Letters on the Philosophy of History

First Letter

MADAM,

It is your candor and sincerity that I most cherish and respect in you. Imagine, therefore, how surprised I was by your letter! It was those delightful qualities of yours that charmed me when I made your acquaintance and caused me to speak to you of religion, although everything about you should have made me keep silent. Once again, imagine my astonishment on receiving your letter! That, Madam, is all I have to tell you concerning the opinion you think I have of your character. Let us say no more about it, but turn at once to the serious part of your letter.

To begin with, what causes this confusion in your mind, a confusion which so agitates you and, as you say, exhausts you to the point of affecting your health? Is this the sad result of our conversations? The new sentiment awakened in your heart should have brought you peace and tranquility; instead, it has caused qualms, anguish, almost remorse. Yet is that so surprising? It is but the natural consequence of our present lamentable state of affairs, which affects all hearts and minds. You have merely allowed yourself to be swayed by the forces which move us all, from the most exalted members of our society to the slave who exists only for his master’s pleasure.

How could you have resisted? The very qualities which set you apart from the crowd must make you the more vulnerable to the ill effects of the air you breathe. How could the little I was able to say to you have clarified your ideas, in the midst of all that surrounds you? Could I purify the atmosphere in which you did, in fact, foresee it? Inspired you with doubt? Had I not been awakened religiously by the social forces in the world at which is a sure sign that the much greater revolutions aroused in you by that pure source.

Insofar as external events taught me to know that the unity and of the succession of national religion; for it is with forces in the world: the progressive establishment of the truth reign among men from the original of the imperial prayer that “they may the reign of God upon this truth to the world. the very principle of duty, seeing your peace, your faith, and not your thoughts toward Madam, if at the same end would be bound.

I believe I once said that is to observe all the discipline, which encom greatest minds have true homage one people the strict practice of the rites of the Christ, effective when people express. There is one finds oneself having the masses, beliefs, certitude and which beliefs of the people national observances in.

But woe to him who

Translated by Valentine Snow from Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev, “Lettres sur la philosophie de l’histoire: Lettre première,” in Sochinenia p’i’ma P. Ia. Chaadaeva, ed. M. O. Gershenzon, Vol. I (Moscow, 1913–14), pp. 74–93. This letter, the only one to be published during Chaadaev’s lifetime—probably against his will—first appeared in Teleshop, No. 15 (Moscow, 1856) although it was written several years before.

Gershenzon’s volume also contains two more of the letters, all printed in the original French. Five others were discovered in the twentieth century and published in a Russian translation, “Neizdanney p’i’ma P. Ia. Chaadaeva,” ed. D. Shakhskovskol, in Literaturnoe nasledstvo, Vol. 22–24 (Moscow, 1955). A German translation of this Russian version may be found in Heinrich Falk, S.J., Das Weltbild Peter J. Tschaadaevs nach seinen acht “Philosophischen Briefen” (Munich, 1954).

1 John 17:11.
Letter! It was those delightful moments which instilled a sentiment of peace and tranquility, and which for so many years I have enjoyed, that made me feel the world was the true home of my soul. Yet I am surprised to hear you say so. Your sentiments are not shared by all, from the most exalted to the most humble. Is it not true that our thoughts are directed by our actions, and that we can only achieve true happiness by placing our trust in the will of our God? Could I purify the atmosphere in which we live? I should have foreseen this consequence; I did, in fact, foresee it. Hence my frequent silences, which could hardly have inspired you with confidence and which must certainly have bewildered you. Had I not been persuaded that, whatever suffering an incompletely awakened religious feeling may cause, it is still better than total slumber, I would have had to repent of my zeal. But the clouds which now darken your sky will one day pass, I hope, dissolve into a life-giving dew which will germinate the seed fallen into your heart. The effect on you of a few valueless remarks is a sure sign that the work of your own intelligence will in future produce much greater results. Abandon yourself without fear, Madam, to the emotions aroused in you by religious ideas; only pure feelings can come from that pure source.

Insofar as external matters are concerned, let it be enough for you today to know that the doctrine which is founded on the supreme principle of unity and of the direct transmission of the truth through the unbroken succession of its ministers cannot but come closest to the true spirit of religion; for it is wholly contained in the idea of the fusion of all the moral forces in the world into a single thought, a single emotion, and in the progressive establishment of a social system, or Church, which is to make the truth reign among men. Any other doctrine, if only because it has split off from the original one, negates the sublime invocation of the Saviour, who prayed that “they may be one as we are” 1, and opposes the realization of the reign of God upon earth. But it does not follow that you must proclaim this truth to the world; that is certainly not your calling. On the contrary, the very principle from which that truth is derived imposes upon you the duty, seeing your position in the world, to maintain it as an inner light of your faith, and nothing more. I deem myself happy to have helped to turn your thoughts toward religion; but I should have been most unhappy, Madam, if at the same time I caused you qualms of conscience which in the end would be bound to lessen your faith.

