

Novalis

Christianity or Europe: A Fragment

Those were beautiful, magnificent times, when Europe was a Christian land, when one Christianity dwelled on this civilized continent, and when one common interest joined the most distant provinces of this vast spiritual empire. Without great worldly possessions one sovereign governed and unified the great political forces. Immediately under him stood one enormous guild, open to all, executing his every wish and zealously striving to consolidate his beneficent power. Every member of this society was honored everywhere. If the common people sought from their clergyman comfort or help, protection or advice, gladly caring for his various needs in return, he also gained protection, respect and audience from his superiors. Everyone saw these elect men, armed with miraculous powers, as the children of heaven, whose mere presence and affection dispensed all kinds of blessings. Childlike faith bound the people to their teachings. How happily everyone could complete their earthly labors, since these holy men had safeguarded them a future life, forgave every sin, explained and erased every blackspot in this life. They were the experienced pilots on the great uncharted seas, in whose shelter one could scorn all storms, and whom one could trust to reach and land safely on the shores of the real paternal world. The wildest and most voracious appetites had to yield with honor and obedience to their words. Peace emanated from them....

This mighty peace loving society ardently sought to make all men share its beautiful faith, and sent its disciples to all parts of the globe to preach the gospel and to make the heavenly kingdom the only kingdom on earth. With justice, the wise head of the church resisted impudent developments of the human powers, and untimely discoveries in the realm of knowledge, that were at the expense of the sense for the divine. Thus he prevented the bold thinkers from maintaining publicly that the earth is an insignificant planet, for he knew all too well that, if people lost respect for their earthly residence and home, they would also lose their respect for their heavenly home and race, that they would prefer finite knowledge to an infinite faith, and that they would grow accustomed to despising everything great and miraculous and regard it as the dead effect of natural laws.

All the wise and respected men of Europe assembled at his court. All treasures flowed there; destroyed Jerusalem was avenged and Rome itself had become Jerusalem, the holy residence of divine government on earth. Princes submitted their disputes before the father of Christendom and willingly laid down their crowns and splendor at his feet; indeed, they saw it as their glory to be members of this holy guild and to close the evening of their lives in divine meditation within lonely cloistered walls, The mighty aspirations of all human powers, the harmonious development of all abilities, the immeasurable heights reached by all individuals in all fields of knowledge and the arts, and the flourishing trade in spiritual and earthly wares within all of Europe and as far as the distant Indies-all these show how beneficial, how suitable to the inner nature of man, this government and organization were.

Such were the beautiful chief characteristics of these truly catholic and truly Christian times. But for this splendid realm mankind was not mature or educated enough. It was a first love, which died under the

pressure of commercial life, whose devotion was repressed by selfish concerns, and whose bond was later denounced as deceit and delusion and then judged according to later experience. Thus it was for ever destroyed by a large number of Europeans. Accompanied by destructive wars, this great inner schism was a remarkable sign of how harmful culture-or at least how temporarily harmful culture of a certain level-can be for the spiritual sense. That immortal sense can never be destroyed; but it can be dimmed, paralyzed, or repressed by other senses.

A longer association of men diminishes their inclinations toward, their faith in their race; and it accustoms them to applying their thought and effort to acquiring the means of material comfort. Needs, and the arts of satisfying them, grow more complicated; greedy man then requires so much time to know and acquire skill in these arts, that he no longer has time for the quiet collection of mind for the attentive consideration of the inner world. Should a conflict arise, his present interest seems to mean more to him; and so withers the beautiful blossoms of his youth, faith and love, giving way to the bitter fruits of knowledge and possession.... Here we have to deal with times and periods, and is not oscillation, an alternation of opposed tendencies, essential to them? Is not a limited duration proper to them, a growth and decay part of their nature? And is not resurrection, a rejuvenation in new vital form, to be expected with certainty of them? Progressive, constantly expanding evolution is the very stuff of history.

