# The Triumph of Romanticism

by Gerard G. Steckler, S.J.

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# Foreword

Fr. Gerard G. Steckler, S.J. (1925–2015), author of the present historical and philosophical study of Romanticism, entrusted this manuscript to me during the time in which he was my spiritual director at Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California, where he served as a well-loved chaplain. We became good friends in those years (1990–1993) and exchanged hundreds of letters in the years afterward, which Fr. Steckler always typed on an old typewriter, then corrected by hand with his abysmal penmanship, about which he was the first to joke that no doctor's could surpass it. My memory is stocked with fond recollections of Fr. Steckler's witticisms, his insights into Scripture passages, his biting critiques of liberal trends (reminiscent of the better-known work of his fellow Jesuit Fr. Paul Mankowski), and his spiritual advice in the confessional and in the course of weekly walks around campus. Unforgettable was his habit of ending homilies at college by yanking dramatically on the little gold chain that turned off the lectern's light.

Knowing my love of history, Fr. Steckler handed me one day a bundle of xeroxed pages—a manuscript, as it turned out, entitled *The Triumph of Romanticism*. He was a true Jesuit in the classic mold, learned across many disciplines, and this was the fruit of his own deep study in and meditation on history and the Christian faith. In its pages he touches with comfortable mastery on authors as diverse as Augustine, Maritain, Huizinga, Eliade, Hobbes, Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, Guardini, Flaubert, Barzun, Ortega y Gasset, Nietzsche, Mounier, Huysmans, Weber, Wilde, Soloviev, Ruskin, Barth, Keynes, Marcel, Tillich, Aquinas, Comte, Bonhoeffer, Malraux, Niebuhr, Bernanos, Daniélou, and Péguy. At the time I received it, the manuscript was unquestionably a complete work, with all notes in place. He wanted it to be published, but for some reason never saw to it himself. In a typewritten letter to me dated January 26, 2004, Fr. Steckler wrote as

a postscript: "Whatever you can [do] to edit *The Triumph of Romanticism* would please me greatly."

I always thought it a great pity that such an eloquent work of scholarship should sit in a file cabinet, unknown and unappreciated. When I founded my own publishing company, Os Justi Press, it seemed, finally, that an opportune moment had come for bringing his work to light and discharging a debt of gratitude to a spiritual and intellectual mentor.

As to the exact date of its composition, it is impossible to be precise; but a witty remark in chapter 17 clues us in: "Don Quixote de Gaulle retired to die, and Sancho Panza Pompidou followed him. France descended and *is still plummeting* under the direction of Rocinante d'Estaing who refuses to admit the dead world has but one savior, the dead Christ" (emphasis added). Since Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was president of France from 1974 to 1981, it is safe to say that this work was written within those years.

Naturally, that means that certain of Fr. Steckler's descriptions reflect the state of the world at that time; for example, the Soviet Union had not yet fallen, and communism seemed to hold much of mankind in its grip. Ironically, the Russia-Ukraine war, the global role of China, and other unpleasant realities of 2023 suggest that perhaps the Soviet Union never fell but only adopted new arrangements, while communism continues to influence the world in strange genetic mutations. The content and style of the book remain as the author left them to us; corrections were generally limited to typographical errors, imprecision in citations, or misspellings—corrections any author would have wished to make, had he the opportunity.

Fr. Steckler did publish one book during his lifetime, *Charles John Seghers: Priest and Bishop in the Pacific Northwest 1839–1886: A Biography* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1986), although it is sadly out of print, and copies fetch high prices on the used book market. In my opinion, it is long past time for a volume of his best homilies and sermons to be compiled; may the publication of *The Triumph of Romanticism* be an incentive in this regard.

I hereby express my thanks to the Rev. Sean Carroll, S.J., Provincial of the West Province of the Society of Jesus in the United States of America, who granted me permission to publish this work, on the basis of an anonymous Jesuit's "*imprimi potest*."