I believe, I once said to you that the best way to preserve religious feeling is to observe all the rites prescribed by the Church. This exercise in submission, which encompasses more than is commonly thought and which the greatest minds have imposed upon themselves after due deliberation, is the true homage one pays to God. Nothing so fortifies the spirit in its faith as the strict practice of all the obligations of that faith. Besides, most of the rites of the Christian religion, dictated by the highest reason, are truly effective when practiced by those who have understood the truths they express. There is only one exception to this otherwise general rule: when one finds oneself holding beliefs of a higher order than those professed by the masses, beliefs which raise the soul to the very wellspring of all our certitude and which at the same time support, rather than contradict, the beliefs of the people, then, and then only, is it permissible to neglect external observances in order to engage all the better in more important tasks.

But woe to him who mistakes the illusions of his vanity and the deceptions

1 John 17:11.
of his reason for special grace which dispenses him from the general law! In your case, Madam, what better thing could you do than wrap yourself in the cloak of humility, so becoming to your sex? Believe me, that is the best way to calm your agitation and to bring sweet peace into your life.

Besides, is there—even in the eyes of the world—a more natural existence for a woman whose cultivated mind finds pleasure in study and in the grave emotions of meditation than a somewhat earnest life, much of which is spent in reflecting on and practicing religion? You say that nothing in your reading so captivates your imagination as descriptions of tranquill and thoughtful lives, the image of which, like the view of a fair countryside in the setting sun, brings repose to the spirit and for a moment takes us out of our painful or dull reality. Well, those are not mere fantasies; you can, if you wish, make one of these charming figments come true; you lack nothing for such an achievement. You see that I am not preaching an austere morality; it is in your own tastes, in the pleasantest fancies of your imagination, that I look for that which can bring peace to your soul.

There is a side in our life which relates not to the physical, but to the thinking, being. It should not be neglected; there is a regimen for the spirit as there is one for the body, and we must learn to submit to it. That is an old saying, I know; but I think that in our country it often has the merit of novelty. It is one of the most deplorable traits of our peculiar civilization that we are still discovering truths which other peoples, even some much less advanced than we, have taken for granted. The reason is that we have never marched with the other peoples. We do not belong to any of the great families of the human race; we are neither of the West nor of the East, and we have not the traditions of either. Placed, as it were, outside of time, we have not been touched by the universal education of the human race.

The admirable linking of human ideas over successive periods, the history of the human spirit which has brought it to its present state everywhere else in the world, have had no effect on us. That which elsewhere has long been absorbed into the life of society is to us still a matter of conjecture and speculation. You, for example, if I may say so, Madam, who are so well constituted to receive all that is good and true in the world, you who are capable of experiencing all the sweetest and purest joys of the soul, what have you achieved with these advantages? You are still seeking to fill not a life, but a day. You lack completely the very things which elsewhere form the framework of existence, where all the day's events find their appointed place—that being as essential for a healthy moral life as good air is for a healthy physical life. You will understand that I am now speaking not of moral principles or philosophical maxims, but merely of a well-ordered existence, of habits and routines which set the mind at ease and give a rhythm to the soul.

Look around you. Everyone seems to have one foot in the air. You would say we are all travelers on the move. No one has a fixed sphere of existence; there are no good habits, no rules that govern anything. We do not even have homes; we have nothing that binds, nothing that awakens our sympathies and affections, nothing that endures, nothing that remains. Everything passes, flows away, leaves no marks on us. And in the cities we appear to be everywhere; as if the flocks in our steppe were to our tawny wretches that we are to our tawny country; I shall not feel as if you would not be able to live here.

Every people pass an era of thoughtless activity in body. This is a time of violent passions; but not without profit. It endows them with their poetry, all the foundations of society; they would have not had a fascinating epoch in the time when their human nature and the lesson of joy and the lesson of sorrow was given to them. A brutal barbarism cannot pass into the mind, have known nothing of the resultant play of a people; it corresponds to that great out force or energy. There are no nationalities, no bound. The eye roam over all the earth, and spread over, and you, venerable monuments of the history and picturesqueness and man; as the present time, the world we do rouse ourselves to; we do rouse ourselves to achieve some common aim, some object we set up and stretch it out. The true development of people until life has come to an end. They germinate in a society that is not so formal, that is not so definite shape; they are a development of the society, the sphere, resembling the present period. We an
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camp in our houses, we behave like strangers in our families; and in our
cities we appear to be nomads, more so than the real nomads who graze
their flocks in our steppes, for they are more attached to their desert than we
are to our towns. And do not imagine that this is a trilling matter. Poor
wretches that we are, let us not add to our miseries by misunderstanding
ourselves; let us not aspire to a life of pure intelligence; let us learn to live
reasonably in our present reality. Let me discourse a little longer on our
country; I shall not be departing from my subject. Without this preamble,
you would not be able to understand what I have to say.