What does not now reach perfection will do in a future attempt, or in another later one. Nothing in the grasp of history is transient; from innumerable transformations it always proceeds anew to ever richer forms. Christianity once appeared with full power and splendor; its ruins, and the mere letter of its law, ruled with ever increasing impotence and mockery until a new world inspiration. Infinite inertia lay heavily on the complacent guild of the clergy. They stagnated in the feeling for their authority and material comfort, while the laity snatched from them the torch of experience and learning, surpassing them with great strides on the path of education. Forgetting their proper mission to be the first among men in spirit, knowledge and education, their lower desires went to their heads. The banality and baseness of their attitude became all the more offensive because of their clothing and calling. Thus respect and trust, the basis of this and any empire, gradually collapsed, destroying this guild and silently undermining the real authority of Rome long before the powerful insurrection. Only prudent, and therefore merely expedient, measures held the corpse of the old constitution together and preserved it from a too hasty dissolution. Among such measures was, for example, the abolition of the right of priests to marry. Such a measure, had it been applied to the similar profession of soldiers, could have given it a formidable coherence and prolonged its life. What was more natural than that a fiery agitator should preach open rebellion against the despotic letter of the previous constitution, and with such great success because he was a member of that guild.

The insurgents rightly called themselves Protestants, for they solemnly protested against any pretension to rule over conscience by an apparently tyrannical and unjust force. For a while they reclaimed their once tacitly surrendered right to investigate, determine and choose their religion. They also established a number of correct principles, introduced a number of laudable things, and abolished a number of corrupt statutes. But they forgot the necessary consequences of their actions: they separated the inseparable, divided the indivisible church, and impiously divorced themselves from the universal Christian union, through and in which alone genuine lasting rebirth was possible. A condition of religious anarchy should be no more than transitional, for the basic need for a number of people to devote themselves to this high

vocation, and to make themselves independent of secular power in regard to these concerns, remains pressing and valid.

Establishing consistories and retaining a kind of clergy did not satisfy this need and was not a sufficient substitute. Unfortunately, the princes intervened in this split, and many used the dispute to consolidate and expand their sovereign power and revenue. They were happy to rid themselves of that higher influence and took the new consistories under their paternal protection and direction. They were zealously concerned to prevent the complete reunion of Protestant churches. With religion sacrilegiously enclosed within the boundaries of the state, the foundation was laid for the gradual undermining of the religious cosmopolitan interest. Religion thus lost its great political influence as a peacemaker, its proper role as the unifying, characteristic principle of Christianity. The religious peace was concluded according to completely mistaken and sacrilegious principles and, through the continuation of so-called Protestantism, something completely contradictory was declared-namely, a permanent revolutionary government.

However, Protestantism is by no means based solely on this pure concept. Luther generally treated Christianity in an arbitrary manner, misunderstood its spirit, and introduced another law and another religion, namely the universal authority of the Bible. In this manner another alien, earthly science-philology-interfered with religious concerns, and its corrosive influence has been unmistakable ever since. From the dark feeling of his error, a large part of the Protestants elevated Luther to the rank of an evangelist and canonized his translation.

This decision was fatal for the religious sense, since nothing destroys its sensibility as much as the dead letter. Previously, this could never have been so harmful, because of the broadness, flexibility and richness of the catholic faith, because of the esoteric stature of the Bible, and because of the holy might of the councils and pope. But now that these antidotes were destroyed, and the absolute popularity of the Bible maintained, the meagre content of the Bible, and its crude abstract scheme of religion, became even more obviously oppressive. It made the revival, penetration and revelation of the holy spirit infinitely more difficult.

Hence the history of Protestantism shows us no more splendid revelations of the heavenly realm. Only its beginning glowed from a passing fire from heaven; but shortly afterwards a withering of the holy sense is apparent. The worldly had now won the upper hand, and the feeling for art suffered in sympathy with religion.... With the Reformation Christianity was done for. From hence forth it existed no more. Catholics and Protestants or Reformers stood further apart from one another in their sectarian conflict than from Moslems and pagans. The remaining Catholic states continued to vegetate, not without vaguely feeling the corrupting influence of the neighboring Protestant states. The new politics arose during this time: individual powerful states sought to take possession of the vacant universal see, now transformed into a throne....