Peter A. Kwasniewski
April 25, 2023
Major Rogation and St. Mark

# Preface

The purpose of this volume is to study how thought and art forms from the end of the Napoleonic wars have impacted the everyday events and human beings of Western Civilization, and in turn to see how both intellectual and "common" men have reimpacted the art and thought. Under art is included plastic and fine arts, literature, and, to a minor degree, music. Philosophy, natural science, social sciences, and theology are subsumed under thought. It may be instructive, enlightening, possibly even sapiential to view the kaleidoscope of Western Man from day to day if possible, at least from period to period, so that we can comprehend what is happening as the twentieth century enters its final score of years. As a yardstick whereby to judge what has occurred during these periods, Catholic Christianity provides the epistemological and metaphysical principles of the thirteenth-century "synthesist" thinker, Thomas Aquinas. Without preaching to our contemporaries, the present volume will infer that a return to such principles would provide a satisfactory exit from the hopeless confusion of skepticisms and panaceas.

The early seventeenth-century Baroque synthesis of the divine-human relationship emphasized the primacy of the Christian God in the lives of all men as the basis for legitimate humanism. The eighteenth-century "enlightened" responses tore apart the components, emphasizing matter over spirit; the deistic God who benevolently watches His creation but never interferes prevailed over the passionate God who has invested His world of nature with creative dynamism available to those who immerse themselves therein. In the first half of the nineteenth century, at a point where our story begins, the spirit (Romanticism) prevailed over matter, but during the second half of that century, matter ruled again almost completely ("realism"). From the three-quarter mark of the century, the spirit began to demur (neo-Romanticism), but did not succeed in dominating matter until the Depression proved that the World War

had truly ended the reign of objective material nature. For over half a century, psychologism, utopianism, existentialism, social Christianity, subjectivist ethics, Freudianism, and charismatic spirituality merely serve to exemplify the conflicting neo-neo-Romanticisms that index the intellectual crisis of our time.

Johan Huizinga has presented the connotation of cultural history: "Only when the scholar turns to determining the patterns of life, art, and thought taken all together can there actually be a question of cultural history."[1] In an endeavor to be objectively complete, he studied law, philosophy, the histories of music, literature, and the fine arts, and the emergent social sciences. He emphasized what men thought and created, linking these products with historical facts:

> For cultural history . . . the forms of the past are expressions of a spirit it attempts to understand, always viewing them in the thick of events. Cultural history directs its attention towards objects, but is continually turning back from these objects to the world in which they had their part. . . .[2]

Huizinga avoided intellectual history, the history of ideas, an endeavor that most intellectuals regard as Hegelian self-validation. Hegel thought that world events represented God acting rationally. His atheistic successors proceeded further to the romantic conclusion that history is deterministically rational, that history is analogically biological although it will not end. The intellectual historian contents himself in explaining how ideas have succeeded each other and why they have done so, but is rarely interested in how men act under their influence or if they are true.

In his *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*, a pessimistic view of democratic and fascistic Europe in the mid-1930s, Huizinga elaborated on his definition of culture. Culture was judged present when

1. controlled nature produces a condition "higher and better" than would follow from uncontrolled nature, and if there exist:
2. a harmonious balance of material and spiritual values, and
3. a more or less homogeneous ideal of the entire community.[3]

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[1] Quoted by R.A. Colie, "Johan Huizinga and the Task of Cultural History," *American Historical Review* 69, no. 3 (April 1964), 608.

[2] Colie, 625.

[3] Johan Huizinga, *In the Shadow of Tomorrow* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964 [1936]), 40–51.

Physical nature has been pretty well controlled, but contemporary man refuses to dominate himself, indeed is urged to express himself as he is inclined. Outside of a few Christian voices, the strategies of "salvation" concur in denying the traditional notion of sin or have transformed it into certain types of social sin.