Every people passes through a period of violent agitation, frenzied unrest,
and thoughtless activity, when men roam through the world, in mind and
in body. This is a time of great emotions, great undertakings, great passions.
It is a time of violent movement for the peoples, without apparent motive,
but not without profit for posterity. All societies have passed through such a
period. It endows them with their most vivid recollections, their legends,
their poetry, all their most durable and fecund ideas; these are the very
foundations of society. Otherwise they would have no memories to treasure;
they would have nothing to love but the dust of their native soil. This
fascinating epoch in the history of peoples is the adolescence of nations; it is
the time when their faculties reach their peak, the memory of which is the
joy and the lesson of their maturity. As for us, we have nothing of the kind.
A brutal barbarism to begin with, followed by an age of gross superstition,
then by a ferocious and humiliating foreign domination, the spirit of which
has passed into the national state—that is the sad history of our youth. We
have known nothing resembling that age of exuberant activity, that ex-
ultant play of a people’s moral forces. The epoch in our society which
Corresponds to that period was one of a dreary and somber existence, with-
out force or energy, enlivened only by crime, made sweeter only by servil-
tude. There are no delightful recollections or charming images in our
national memory, no powerful lessons in our national tradition. Let your
eye roam over all the centuries we have traversed, all the land we have
spread over, and you will not discover a single cherished memory, a single
venerable monument which forcefully recalls the past and recreates it in a
lively and picturesque manner. We live in a narrow present, without a past
as without a future, in the midst of a dead calm. On the few occasions when
we do raise ourselves, we do so neither in the hope nor in the desire of
achieving some common good, but with the thoughtlessness of a child who
sits up and stretches its hand for the rattle held out by its nurse.

The true development of human beings in society does not begin for a
people until life has become better regulated, easier, and pleasanter than in
the midst of the uncertainties of its first period. How can the seeds of good
germinate in a society which, without convictions and without rules, still
vacillates even in daily matters, and in which life has not yet taken a
definite shape? Ours is still the stage of chaotic fermentation in the moral
sphere, resembling the physical upheavals of our planet which preceded its
present period. We are still in that stage.
Our early years, spent in animal passivity, have left no trace on our minds, so that we have nothing of our own to serve as a basis for our thinking; but, having been isolated by a strange destiny from the universal progress of humanity, neither have we acquired any of the traditional ideas of the human race. Yet it is on such ideas that the life of nations is founded; it is such ideas that determine their future and shape their moral development. If we wished to evolve an attitude resembling that of other civilized peoples, we would, as it were, have to repeat for ourselves the entire process of the education of the human race. To this end, we would have before us the history of nations and the results of the striving of centuries. This is, of course, a difficult task, and perhaps no one man can accomplish it; but first of all we must know what it is. What is this education of the human race, and what place do we occupy in the general scheme of things?

Nations live only through the strong impressions left by ages past and through relations with other peoples. In this way, every individual is conscious of being in contact with all mankind.

What is the life of man, says Cicero, if memory of earlier events does not relate the present to the past? But we [Russians], who have come into the world like illegitimate children, without a heritage, without any ties binding us to the men who came before us on this earth, carry in our hearts none of the lessons preceding our own existence. Each one of us must endeavor to restore the broken family bonds. We must deliberately hammer into our heads things which have become habit and instinct with other peoples. Our memories go back no further than yesterday; we are, so to say, strangers to ourselves. We move so slowly in time that, as we advance, the immediate past is irretrievably lost to us. That is but a natural consequence of a culture which is wholly imported and imitative. There is no internal development, no natural progress, in our society; new ideas sweep out the old, because they are not derived from the old but come from God knows where.

Since all our ideas are ready-made, the indelible trace left in the mind by a progressive movement of ideas, which gives it strength, does not shape our intellect. We grow, but we do not mature; we move, but in a diagonal, that is, a line which does not lead to the desired goal. We are like children who have not been taught to think for themselves; when they become adults, they have nothing they can call their own—all their knowledge is on the surface, their soul is not within them. That is precisely our condition.

Peoples, like individuals, are moral beings. It takes centuries for their education, as it takes years for that of persons. We may be said to be an exception among peoples. We are one of those nations which do not appear to be an integral part of the human race, but exist only in order to teach some great lesson to the world. Surely the lesson we are destined to teach will not be wasted; but who knows when we shall rejoin the rest of mankind, and how much misery we must suffer before accomplishing our destiny?

