

WHAT THEY ARE AND WHAT WE ARE¹

(13 November 1830)

When you get down to it, there are in Europe only five types of men.

The first type encompasses some Catholics, Gallicans, philosophers, atheists, gentlemen, and kings — all differing in customs and principles, but all in agreement on one point: the sincere love of absolute power. They do not like absolute power for itself, with the exception of kings, however, but on account of order. Order, if we can guess at their thoughts, is something which averts fear, something which does not trouble either virtue, or vice, not the oppressed in his dungeon, nor the oppressor deep inside his palace — something which makes no noise. Admittedly, their idea is accurate, since God, Who is order preeminently, is eternally unchanging. They love this concept of order, and that is why despotism realistically charms them. They would have preferred freedom, if it made even less noise. In secret they do revere order and strongly promise themselves to obtain as much of it as they can for themselves: the gentleman by his standing, the philosopher by his talent, the priest by his faith in the prince, the prince by power. All of them dream of freedom, all rely on it, all would band together to grasp it if a

portion of that precious good had not been available to them to a degree befitting their spirit and their desire. But as fearful liberals in conscience and egoists regarding charity, neither the human race, the future, nor God, amount to very much in their political musings. Indeed, they do not believe in the human race, even less in the future, and as for God, since his reign is not of this world, they will think about Him later in their tomb. No universal thought beats in their breast; no deep passion stirs them, and, except for a feeling of sympathy for a house [likely reference to the royal House of Bourbon, 1815-1830 - Trans.] whose misfortunes have surpassed its glory, they have nothing left of the infinite breath which made man. The word, writing, and the press, those three gifts given by God to minds so as to communicate life along with truth to each other, they consider to be three calamities because they also communicate error and death. Standing at the threshold of the past, their eyes fixed on its shadows, they are able to live life only under the dark arches of previous ages. After stopping for a moment at Louis XIV, they travel from ruin to ruin all the way up to God where they stop a second time, to reproach Him for having made only a mere man with only one resting place on the long road of time. Incredible spirits! Milton had not encountered them in his stay in the abyss because they did not exist in his time. Then, it was faith that supported souls against the terror of revolutions and kept them from falling into the region where the only belief that exists is fear. Men of this type, however, can do one thing: whenever a storm comes up, they point their finger at absolute power on the horizon and they say: behold the rainbow.

A second type of man mocks both, the first type [paragraph one, above - Trans.] and past history. Untiring architects of a new order, these men spent forty years destroying everything that was, and succeeded. But on their knees before the present, which is their conquest, they believe that the universe, by

changing its ideas, has reached the limit of its progress, and, like Joshua in olden times, they yell at it, in the name of victory: *sta!* [*“Shout.” See Joshua, chapter 6, the siege of Jericho in the Bible. - Trans.*] Less fearful, less selfish than the first, pride and fatigue persuade them that a stay in their salons is the best that the human race could desire. The impatience of humans amazes them; in their turn, they are ready to call it an “indefinable illness,” and yet they can only say one thing to generations eager for progress, namely, that they have created the present and that, once and for all, it is necessary to stop. Insignificant party, weaker still than the other! After having taken away the world’s rest, it should not simply be tossed under a tent pitched by the hand of man. One does not at whim impose his opinions as laws, his household patrons as gods.

In this matter, the generations are not deceived. Men of the third type refuse the leisure from the hand of their fathers, and hastening prematurely over their (sires’) tombs, they rush with joy toward an unknown life. They do not know where they are going but it does not much matter. They are cheerfully on their way because they must go, because it is only a man in front of them to stop them, a powerless phantom who keeps moving backward and who amuses them by his fear. They make of every day a century by pushing it forward; they are anxious to reach the end. Yet these absolutists look on their adventurous attempts with a smile, believing that they themselves possess the secret of fate. Absolute power appears to these men only at the end of their career, raising its immobile and cold head.

It does not take a very superior mind to get caught up in sadness at the sight of a performance so filled with troubles, nor to understand the basic flaw in the opinions which these three types of men share. All three are

equally enemies of freedom and differ among themselves only in the manner of shackling people. The men of the past revere a man and tell him: rule and be done with thinking about others; our thoughts are better than theirs. [The men of the present not mentioned - Trans.] Those men devoted to progress revere a thought which does not yet exist and tell the man: rule, and everything be damned because everything bothers us.

All three are equally enemies of God: those of the past by hobbling the past to a man they call prince; those of the present by confining the present to human wills, which they call laws; those of progress, by holding the future open to all possibilities.