Does a homogeneous ideal prevail? Not at all. What was formerly "the glory of God" has splintered into, by way of examples, prosperity, power, security—all ideals unrelated to the traditional Spirit upon whom Christians were urged to rely as the response to hostility. Does a balance of spiritual and material values create a resonant harmony? Activity in both fields is feverish, but disjunctly so. In fact, romantic spirituality presently lords it over the rational material. More trenchantly, reasonable (what can be agreed upon) solutions must have the upper hand over the morally true. Voltaire, for all of his denial of the need for revealed truths, preached the moral essence of nature, though he thought of physical rather than metaphysical nature as normative.

This volume accepts Huizinga's definitions of cultural history as acceptable if one wishes to understand the cultural situation at the closing of the twentieth century. It adds the further "catholic" view of true culture: human creations in thought and art emanating from a correct view of reality in both its natural and supernatural forms. This presupposes that the structure of reality is intellectual, that Someone understands all, that it is imperative for human individuals to contact that Someone in order to comprehend. If the threefold nature of the triune God is reality, the "catholic" vision sees this Trinity as somewhat comprehensible to the human mind, that is, in a natural way; it further sees this triune God as communicating Himself to those who have entered the Trinity through the Way of Jesus Christ. Ultimate reality must be immaterial, unlimited, invisible. The contradictories of these would mean that there can be no intellectual understanding of reality. The intellect is immaterial in its operation and is satisfied only by possessing that which can satisfy it, the immaterial. If the latter is unobtainable, there is no substance to our desire to know, we are singly doomed to frustration, no questions need be asked about significant matters. The human mind, obviously limited, cannot adequately comprehend anything unless it rests in the original knowledge, the necessary understanding, of being—rooted in the Being whose essence is existence. Man cannot proceed from sheer ignorance to comprehension. He must start from an already given basic knowledge in order to proceed to an understanding of his created being; and, in order to understand as the saints do, must live in God through the intellectual instrumentality of Jesus.

Since this work is illustrative rather than exhaustive, I have restricted my sources to major writers and to convenient texts and anthologies. Nothing will have been gained by using Weberian *Kulturwissenschaftliche Allgemeinbegriffe*, for it is precisely my thesis that only metaphysical rational knowledge rather than empirical methodologies can explain and solve *la condition humaine*.[4]

[4] General concepts of cultural studies . . . the human condition.

# Introduction

In the Western world thought and art have impacted life, and both intellectual and common man have reimpacted the art and the thought. The study of these movements from 1815 will reveal the course of cultural history of modern and contemporary man. Under art is subsumed plastic and fine arts, literature, and, peripherally, music. Thought includes natural science, social sciences, philosophy, and, in the last place (contrary to the medieval hierarchy of subjects), theology.

Without a view of the kaleidoscope of Western Man from day to day, if possible, at least from period to period, contemporary intellectuals cannot understand what is happening in the ever-new moment.

Seventeenth-century southern Baroque artists looked "up" for inspiration, *toward* the transcendent God who had manifested Himself through the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and who continued to do so through their common Spirit, the bond of love. The architects, painters, and sculptors of southern Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century were sure that in order to portray the proper relationship between man and God they had to live in the triune Deity revealed through Jesus Christ. Man could be holy, therefore creative, correctly tense, important. Only if the individual loved God passionately could he accurately capture the proper relationship between the self and God and between the self and others, for Jesus had said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself."

Eighteenth-century "enlightened" thinkers split the Baroque divine-human synthesis into components that have never since been successfully reunited, though Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and myriad others made valiant efforts to do so. The eighteenth-century rationalists headed by Voltaire, inspired by the methodology of late seventeenth-century scientists, began looking to physical nature measurably conceived as the source for objective ways of reorganizing

religion, economics, society, and, lastly, politics. If intellectual man relying on self, it was reasoned, had been able to locate the objective laws operative both among the planets and on the earth, he can locate by the use of his mind, quite apart from Christian revelation (which is a matter of dispute, anyway), the laws underlying correct modes of human behavior. In so arguing, the rationalists denied the thirteenth-century epistemological synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas that Roman Christianity later adopted as her very own. For Aquinas had maintained that the world of physical nature, representing the created limitation of spiritual reality, can alone open men to the metaphysical immaterial nature of created reality. Man, now intellectually aware, can then be attracted by the reasonableness of the trinitarian God revealing difficult or humanly unobtainable truths. Aquinas denied innate ideas in our physical reality. Voltaire had inherited them from Descartes but had stripped them totally of their Christian origin. Voltaire's God was an Aristotelian one bathed in the muddied waters of a Christianity evaporating in the eighteenth century. Voltaire endowed his modern man with an ability to understand all that was understandable, but he was almost as pessimistic as Aristotle about producing intellectuals who could know as much as he did.