The Reformation had been a sign of the times. It was significant for all Europe, even if it had broken out publicly only in free Germany. The better minds of all nations had secretly grown mature, and in the delusive self-confidence of their mission they rebelled all the more boldly against obsolete constraint. In the old order the intellectual was instinctively an enemy of the clergy. The intellectual and clerical estate, once they were divided, had to fight a war of extermination, for they were fighting for one position. This division became increasingly prominent, and the intellectuals won more ground the more the history of Europe approached the age of triumphant learning, and the more faith and knowledge came into a more

decisive opposition. One saw in faith the source of universal stagnation; and through a more penetrating knowledge one hoped to destroy it. Everywhere the sense for the sacred suffered from various persecutions of its past nature, its temporal personality.

The result of the modern manner of thinking one called "philosophy," and regarded it as anything opposed to the old order, especially therefore as any whim contrary to religion. The original personal hatred against the Catholic faith gradually became a hatred of the Bible, of Christian belief, and finally of all religion. Furthermore, the hatred of religion extended very naturally and consistently to all objects of enthusiasm, disparaging fantasy and feeling, morality and the love of art, the future and past. This new philosophy placed man of necessity at the top of the series of natural beings, and made the infinite creative music of the cosmos into the uniform clattering of a gigantic mill-a mill in itself driven by and swimming in the stream of chance without architect or miller, a genuine *Perpetuum mobile*, a self-grinding mill.

One enthusiasm was generously left to the poor human race, and made indispensable for everyone concerned, as a touchstone of the highest education: the enthusiasm for this splendid, magnificent philosophy, and especially for its priests and mystagogues, France was especially fortunate to be the nursery and home of this new faith, which was stuck together out of pieces of mere knowledge. However disreputable poetry was in this new church, there were still a few poets in it, who for the sake of effect, used the old ornaments and lights; in doing so, however, they were in danger of igniting the new world system with old fire. More clever members knew how to throw cold water on their inspired audience. The members were constantly preoccupied with purging poetry from nature, the earth, the human soul and the sciences. Every trace of the sacred was to be destroyed, all memory of noble events and people was to be spoiled by satire, and the world stripped of colorful ornament. Their favorite theme, on account of its mathematical obedience and impudence, was light. They were pleased that it refracted rather than played with its colors, and so they called their great enterprise "Enlightenment." One was more thorough with this business in Germany: education was reformed, the old religion was given a new, rational and common sense meaning by carefully cleansing it of everything miraculous and mysterious; all scholarship was summoned to cut off taking any refuge in history, which they struggled to ennoble by making it into a domestic and civil portrait of family and morals. God was made into the idle spectator of the great moving drama, performed by intellectuals, whom the poets and actors should entertain and admire at the end.

Rightly, the common people were enlightened with pleasure and educated to an enthusiasm for culture. Hence arose that new European guild: the philanthropists and enlighteners. It is a pity that nature remained so wonderful and incomprehensible, so poetic and infinite, defying all attempts to modernize it. If anywhere there still crept the old superstition of a higher world and the like, alarm was immediately raised from all sides, and wherever possible the dangerous spark would be extinguished by philosophy and wit. Nevertheless, the watchword of the educated was "tolerance," and especially in France it was synonymous with philosophy.

The history of modern unbelief is extremely remarkable, and the key to all the monstrous phenomena of the modern age. Only in this century, and especially in the latter half, has it begun and grown in little time to an immense size and variety. A *second Reformation*, a more comprehensive and proper one, was unavoidable. It would have to affect that country that was most modernized and that had laid in an

asthenic state longest because of a lack of freedom. Long ago the supernatural fire would have been released and would have foiled the clever schemes of enlightenment if worldly pressure and influence had not come to their rescue. But at the very moment when a dispute arose between the intellectuals and government, and among the enemies of religion and their whole confederacy, religion had to step forward again as a third leading, mediating party. Everyone of its friends should now recognize and proclaim this role, if it is not already clear enough. That the time of the resurrection has come, and that precisely the events that seemed to be directed against its revival and to complete its demise have become the propitious signs of its regeneration—this cannot be denied by the historical mind.

