heart; listen to the prayer of this poor man." I do not know the day nor the hour when it happened, but I finally saw what I had not seen; I left Rome a free man and victorious. I learned from my own experience that the Church is the liberator of the human spirit. Moreover, since from the freedom of the mind there flow necessarily all the other freedoms, I noticed in their true light the questions which divide the world today.

Yes, the world looks for peace and freedom, but it seeks them on the road to trouble and servitude. In fact, the Church is the only source of peace and freedom for the human race; abused by Her offspring, She is the only one to have preserved in Her breasts the inexhaustible and sacred milk. When the nations finally become tired of being killers, they will find with Her the good which they no longer possess. This is why the priest will not get involved in the bloody and sterile quarrels of his century; like Tobias, he will leave his meal to bury those who died from the bondage; he will, as best he can, embalm in charity the pains of the world. He will predict untiringly to contemporary generations that neither peace nor freedom is possible beyond the truth; he will be full of compassion and hope; he will gather together the souls who suffer and who seek God, pouring over their wounds that word which revives those who are weary. He will thank God that he is living at a time when ambition is no longer possible; he understands that, the more men are disturbed, all the more powerful is that peace which reigns in the countenance and in the soul of the priest. The more men have fallen into anarchy, all the more is the unity of the Church seen as something powerful. The more men seem to be strong, the more powerful is the external weakness of the Church, which survives only by the power of God. The more the generation predicts the death of Christianity, all the more will Christianity glory in this some day, when time, faithful to eternity, will have swept away that arrogant dust which never doubts that to be something in the future, it has to be something in the present, and that nothingness leads to nothing. Finally, the priest will be like the Church: disarmed, peaceful, charitable, patient, a traveler who does good while

passing by, and who is not surprised at being poorly known by the times, since he does not belong to time.

O Rome, this is how I saw you! With boundless love, I visited the always-young relics of your saints, and also the admirable remains of all your grandeur. At the reclusive foot of your Vatican, I heard the cries of your enemies only as a faint repetition of the voices of slaves who periodically¹ repeated to your Capitol that its victors were mortal. You have indeed inherited some of their glory, but none of their weaknesses. Even after so many centuries, I found you still standing, always virgin, always mother, always mistress, everlasting adversary of human error and impotence. Set in the midst of European storms, you never had any doubt about yourself, no weariness; your gaze toward the four faces of the world followed with breathtaking precision the unfolding of human affairs in their links with divine matters. Only the storm, which left you calm because the spirit of God breathed in you, gave you, in the eyes of the simple faithful less accustomed to the vagaries of the centuries, something which, when admired, revealed its sympathetic nature. The Cross shone on your forehead like a golden and immortal star; yet it remained always the Cross. O Rome! God knows I never slighted you, even though I never came across kings prostrate at your gates; I kissed your ground with indescribable joy and respect. You appeared to me as you truly are, the benefactress of the human race in the past, the hope of its future, the only great entity living in Europe today, the captive of a universal jealousy, the queen of the world. As a traveling petitioner, I brought back from you — not gold, or perfumes, or precious stones — but something even more rare and little known: the truth. A prophetic word came out of your breast; when time has made some advance, when will have happened what is meant to happen, that word, unknown to the present world, which knows nothing, will awaken in his tomb the Pontiff who had been its spokesman, to enable him to hear the cheers of posterity.

O Rome!

One of your sons, to whom you gave peace on his return to his country, has written this book. He places it at your feet in proof of his gratitude; he submits it for your judgment as proof of his faith.

ENDNOTES

Preliminary Chapter

1. *Considérations sur le système philosophique de M. de La Mennais*.
Par M. L'Abbé Henri-Dominique Lacordaire.
Paris: Derivaux, Libraire. 18, rue des Grands Augustins. 1834.

— Reprint from the collection of the University of Michigan Library.
2. Jansenism.
3. The scholars, e.g., Arnauld and Pascal, at the Abbey of Port-Royal, near Paris.
4. Emphasis in original.
5. Once again, Jansenism.
6. Julian, known as the Apostate (331-363). Roman emperor, 361-363.
7. See Internet at www.worksoflacordaire.com: “Fundraising for the Rebuilding of the Archbishop’s Residence in Paris.”
8. Mt 11:3 ff. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). American Bible Society.
9. Galatians 3:28.
10. In the former *Globe*, newspaper.
11. Acts 14:16.
12. 1 May 1834.
13. Publication of the book, *Paroles d’un croyant* [Words of a Believer].