Nineteenth-century Romanticist thinkers represented the flowering of a sub-theme from the previous century, the conviction that a common man could think better than the desiccated intellectual who limited the source of knowledge to sense data. For metaphysical philosophy and revelational theology, Romantics substituted the world of dynamic physical nature. The dynamism, volatility, effervescence, and creativity that emanated from trees and flowers, babbling brooks and alpine tangles, provided sources of knowledge—asserted Rousseau and his followers—that serve to complement the exclusively intellectualist method of the rationalists. While Voltaire complained that Rousseau wanted him to crawl on all fours again, Rousseau mystically viewed the development of the arts and sciences as constricting. When Romanticism fell victim to unsuccessful revolution in the late 1840s, scientism was at hand to attempt rationalism in an updated form. The realists, based on Comte, looked to science to replace a passé Christianity and an uninspiring rationalism. Two ideologies—that is, Romantic substitutions for revelational divinity, and exclusivist positivism in place of metaphysical thinking—engaged in a colossal struggle, which, from the second half of the twentieth century, was decided in favor of Romanticism. An "objective" view of reality became a minoritarian opinion. Subjective, psychological, relativist, ideal, objectivist modes of thinking have emerged triumphant.

A brief review of European history from 1815 will provide a matrix wherein the struggle between rationalist and Romantic modes of thinking can be highlighted. In the post-Vienna world the principal ideological conflict involved reactionary conservatism (let Metternich be a symbol) and classical liberalism (led by England). Organic conservatism (Edmund Burke) as a form of reasonable Hegelianism was too intellectualist ever to become popular. Burke may have been a total humbug, but his ideas did catch on with some mid-twentieth-century Americans who thought that the United States was once a Christian nation. Nationalism was either conservative or liberal. Let us define nationalism as Gerhard Masur has done: the tenet that every human being owes his essential duty to the nation, the ideal unit of political organization and the embodiment of cultural distinction.[5] Its roots in nationality and patriotism, it had risen from the French Revolution whose Jacobinism had converted the revealing God into the salvation of *la patrie* (the fatherland). Conservative nationalists insisted on the value of their own cultural development. Liberal nationalists viewed every nation as contributing some ingredient to a harmonious whole. The Victorian Compromise from 1832 and the French July Revolution of 1830 split: (1) republicans from socialists, (2) bourgeoisie from workers (whose consciousness had to be awakened by intellectuals, to be sure), and (3) liberals from democrats. In the final analysis republicans were liberal capitalists while socialists desired property in common. In the nineteenth century liberals slowly but steadily mutated into democrats in their frantic efforts to retain the power that they had never exercised in the feudal structure.

The overarching general inspiration of the Metternichian world was Romanticism, the only noncontroversial definition of which must be "reaction to rationalism." Since rationalism got the blame for the French Revolution and the Napoleonic aggrandizement, a "broader" thinking emerged. The Romantic claimed to be a "whole" man, whereas the enlightened rationalist lacked sources of light. The Romantic emphasized, variously and sometimes contradictorily, feeling, sensibility, the emotional, the individual or the group (but always considered apart from his/her relationship to the defunct Christian God). The Romantic talked very much about religion, that is, the general improvement of the human condition (usually done by regressing), or the religious feeling that one experiences by plunging into nature or serving one's nation on the battlefield. To the Romanticist, history was organic, every nation was unique.

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[5] Gerhard Masur, *Prophets of Yesterday: Studies in European Culture, 1890–1914* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1966 [1961]), 12.