The peoples of Europe have a common physiognomy, a family look. Despite their broad division into Latins and Teutons, into Southerners and Northerners, there is a tie which binds them together into one and which is readily apparent to all, that not too long ago was used in public law. A people has a character. These, between which the individual enjoys his share of life without effort or difficulty, turn them to account, fundamental ideas we need and to make some use of, not of study or reflection, but of contact with other people, the cradle, by which he is brought to him in her caresses, and the marrow of his being moral being even before he feels it. Do you want to know justice, right, and order? Look at European society; the countries.

That is the atmosphere of our psychology—it is the output of its place. I do not quarrel from what I have said; I see that the strange spirit is bound to any sequence of ideas, proceeding each other, which the human mind only by contact with other nations, must have been individual members.

You will therefore find no method in our thinking that is known to us. There is no new finest ideas, for lack of one and we are unable to establish a common philosophy. He loses all contact with the unbroken world. There are such general characteristic. The French and which did not preclude either being and charm to social gaining experience on ephemeral existence of neither with acquiring those inherited family
have left no trace on our to serve as a basis for our destiny from the universal any of the traditional ideas the life of nations is founded: shape their moral developing that of other civilized ourselves the entire process we would have before us the notions of centuries. This, of itself can accomplish it; but first education of the human race, the notions left by ages past and every individual is con-

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rations, into Southerners and together into one and which is

readily apparent to anyone who has studied their general history. You know that not too long ago all Europe called itself Christendom, and the term was used in public law. In addition to this general character, each of these peoples has a character peculiar unto itself, shaped by its history and tradition. These, between them, furnish their patrimony of ideas. Each individual enjoys his share thereof, and in the course of his lifetime picks up without effort or difficulty these ideas that are prevalent in his society, and turns them to account. Draw the parallel for yourself and see how many fundamental ideas we are thus able to gather in ordinary social intercourse and to make some use of as guidance in life. Please note that I am speaking not of study or reading, of literary or scientific endeavor, but merely of contact with other minds—of those ideas which the child imbibes in his cradle, by which he is surrounded when at play, which his mother imparts to him in her caresses; which, in the form of various emotions, penetrate to the marrow of his bones with the air he breathes, and shape him into a moral being even before he goes out into the world as a member of society.

Do you want to know what these ideas are? They are the ideas of duty, justice, right, and order. They derive from the events which have formed European society; they are part and parcel of the social fabric of these countries.

That is the atmosphere of the West; it is more than history, more than psychology—it is the very physiology of European man. What have we to put in its place? I do not know whether any absolute notion can be deduced from what I have said, and a definite principle drawn; but it will readily be seen that the strange situation of our people, which cannot link its thinking to any sequence of ideas progressively developed by society and slowly succeeding each other, which has taken part in the general movement of the human mind only by a blind, superficial, and often clumsy imitation of other nations, must have a profound influence on the thinking of each of its individual members.

You will therefore find that we all lack a certain assurance, a certain method in our thinking, a certain logic. The syllogism of the West is unknown to us. There is something more than frivolity in our best minds. The finest ideas, for lack of coherence or sequel, dazzle for a moment but are sterile and congeal in our brains. It is natural for man to feel lost when he is unable to establish a connection with what preceded him and with what follows. He loses all certainty, all feeling of consistency. Not being guided by a sense of unbroken continuity, he feels that he has gone astray in the world. There are such lost creatures in all countries; but with us this is a general characteristic. Ours is not the levity which used to be thrown up to the French and which in fact was merely a facility of understanding that did not preclude either depth or breadth of intellect and gave infinite grace and charm to social intercourse. We are scatterbrained; we live without gaining experience or providing for the future; our life is reduced to the ephemeral existence of the individual separated from his species, concerned neither with acquiring glory nor with promoting some cause, nor even with those inherited family interests and the many prospects and prescriptions.
which, in a society based on a memory of the past and an understanding of the future, are the essence of both public and private life. There are absolutely no general notions in our heads; everything is particular, and everything is unattached and incomplete. Even in our gaze, I find, there is something oddly vague, cold, and uncertain, resembling somewhat the look of people on the lowest rungs of the social ladder. Abroad, especially in the South, where faces are so animated and expressive, many a time when I have compared my compatriots with the local inhabitants, I have been struck by the mute appearance of our countenances.

Foreigners have commended us for a certain careless temerity, which is to be found mainly among our lower classes; but, having been able to observe only a few isolated traits of our national character, they could not evaluate it as a whole. They failed to see that the very thing which sometimes makes us so bold and renders us totally incapable of depth and perseverance; they failed to see that what makes us indifferent to the hazards of life makes us equally indifferent to all good, all evil, every truth and every lie, and that for this reason we lack the powerful motives which other men have for self-improvement; they fail to see that it is precisely because of this lazy audacity that—painful as this is to admit—in our country even the upper classes are prone to vices which elsewhere afflict only the lowest; finally, they failed to see that, while we have some of the virtues of young and not highly civilized peoples, we have none that characterize mature peoples with a high level of culture.