True anarchy is the creative element of religion. From the destruction of everything positive it lifts up its glorious head as the creator of a new world. If nothing more binds him, man climbs to heaven by his own powers. The higher faculties, the original germ for the transformation of the earth, free themselves from the uniform mediocre mixture, from the complete dissolution of all human talents and powers. The spirit of god hovers over the waters, and a heavenly island becomes visible over the receding waves as the dwelling place of the new man, as the birthplace of eternal life.

Calmly and impartially, the genuine observer considers the new revolutionary times. Does not the revolutionary seem like Sisyphus to him? Now he has reached the summit only for his mighty burden to roll down again. It will never stay on top unless an attraction toward heaven keeps it balanced there. All of your pillars are too weak if your state retains its tendency toward earth. But link it through a higher longing to the heights of heaven and give it a connection to the cosmos, then you will have a never tiring spring in it and all your efforts will be richly rewarded. I refer you to history. Search in its instructive continuum for similar times and learn to use the magic wand of analogy.

France defends a worldly Protestantism. Should now worldly Jesuits arise and renew the history of the last centuries? Should the Revolution remain French, as the Reformation was Lutheran? Should Protestantism again be established—contrary to nature—as a revolutionary government? Should the dead letter be replaced only by another dead letter? Do you seek the seed of corruption also in the old constitution, the old spirit? And do you think you know a better constitution, a better spirit? Oh! that the spirit of spirits fill you and lead you away from this foolish attempt to mold and direct history and humanity. Is history not independent, autonomous, virtually infinitely lovable and prophetic? To study it, to follow it, to learn from it, to keep step with it, faithfully to follow its promises and suggestions—this no one has thought of.

In France much has been done for religion, in not only one of its countless forms, by depriving it of its civil rights and by granting it merely the right of asylum. As an insignificant alien orphan it must first win back hearts and be loved everywhere before it is publicly worshipped and combined with worldly things to give friendly advice and heart to the spirit. The attempt of that great iron mask, which went by the name of Robespierre, to make religion the middle point and heart of the republic remains historically remarkable. Equally remarkable is the coldness with which theophily, the mysticism of the new Enlightenment, has been received, not to mention the conquests of the Jesuits, and the closer relation to the Orient with the new politics.

Concerning the other European countries, except Germany, one can only prophesy that peace will bring a new higher religious life and will soon consume all other worldly interests. In Germany, though, one can point out with complete certainty the traces of a new world. In its slow but sure way Germany advances

before the other European countries. While the other countries are preoccupied with war, speculation and partisanship, the German diligently educates himself to be the witness of a higher epoch of culture; and such progress must give him a great superiority over other countries in the course of time. In the sciences and arts one perceives a powerful ferment. An infinite amount of spirit is developed. New fresh mines are being tapped. Never were the sciences in better hands, and never have they aroused greater expectations. The most various aspects of things are traced; nothing is left untouched, unjudged or unexamined. No stone is left unturned. Writers become more original and powerful; every monument of history, every art, every science finds new friends and is embraced and made more fruitful. A diversity without parallel, a wonderful depth, a brilliant polish, extensive knowledge and a rich powerful fantasy can be found everywhere and are often boldly joined together. A powerful intuition of creative wilfulness, of boundlessness, of infinite diversity, of sacred originality and the omnipotence of inner humanity appears to stir everywhere. Woken from the morning dream of helpless childhood, one part of the human race exercises its powers on the vipers that encircle its cradle and attempt to deprive it of the use of its limbs. These are still intimations, unconnected and crude, but they betray to the historical eye a universal individuality, a new history, a new humanity, the sweetest embrace of a young surprised church and a loving god, not to mention the inner reception of a new messiah in all his thousand forms. Who does not feel hope with sweet shame? The new born will be the image of its father, a new golden age with dark infinite eyes, a prophetic, miraculous, healing, consoling time that generates eternal life. It will be a great age of reconciliation, of a redeemer who, like a true genius, will be at home with men, believed but not seen. He will be visible to the believer in countless forms: consumed as bread and wine, embraced as a lover, breathed as air, heard as word and song, and as death received into the heart of the departing body with heavenly joy and the highest pains of love.