Popular Hegelianism had God developing Himself (Itself?) only in historical events. The World-Spirit always and only realized Self through "real" events, such as Napoleon. History went forward, maintained the philosophical Hegelians, through Stasis producing Challenge, the clash between which led to Resolution as the basis for a new Stasis. Romanticism gave birth to a diversity of ideologies, "-isms" that quickly metamorphosed into secular religions trying to perform the task that the medieval world had once lived as accomplished eternally by Christ. Even answers to problems were Romantic: utopian socialism, poets running governments, ignorance as bliss.

Generally, the Romantics stressed a-rational ideas. Such ideas by themselves always fail. Ideas need force for implementation. An Hegelian would say that the ideas call forth force from themselves. Force as a challenge rose up and overwhelmed ideas. The Revolutions of 1848 made Romanticism a ridiculous memory. Power was needed to implement the ideas. Since Romantics shunned power, the positivists had their day in the world court of judgment. Bismarck substituted talk of "Blood and Iron" for parliamentary speeches. Cavour unscrupulously began to "make" Italy. Napoleon tried to be a *Realpolitiker*, but suffered from a Romantic heritage. Schopenhauer tried to lecture next door to Hegel in the University of Berlin, but only when the age of realism after 1850 caught on did his call for aesthetic contemplation and will to replace intellect successfully challenge the bland historicism of his rival. Posing as the greatest scientist of all, Karl Marx personified the age of positivism, but was surely a romantic fideist as well. Bismarck's realism proved too much for non-German Europeans. The German Empire under Prussian domination upset the balance of power. Two World Wars decided its conquerors to dismantle it permanently. The *Ausgleich* of 1867 allowed the Magyars and the Germans each to enslave their own Slavs. Abraham Lincoln refused to allow the South to leave the Union on the Hegelian grounds that the history of the Union showed the bonds of unity drawn ever tighter.[6] He used realist means to implement this romantic idea, and the constitutional decision of Texas vs. White after the war approved the logic that the South had been wrong because she had lost.[7] The British North American Act in 1867 represented a realistic solution to the interrelationship between the federal government and the provinces. Profiting from seeing what

[6] Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, in *American Democracy: A Documentary Record*, ed. J. Rogers Hollingsworth and Bell I. Wiley (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1961), 518–22.

[7] Alpheus Thomas Eason and Richard H. Leach, *In Quest of Freedom* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959), 347–49.

havoc a civil war had done to her southern neighbor, the Canadian national government retained all the powers that had not expressly been granted to the provinces. In Japan, the Meiji Restoration replaced the effete shogunate. Russia freed her serfs in 1861; the United States freed most of her slaves two years later. Neither Abraham Lincoln nor Alexander II was motivated to do so for altruistic reasons. *Ragioni di Stato* explained both. There was no necessary connection between the two movements and the violent deaths of their initiators, but less Romanticism and more realism might have prolonged their lives. In any case, the Black Republicans went on to rape the South, and from 1881 the Tzars turned into vengeful autocrats.

From 1870 to 1910 European civilization rested at full tide. Europe displayed optimism, self-confidence, a balance of power until the German Empire became too strong. Symbolized by the *Pax Britannica*, Europe enjoyed quiet and leisure. The little Continent controlled the trade of the whole world, owned 85% of the globe, and exported an intellectual capital that submerged indigenous ideas everywhere. Europe had experienced Industrial and French Revolutions that became the inspiration for all such movements. The second Industrial Revolution ushered in a world potentially capable of total chemical transformation. France underwent three political revolutions in the nineteenth century and inspired many others, causing some to conclude that Europe was grand in 1900 partially because of her periodic baths in bloody revolution. Had not the great Thomas Jefferson said so attractively, it was good to water the tree of liberty from time to time with a little blood?