I do not, of course, mean to say that we have only vices and the nations of Europe only virtues—God forbid! But I do say that, in order to judge a people, one must study the general spirit which permeates their existence, for it is only that spirit, and not any one trait of their national character, which can lead them to greater moral perfection and promote unending progress.

The masses are guided by certain forces which are at the summit of society. They do not think for themselves; there are among them a few who think for them, who furnish the impetus for the collective intelligence of the nation and make it advance. While this small number cogitates, the rest feel, and a general movement results. With the exception of a few besotted races which are human only in appearance, this is true of all the peoples of the globe. The primitive peoples of Europe, the Celts, the Scandinavians, the Germans, had their druids, their skalds, their bards, who were powerful thinkers in their way. Look at those peoples of North America whom the materialistic civilization of the United States is so busily destroying; there are men of admirable profundity among them.

But where are our wise men, may I ask, where are our philosophers? Who has ever thought for us, who thinks for us today? And yet, placed between the two great divisions of the world, between the East and the West, resting one elbow on China and the other on Germany, we ought to combine in ourselves the two great principles of human intelligence, imagination and reason, and fuse in our civilization the history of all parts of the globe. But that is not the role Providence has assigned to us. On the contrary, it seems to have given no thought to that influence on the minds have none of us, and has passed us by; eras anything of value. To the law of mankind has been added a single idea, contributed to the progress of this progress we have produced no useful thought has even great truth has emerged invent anything ours rowed only empty con Strange to say, even this is linked to nothing, hordes which turned the inhabit before invaded chapter to world history from the Bering Strait to civilize us; and, in order the mantle of civilization civilization itself. Another glorious mission, led by returning home from journeys of the world, we sought in something in our mixed lived, and we live now remote posterity that a blank in the intellect blank at the astonishing islands unfathomable fate; but something in the moral world that explains a people.

What were we doing of the Northern peoples of modern civilization? Politics, which those people to educate us. Shortly from the brotherhood by human passions, created everything in Europe upon it. The intelle
to have given no thought to our destiny. Excluding us from its beneficent influence on the minds of men, it has left us entirely to ourselves; it would have none of us, and it has taught us nothing. The experience of the ages has passed us by; eras and generations succeed each other without leaving us anything of value. To look at us, one might come to believe that the general law of mankind has been revoked in our case. We are alone in the world, we have given nothing to the world, we have taught it nothing. We have not added a single idea to the sum total of human ideas; we have not contributed to the progress of the human spirit, and what we have borrowed of this progress we have distorted. From the outset of our existence as a society, we have produced nothing for the common benefit of all mankind; not one useful thought has sprung from the arid soil of our fatherland; not one great truth has emerged from our midst; we have not taken the trouble to invent anything ourselves and, of the inventions of others we have borrowed only empty conceits and useless luxuries.

Strange to say, even in the realm of science, which is universal, our history is linked to nothing, explains nothing, proves nothing. If the barbarian hordes which turned the world topsy-turvy had not crossed the land we inhabit before invading the West, we would barely have furnished one chapter to world history. To be taken notice of at all, we have had to spread from the Bering Strait to the Oder. On one occasion a great man sought to civilize us; and, in order to give us a foretaste of enlightenment, he flung us the mantle of civilization; we picked up the mantle, but we did not touch civilization itself. Another time, another great prince, associating us with his glorious mission, led us victorious from one end of Europe to the other; returning home from that triumphant march across the most civilized countries of the world, we brought back only ideas and aspirations which resulted in an immense calamity, setting us back half a century. There is something in our blood that resists all real progress. In a word, we have lived, and we live now, merely in order to furnish some great lesson to a remote posterity that will come to know it; today, say what you will, we are a blank in the intellectual order. I never weary of marveling at this vacuum, at the astonishing isolation of our society. In part this is the fault of our unfathomable fate; but in part it is certainly the work of men, as is everything in the moral world. Let us take another look at history, for it is history that explains a people.

What were we doing while the struggle between the vigorous barbarism of the Northern peoples and the lofty concepts of religion was giving rise to modern civilization? Driven by a fatal destiny, we went to wretched Byzantium, which those peoples profoundly despised, for the moral code that was to educate us. Shortly before, an ambitious spirit \(^2\) had removed that race from the brotherhood of man; thus what we received was an idea distorted by human passions. At that time the life-giving principle of unity permeated everything in Europe. Everything sprang from it, everything converged upon it. The intellectual trend of the time was toward unity of human

\(^2\) Photius.
thought, and every impulse stemmed from that powerful need to evolve a universal idea which is the genius of modern times. Alienated from this remarkable principle, we became a prey to conquest. After we freed ourselves from the foreign yoke, we might, had we not been separated from the great family of man, have benefited by the ideas which during this time had emerged among our Western brethren; instead, we fell into a servitude that was harsher still, sanctified as it was by our deliverance.