Now we stand high enough to smile back amiably upon those former times and to recognize in those strange follies remarkable crystallizations of historical matter. Thankfully we should shake hands with those intellectuals and philosophers; for this delusion had to be exhausted for the sake of posterity and the scientific view of things had to be legitimated. More charming and colorful, poetry stands like an ornate India in contrast to the cold, dead pointed arches of an academic reason. So that India might be warm and magnificent in the center of our planet, a cold, frozen sea, desolate cliffs and fog, rather than the starry sky and a long night, had to make both poles inhospitable. The deeper meaning of mechanics troubled these hermits in the desert of the understanding. The excitement of their first discovery overwhelmed them, the old order revenged itself on them. With wonderful self-denial they sacrificed the most holy and beautiful things in the world to their first self-awareness. They were the first to recognize and, proclaim again the sanctity of nature, the infinitude of art, the necessity of knowledge, the respect for the secular, and the omnipresence of the truly historical. They put an end to a higher, more widespread and horrible reign of phantoms than they themselves believed.

Only through a more exact knowledge of religion will one be able to judge the dreadful products of a religious sleep, those dreams and deliria of the sacred organ. Only then will one be able to assess properly the importance of such a gift. Where there are no gods, phantoms rule. The period of the genesis of European phantoms, which also rather completely explains their form, is the period of transition from Greek mythology to Christianity. So come then, you philanthropists and encyclopedists, into the peace making lodge and receive the kiss of brotherhood! Strip off your grey veil and look with young love at the miraculous magnificence of nature, history and humanity. I want to lead you to a brother who shall speak to you so that your hearts will open again, and so that your dormant intuition, now clothed with a new

body, will again embrace and recognize what you feel and what your ponderous earthly intellect cannot grasp.

This brother is the pulse of the new age. Who has felt him does not doubt its coming, and with a sweet pride in his generation steps forward from the mass into the new band of disciples. He has made a new veil for the saints, which betrays their heavenly figure by fitting so close and yet which conceals them more chastely than before. The veil is for the virgin what the spirit is for the body: its indispensable organ, whose folds are the letters of her sweet annunciation. The infinite play of these folds is a secret music, for language is too wooden and impudent for the virgin, whose lips open only for song. To me it is nothing more than the solemn call to a new assembly, the powerful beating of wings of a passing angelic herald. They are the first labor pains; let everyone prepare himself for the birth.

Physics has now reached its heights, and we can now more easily survey the scientific guild. In recent times the poverty of the external sciences has become more apparent the more we have known about them. Nature began to look more barren; and, accustomed to the splendor of our discoveries, we saw more clearly that it was only a borrowed light, and that with our known tools and methods we would not find or construct the essential, or that which we were looking for. Every enquirer must admit that one science is nothing without the other. Hence there arose those attempts at mystification of the sciences, and the wonderful essence of philosophy sprang into being as a pure scientific element for a symmetrical basic norm of the sciences. Others brought the concrete sciences into new relations, promoted their interchange, and sought to clarify their natural historical classification. And so it goes on. It is easy to estimate how promising might be this intimacy with the external and internal world, with the higher development of the understanding, and with the knowledge of the former and stimulation and culture of the latter. It is also easy to estimate how, under these circumstances, the storm will clear and the old heaven and the yearning for it—a living astronomy—must again appear.

Now let us turn to the political drama of our times. The old and new order are locked in struggle. The inadequacy and destitution of the previous political institutions has become apparent in frightful phenomena. If only the historical end of the war were, as in the sciences, a more intimate and varied contact and connection between the European states! If only there were a new stirring of hitherto slumbering Europe! If only Europe wanted to awaken again! And if only a state of states, a new political theory of science, were impending. Should perhaps the hierarchy, the symmetrical basic figure of the sciences, be the principle of the union of states as an intellectual intuition of the political ego? It is impossible that worldly powers come into equilibrium by themselves; only a third element, that is worldly and supernatural at the same time, can achieve this task. No peace can be concluded among the conflicting powers. All peace is only an illusion, only a temporary truce. From the standpoint of the cabinets, and of common opinion, no unity is conceivable.