But neither God nor liberty ever dies in the world without creating for it some men of a new type whose enthusiasm struggles against universal vileness. Thus, when religion and freedom were perishing together in Rome, some souls were found who had lost hope in God and in the republic, but not in themselves. Abandoned by heaven, which remained only an enigma, and by the earth where Caesar ruled, they resolved to live or die with a conviction that accused fate. Long have we sought for you, said they to God, but You withdrew from us and did not deem to reveal to men the secret of Your Name. The time has come for us to do without You and to make a final reproach to Your silence by reason of our virtues. Long have we fought for your defense, they would say to the republic, but you preferred the behaviors of slaves to those of your forbears; you cannot bring life back through the sword. The time has come for us to do without you and to be free of your wreckage. Thus came into being the Stoics from an extraordinary weariness with God Who did not speak — men who were competing with each other for a vile power, something between despotism and anarchy.

Indeed, the same distress which had formerly produced them today created the liberals of Saint-Simon.² [A fourth type of man - Trans.] Like the Stoics, the latter had despaired of God and of the republic; they produced a break with everything that had been, everything that was, and everything that the nineteenth century hoped for. They realized that this triple cause was lost; allowing the crowd to become intoxicated with the lies of a spent society, they took refuge in their hearts, there to look for something which offered power and truth. While the Stoics did not believe that a new God was possible, nor even a new society, the liberals of Saint-Simon, enlightened by the miracle of Christianity, conceived the plan to strengthen the world by making God over, that is to say, they understood exactly what was missing in modern society for it to be a genuine society: namely, faith. A strange event, no doubt! While the funeral bells for God were tolling everywhere, it so happened that from our contemporaries, there came young men like us, whose restive incredulity so longed for faith that they went so far as to create it, to submit willingly to a religious hierarchy, and to preach some truths to the people.

Nonetheless, they do not work for themselves. Perhaps they will attract many souls because the times are coming when whoever speaks of God will cause them to weep, so much has the human heart become tired of men. But one obstacle, more invincible even in enlightened times than in periods of ignorance, will always impede the spread of a faith founded on reasoning only. The liberalism of Saint-Simon is nothing but a philosophy, a maneuver dressed up with religious pretensions which will not stand up to scrutiny. They only prove the necessity for faith, just like those celestial bodies which for a long time were the terror of the world, yet whose wandering brilliance provided a glimpse of the stationary star.

There is a fifth type of man which will harvest the heritage of all, a man both new and old at the same time, who beyond ephemeral opinions discovers the immutable beliefs of human nature; beyond the rule and the successive bondage of partisan thought, the unique rule of an idea common to all; beyond the people there is *God*, not Louis XIV — the God of the Christians, the One who will no longer be hated once His story is known, when it will be learned how liberal He was, a friend of progress, generous to the people who were submitted to Him. For five hundred years, jealous kings have conspired against His blessings; they denounced Him as seditious to the electors of empire, to the towns, to the barons, to parliaments, to the entire earth. And what was this God doing? He was protecting the freedom of Europe against the power of kings, the honesty of human thought against courtesans and military men, the sanctity of marriage and of the family against the adulterous kings of the Middle Ages (in the style of Louis IV), the Christian kingdoms against the William of Nassau, the Belgians and the Irelands bounced between the Hollands and the Great Britains of yore; — that is what He was doing. The kings did not appreciate the situation; they enslaved the common Father of European freedom; they persuaded the people that God was the enemy of their rest — and some bishops ended up believing this. God remained silent. Assured of His requital, He left the kings alone, and they did what they wanted. Where are they now?

And so, here you have the God Who appears to us as the liberator of the world, the One whom the nations look for, unbeknownst to themselves, the One whose loss they deplore and Whom they await as they flounder between the distress of despotism and that of anarchy, the One Who will be both freedom and the brake on freedom.

You Catholics scattered and suffering! Catholics of the United States, of Ireland, of Belgium, of France! Catholics from 1783 to 1830, who have discovered your God, who did not despair of Him, take heart! Your story is already proclaimed! It becomes more renowned every day. Take heart! Because that is what they are and this is what we are.

ENDNOTE

1. Article published in *L'Avenir* newspaper (1830). Later collected in: *Lacordaire Journaliste* by P. Fesch. Delhomme et Brigueuet. Paris, 1897. – Translated by the Brothers CHRISTIAN, Richard L. & George E. ©) 2010
2. Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon — aka Henri de Saint-Simon — an early socialist theorist and reformer. He proposed joint stock of property and a just division of the fruits of common labor as remedies for social ills. Further, he held that men who are fitted to organize society for productive labor are entitled to rule it. - Trans.