How many bright rays had by that time pierced the darkness which had enveloped Europe! Most of the knowledge in which the human mind takes pride today was already being surmised; society had already taken shape; and, falling back on pagan antiquity, the Christian world had rediscovered the beauty it still lacked. But we were deep in our schism, and nothing of what happened in Europe reached us. We took no part in the world's great business. The remarkable qualities with which religion had endowed the modern peoples and which, in the eyes of reason, placed them as high above the peoples of antiquity as the latter were above the Hottentots and the Laplanders; the new powers with which it had enriched human intelligence; the customs and manners which submission to an unarmed authority had made as gentle as they had once been brutal—we had none of these in our country. While Christianity was majestically advancing along the path traced for it by its divine Founder and drawing whole generations after it, we did not move, for all that we called ourselves Christians. While the entire world was rebuilding itself, we constructed nothing, but went on squatting in our thatched huts. In brief, the new destinies of the human race were not for us. Christians though we were, the fruit of Christianity did not ripen for us...

I ask you, is it not absurd to suppose, as is usually done in our country, that we can in one fell swoop, without so much as taking the trouble to discover what brought it about, appropriate the results of a progress achieved in Europe gradually and under the direct and manifest influence of a unique moral force?

They misunderstand Christianity entirely who fail to see that it has a purely historical aspect, which is so integral a part of its dogma that it may be said to express the whole Christian philosophy, since it shows what Christianity has done for man and what it must do for him in the future.

Thus the Christian religion is not merely a moral system conceived in mortal human minds but a divine, eternal power, ever at work in the world of the intellect, whose visible action should be a constant lesson to us. That is the true meaning of the dogma which is symbolized by faith in a universal Church. In the Christian world, everything must of necessity contribute to the establishment of a perfect order upon earth, and indeed everything does. Otherwise the Lord's words would be belied by actuality, and he would not be within his Church to the end of time. The new order, the reign of God, which is to be brought about by redemption, would be no different from the old order, the reign of evil, which it was to annihilate. We would be left with nothing save that imaginary perfectionity which is a philosopher's dream and which is denied by every page of human history—

that vain agitation of the human mind, which has never raised into a deeper abyss.

But, you will say, civilized other than the Abyssinians. Certainly, the European way. If we are to believe one of the levity of the Abyssinians about that order of the human species; and human truths are

Christianity has its individual; the second, naturally merged in the end. But the time has revealed the sources he finds in his predestined end of the Divine Wisdom can distinguish between human lives, and the work of redemption, a single emotion, a sin will tumble. But to the is in the general order of the intellect have had the...

Hence in the society, in a certain circle of forty, exactly the same for peoples—nevertheless, the result of the immensity the passions and intellect have had the...

All the nations throughout the centuries, they always meet apparent to the family of people, and you will find this problem. Remember this to address God, but in words, they raise the... His glory is in His great; more sublime than which the Europeans...
that vain agitation of the mind which serves only our material needs and which has never raised man, be it ever so little, save in order to plunge him into a deeper abyss.

But, you will say, are we not Christians, and is there no way of being civilized other than the European? Of course we are Christians, but so are the Abyssinians. Certainly one can be civilized without being civilized in the European way. Is that not true of Japan, even more so than of Russia, if we are to believe one of our compatriots? But do you think that the Christianity of the Abyssinians and the civilization of the Japanese will bring about that order of things I have spoken about, which is the final destiny of the human species? Do you think that these absurd aberrations of divine and human truths are capable of bringing Heaven down to earth?

Christianity has two very distinct aspects. The first is its action on the individual; the second, its action on the universal intelligence. They are naturally merged in Supreme Reason and of necessity work toward the same end. But the time required for the accomplishment of the eternal designs of Divine Wisdom cannot be encompassed by our limited vision. We must distinguish between divine action manifesting itself in a finite period of human lives, and the action taking place in infinity. On the day when the work of redemption is completed, all hearts and minds will be fused into a single emotion, a single thought, and the walls separating peoples and faiths will tumble. But today it is important for each of us to know what his place is in the general order of the Christian vocation, that is to say, what resources he finds in himself and in his surroundings for working toward the predestined end of the entire society of man.

Hence in the society where this end is to be achieved, that is to say, where revealed thought must ripen and reach its fullness, minds of necessity move in a certain circle of ideas. That circle, that moral sphere, naturally produces a certain mode of life and a point of view which, without being exactly the same for everyone—this applies to us as well as to all European peoples—nevertheless create the same way of being for all, which is the result of the immense intellectual labor of eighteen centuries in which all the passions and interests, all suffering, all the imaginings and efforts of the intellect have had their part.