Both sides have great and necessary claims and must put them forward, driven by the spirit of the world and humanity. Both are indestructible powers within the human breast. On the one hand, there is veneration of the old world, loyalty to the historical constitution, love of the ancestral monuments and of the old glorious royal family, and joy in obedience. On the other hand, there is the rapturous feeling of freedom, the unlimited expectations of a more potent sphere of action, the pleasure in what is new and young, the informal contact with all fellow citizens, the pride in human universality, the joy in personal rights and in the property of the whole community, and the strong civic sense. Neither side should hope to

destroy the other. All conquests mean nothing, for the inner capitol of that kingdom lies not behind earthen walls and cannot be stormed.

Who knows whether there has been enough war, whether it will ever cease, unless one seizes the palm branch, which a spiritual power alone can offer. Blood will continue to flow in Europe until the nations recognize their terrible madness. This will continue to drive them into circles until, moved and calmed by sacred music, they step before their past altars in a motley throng. Then they will undertake works of peace, celebrating with hot tears a great banquet of love as a festival of peace on the smoking battlefields. Only religion can reawaken Europe, make the people secure, and install Christianity with new magnificence in its old peacemaking office, visible to the whole world.

Do not the nations possess everything of man—except his heart—his sacred organ? Do they not become friends, as people do around the coffin of their beloved? Do they not forget all hostility when divine pity speaks to them—and when one misfortune, one lament, one feeling, fills their eyes with tears? Are they not seized by sacrifice and surrender with almighty power, and do they not long to be friends and allies?

Where is that old, dear belief in the government of God on earth, which alone can bring redemption? Where is that sacred trust of men for one another, that sweet devotion in the effusions of an inspired mind, that all-embracing spirit of Christianity?

Christianity has three forms. One is the creative element of religion, the joy in all religion. Another is mediation in general, the belief in the capacity of everything earthly to be the wine and bread of eternal life. Yet a third is the belief in Christ, his mother and the saints. Choose whichever you like. Choose all three. It is indifferent: you are then Christians, members of a single eternal, ineffably happy community.

The old catholic faith, the last of these forms, was applied Christianity come to life. Its omnipresence in life, its love for art, its deep humanity, the sanctity of its marriages, its philanthropic sense of community, its joy in poverty, obedience and loyalty, all make it unmistakable as genuine religion and contain the basic features of its constitution. It is purified through the stream of time; and in indivisible union with the other two forms of Christianity it will bless the earth.

Its accidental form is as good as destroyed. The old papacy lies in the grave, and for a second time Rome has become a ruin. Should not Protestantism finally cease and give way to a new more lasting church? The other parts of the world wait for Europe's reconciliation and resurrection to join with it and become fellow citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Should there not be soon again in Europe a number of truly sacred minds? Should not all kindred religious minds be full of yearning to see heaven on earth? And should they not eagerly meet to sing a holy chorus?

Christianity must again become alive and active, and again form a visible church without regard to national boundaries. Once again it must receive into its bosom all hungry souls and become the mediator of the old and new world.

Christianity must again pour the old cornucopia of blessings over the nations. It will rise again from the bosom of a venerable European council, and the business of religious awakening will be pursued according to a comprehensible divine plan. No one will again protest against Christian and worldly coercion, for the essence of the church will be genuine freedom, and all necessary reforms under its direction will be performed as peaceful and formal processes of state.

When and how soon? That is not to be asked. Have patience. It will and must come, the sacred age of eternal peace, where the new Jerusalem will be the capitol. Until then be calm and brave amid the dangers of the age. Companions of my faith, proclaim by word and deed the divine gospel! Remain loyal to the true, eternal faith until death.