Chapter I

1. Maury, Jean-Sifrein (1746-1817). Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, 1810-1815.
Orator, deputy to the Constituent Assembly.

Chapter II

1. Frayssinous, *Conférence sur le culte en général* (Conference on worship in general).
2. *Éclaircissement de six questions contre les païens*, seconde question
(Explanation of six questions against the pagans, Question 2).

Chapter III

1. St. Augustine, *De la vraie religion* (On True Religion).
2. Fauste, *Le Manichéen* (Manichaeism).
3. St. Augustine, *De l'utilité de croire* (On the Usefulness of Belief).
4. I Cor. 1:20-23.
5. Lk 19:2-5.
6. Mt 11:25.
7. St. Augustine, *Lettre à Volusien* (Letter to Volusianus).
8. St. Augustin, *loc. cit.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Bergier (1718-1790); author of a well-received *Dictionnaire de théologie*.
12. *Coup d'oeuil sur la controverse chrétienne* (A Glance at the Controversy of Christianity), pp. 60-62 .
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 114, 142.
14. *Ibid.*

Chapter IV

1. Col. 3:11.
2. Romans 1:18.

Chapter V

1. Mt 5: 3-8.
2. See Virgil, *Aeneid*, book 6.
3. St. Clement of Alexandria, cited by Mr. de Bonald in *Recherches philosophiques*, chap. 1.
4. Epiphanius: *On Heresies*.
5. St. Augustine, *Against the Academicians*, book 3, chap. 17.

6. St. Augustine, *Retractions*, book 1, chap. 1.
7. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, book 7, see chaps. 9 and 20.
8. Tertullian, *On the Soul*, chap. 3.

Chapter VII

1. *Dissertation préliminaire* [Preliminary discussion], p. 67.
2. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, book 1, chap. 2.
3. Descartes, *Méthode*, 2^e partie.

“The only resolution to rid one’s self from belief in all the opinions which one had earlier received, is not an example that everyone should follow. The world is largely composed of only two types of minds to which in no way is it compatible, namely, of those who believe themselves to be more capable than they are, who cannot keep themselves from making hasty judgments, nor have sufficient patience to guide their thoughts in an orderly manner. Whence it arises that, if at one time they had taken the liberty of doubting the principles they had received, and wandered from the common road, never would they have been able to keep to the route that has to be taken to travel more directly, and would have remained astray all their lives. The second type consists of those who have enough sense or modesty to judge that they are less capable of distinguishing the true from the false, that given the few others who could teach them, ought rather to be content to follow the opinions of these others rather than try to find better ones themselves.”

4. This is what we can read in the *Philosophie de Lyon* [Archdiocese of Lyons, Philosophy Course], commonly taught in the seminaries of France. The methodical doubt on which Descartes had based all his philosophy occupies an unnoticed place, where it is good for nothing and where it disturbs nothing.

5. *Recherches philosophiques*, ch. 1.

CHAPTER VIII

1. Hilary of Poitiers (315?-367); bishop and Christian apologist.
2. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentes* [Against the Nations], chaps. 2, 3, 9.
3. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 - between 211-263); early Christian Father, apologist.

CHAPTER IX

1. “We will even cast into doubt those first principles that we had considered, up to that time, to be known by themselves.” (Descartes: *Principes de la philosophie*).

CHAPTER X

1. II Cor. 3:18. "From one degree of glory to another."
2. *Avertissement de la 4^e édition du 2^e volume de l'Essai sur l'indifférence.*
(Notice to the 4th edition of Volume 2 of the Essay on Indifference).
3. *Neque auctoritatem ratio penitus deserit cum consideratur cui sit credendum.* (*De vera religione*, ch. 24 [True Religion]).
4. *Défense de l'Essai sur l'Indifférence*, ch. 1.
(Defense of the Essay on Indifference).
5. Charenton: a psychiatric hospital in France [Trans.].
6. *Essai*. . . , vol. 2, chap. 14, note.
7. Mk 1:33 - "as one having authority."

CHAPTER XII

1. *De la religion, considéré dans ses rapports avec l'ordre civil et politique.*
(Religion Considered in its Relationships with the Civil and Political Orders.), chap. VI.
2. *Essai sur l'Indifférence*, vol. 3, chap. 22.
3. St. Augustine, *True Religion*.

CONCLUSION

1. In the original, a Roman expression meaning: every five years. - Trans.