All the nations of Europe held each other by the hand in advancing through the centuries. Whatever they did today to strike out on their own, they always meet again on the same road. To visualize the development of this family of peoples, it is not necessary to study history. Just read Tasso, and you will find them all prostrating themselves before the walls of Jerusalem. Remember that for fifteen centuries they had but one language in which to address God, but one moral authority, but one faith. Consider that for fifteen centuries, every year on the same day, at the same hour, in the same words, they raised their voices in unison to the Supreme Being to celebrate His glory in His greatest benefaction. Wondrous concert, a thousand times more sublime than all the harmonies of the physical world! This sphere in which the Europeans have their being and which alone can enable the human species to reach its appointed end, is the result of the influence of
religion upon them. Hence it is clear that since the weakness of our faith or the inadequacy of our dogma has kept us out of this universal movement in which the social concept of Christianity was formulated and developed, relegating us to the category of peoples who are to profit only indirectly and very late from the full effects of Christianity, we must seek by every means at our command to revive our faith and to give ourselves a truly Christian impetus; for everything in Europe was achieved through Christianity. This is what I meant when I said to you that we must repeat for ourselves the education of the human race.

The whole history of modern society takes place in the realm of opinion. Consequently, true education lies there. Initially organized on that basis, modern society has progressed solely through thought. Its interests have always followed, and never preceded, ideas. Opinions have always given rise to interests, and never interests to opinions. All its political revolutions were, in principle, moral revolutions. Men sought the truth, and found freedom and prosperity. This is the explanation of the phenomenon of modern society and its civilization; it would otherwise be incomprehensible.

Religious persecutions, martyrdoms, the spread of Christianity, heresies, Church councils—these events fill the first centuries. The entire trend of that epoch, not excluding the barbarian invasion, is comprised of these infant efforts of the modern spirit. The formation of a hierarchy, the centralization of spiritual power, and the continued spread of the Christian religion in the lands of the North make up the second epoch. Next comes a supreme exaltation of the religious feeling and the consolidation of religious authority. The development of philosophy and literature and the cultivation of customs and manners under the guidance of religion complete this history, which has as much right to be called sacred as that of the Chosen People of ancient times. Lastly, it was once again a religious reaction, a new impetus given to the human spirit by religion, which shaped present-day society. Thus opinion was always the greatest, one may say the only, consideration of modern peoples; all material, positive, and personal interests were absorbed in it.

I know that some, instead of admiring this powerful thrust of human nature toward possible perfection, have termed it fanaticism and superstition. But, whatever they say, judge for yourself how deep an impression must have been made on the character of these peoples by a social development stemming entirely from a single emotion, for good as for evil! Let superficial philosophy noisily voice its disapproval of religious wars and of pyres lighted by intolerance; as for us, we can but envy the fate of peoples who, in these classes of opinion, these bloody conflicts in the cause of truth, have created for themselves a world of ideas which we cannot even imagine, far less transport ourselves to it body and soul, as we presume to do.

Once again, all is not reason, virtue, and religion in the countries of Europe—far from it. Yet everything there is mysteriously guided by a power which has ruled in sovereignty for many centuries; everything there is the result of that long sequence of events and ideas which has shaped modern

society. Here is one clearly marked, whose spirit—the English. Their last revolution loosened the whole chain of events that revolution were in its period, purely political and sometimes vanished. Even as I write these agitated by religious events, I would not, if it troubled element which, in the principle, the soul of it.

The action of Christianity's influence on the mind will be but the effect of the nations in which the become find the greatest possibilities of our era—or rather of the attacks on Christianity's general influence on hearts, whether they believe, to recognize the imperfections, faults, and, nonetheless, true that are, because it contains and harbors in embryonic day to be finally established.

Before concluding, Madam, I should like to what I wrote in a piece with the

It is certain, I said, whenever human thought to combat it, does not speak, that name alone is more indicative of the versatility, which enabled possession of their minds even when the truths formerly unknown, experienced before, as if to be made of each other. When we look of Christ becomes a thing, all the levers that His
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society. Here is one proof out of many. The people whose traits are most clearly marked, whose institutions are the most representative of the modern spirit—the English—have, properly speaking, only a religious history. Their last revolution, to which they owe their freedom and prosperity, and the whole chain of events from the reign of Henry VIII onward which led to that revolution were but one long religious development. Throughout this period, purely political considerations appeared only as a secondary motive and sometimes vanished altogether or were sacrificed in favor of opinion. Even as I write these lines [1829], that privileged land is once again being agitated by religious ideas. But, generally speaking, what European people would not, if it troubled to look, find in its national conscience this special element which, in the shape of sacred thought, has been the life-giving principle, the soul of its society, throughout its entire existence?

The action of Christianity is not confined to its direct and immediate influence on the minds of men. The vast results it is destined to produce will be but the effect of a multitude of moral, intellectual, and social combinations in which the complete freedom of the human spirit will necessarily find the greatest possible scope. Everything that has occurred since the first day of our era—or rather from the moment the world's Saviour said to His disciples: "Go... preach the gospel to every creature"—including all the attacks on Christianity, is in complete accord with this concept of Christianity's general influence. It is sufficient to see Christ wielding sway over all hearts, whether they know it or not, whether they accept or resist His dominion, to recognize that His words have come true. Thus, despite all the imperfections, faults, and vices of European society as it is today, it is nonetheless true that the Kingdom of God finds itself in some sort realized there, because it contains the principle of continuous unlimited progress and harbors in embryo all the necessary elements for [God's Kingdom] one day to be finally established upon earth.

Before concluding these reflections on the influence of religion on society, Madam, I should like to transcribe here something about it that I once wrote in a piece with which you are not familiar.

It is certain, I said, that anyone who does not see the effect of Christianity whenever human thought comes in contact with it in any way, even if only to combat it, does not have a clear idea of it. Wherever the name of Christ is spoken, that name alone wins men over, whatever they may do. Nothing is more indicative of the divine origin of this religion than its absolute universality, which enables it to enter men's souls in all possible ways, to take possession of their minds without their knowledge, to dominate and subdue them even when they seem to resist it most, by imparting to the intelligence truths formerly unknown to it, awakening in the heart emotions never experienced before, and inspiring us with feelings which, we know not how, fit us into the general scheme of things. Thus this religion determines the use to be made of each personality and directs all actions toward a common goal. When we look at Christianity from this point of view, each prophecy of Christ becomes a palpable truth. We then see distinctly the operation of all the levers that His all-powerful hand sets in motion to lead man to his
destination without infringing upon his freedom, without immobilizing any of the forces of his nature, but on the contrary, intensifying and raising to an infinite degree whatever powers of his own he has. We see that no moral element remains inactive in this new economy, that the vigor of thought, the generous flow of emotion, the heroism of a strong soul as well as the submission of a meek spirit, all alike find a place and an application in it. Accessible to every intelligent being, instinct in the very pulsing of our hearts, revealed thought carries everything with it, feeds and grows on the very obstacles it encounters. In a genius, it rises to a height to which other human beings cannot aspire; in a timid soul, it advances slowly, hugging the ground; in a meditative mind, it becomes absolute and profound; in a soul dominated by the imagination, it is ethereal and fanciful; in a tender and loving heart, it is dissolved into love and charity; in all cases, it moves forward with each intelligence that surrenders to it, filling it with warmth, strength, and clarity. See what a variety of natures, what a multiplicity of forces it sets in motion, how many different capacities it adds up to a single one, how many unlike hearts it causes to beat for the same idea! But the influence of Christianity on society as a whole is even more admirable. If you unroll the long scroll of the development of contemporary society, you will see that Christianity has transformed all human interests into its own, replacing material needs by moral, giving rise in the realm of thought to those great debates which are without parallel at any other period or in any other society, to those terrible struggles between opposing views in which the whole life of a people was reduced to one great idea, one boundless emotion. You will see that everything has turned into Christianity, and Christianity alone; private and public life, the family and the fatherland, science and poetry, reason and imagination, memories and hopes, joy and pain. Happy are those who, in this great impetus given to the world by God Himself, know in their innermost hearts what the results of their efforts are! But not all men are sentient instruments, not all act knowing what they do; of necessity, whole multitudes move blindly, like lifeless atoms, inert masses, without being aware of the forces which set them in motion or glimpsing the goal toward which they are propelled.

It is time I returned to you, Madam. I confess that I am loath to tear myself away from these general considerations. It is in the picture that I see from this height that I find all my consolation. It is in the sweet belief in man's future happiness that I take refuge when, obsessed by the wretched reality that surrounds me, I feel the need of a breath of purer air, of a look at a more serene sky. Yet I do not think I have wasted your time. I had to explain to you the viewpoint from which we should contemplate the Christian world and our role in it. I must have seemed bitter to you in speaking of our country; yet I spoke only the truth, and less than the whole truth. Besides, the spirit of Christianity will tolerate no blindness, and national prejudice least of all, since that is what divides men most.

This is a very long letter, Madam, and I feel we both need to catch our breath. As I began it, I thought that I could tell you what I had to say in a few words; on second thought, I find that I could fill a volume. Would you like that, Madam? Let me finish the letter, for we have not been able to finish with it before today. I had to copy my notes; I shall not have long to wait.
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like that, Madam? Let me know. In any event, you cannot avoid a second

ter, for we have merely broached our subject. In the meantime, I hope

you will regard the prolixity of the first as compensation for the long time I

have kept you waiting for it. I took up my pen the very day I received your

own letter; but I was preoccupied by sad and wearisome concerns and had

to finish with them before speaking to you of such serious matters, and then

I had to recopy my scribbling, which was absolutely illegible. This time, you

shall not have long to wait: I will take up pen again tomorrow.

Necropolis, December 1, 1829