Finance capitalism had emerged from industrial capitalism, as a handful of bankers manipulated the cosmic economy. A western migration in money and people promoted railroads and the cattle industry and sent 60,000,000 into Atlantic and Pacific waters. European imperialism possessed diverse roots. Capitalistic Europe, to become bigger "and hence better," exported capital and goods, viewing the world as market and supplier of raw materials. Some parts of the globe wanted to be imperialized in order to raise standards of living. Western nations vied for pieces of property to raise their prestige: under the impact of realism, imperialism developed into Pan-Slavism, Pan-Germanism, Pan Anglo-Saxonism, Pan-Hispanism. The French spoke of *mission civilisatrice* (a civilizing mission), the Englishman Kipling of the "White Man's Burden," and Bismarck of German *Kultur*. Since each nation-state was supreme, bigness became the criterion for absolute supremacy. While every nation-state indulged in imperialistic adventures or dreams, paradoxically each embraced representative government as the logical conclusion of visions of liberty begun

in the Middle Ages. No matter that this vision resulted from a delusion, a misunderstanding of limited medieval governments; universal franchise resting on popular authority was implemented and intellectually embraced. In art movements realism, naturalism, and impressionism ended in equating reality with appearances. When Marx converted Comtean appearances into "matter in motion," spirit henceforth rose only from economic modes of production.

From about 1830, neo-Romanticism played dissonant notes in the thundering opera of scientism. Religion was too formal, many complained. Society was too bourgeois and too aristocratic, complained the same and others. The artist and the intellectual became alienated from the moneyed classes. The Symbolist and the Expressionist joined Bergson and Croce in calling for the return of the spirit. In sum, from the middle class fled the artist, the religious, the savant, and, at long last becoming conscious of self, the worker. Neo-Romanticism represented an updated version of Rousseau's Proto-Romanticism, and therefore was another attempt at a substitute for the synthesis of classical and Christian culture.

Europe had laid the seeds for her own demise. For Greek universal rationality and liberty, for Roman objective law and authority, and for Christian human brotherhood, she had fashioned a new trinity of science, capital, and labor. The non-West eagerly embraced Western technology while repudiating contemporary Occidental logic and, of course, Christianity, which every nation had interpreted as favoring itself. Imperialism flowed from nationalism, and the latter was incompatible with pristine Christianity. Nationalism possessed no ability to universalize its human aims. One group's nationalism often meant another group's slavery. Nationalism could grow only in a thoroughly secularized civilization. By 1900 the masses had abandoned Christianity in any orthodox sense and were identifying with the nation-state surrogate. Jacobinism had triumphed. Christianity was no longer catholic, just as Newman had once discovered the Anglican Church to be non-catholic, insular.

Under the blows of dissident elements, the Great Powers swung with the hinges that closed the nineteenth and opened the twentieth centuries. In all important respects the classical liberal outlook declined in favor of democratic groupism. National power was called upon to provide for social equity. The universal panacea, the vote for everyone, was nearing completion. Legislation increasingly benefited workers as liberal cries of interference with freedom waned. Religions were disestablished, and the state began to disassociate herself from protecting and fostering natural morality. Socialisms grew in strength, though orthodox Marxism grew not at all. Economic nationalism waxed anew after 1880 in support of political nationalism.

Great Britain oscillated between Liberals and Conservatives from 1867, but after 1906 the democratized Liberals shriveled to a few. After the first World War, Labor replaced them and generally vanquished the Conservatives, though their differences remained microscopic. From 1871 the German Empire under the calculating Bismarck led Europe in social legislation, political alliances, and ever less political sagacity. In 1914 a psychologically wounded Kaiser stood poised to do more than "shit" upon the decisions of the Hague Peace Conference.[8] In France the Revolution of 1871 accidentally birthed the Third French Republic. Initially a rickety infant, it gained weight and prestige and sympathy from the Boulanger and Dreyfus Affairs. Jacobin republicanism had become domesticated.

In the late eighteenth century, England spawned laborers for the first time in modern history. Both Christianity and socialism fought to possess them. A largely nominalistic Christianity could fight but poorly against a universal materialistic bias. The workers took some time to accept what the socialist intellectuals were telling them: Christ is a myth, suffering is nonsense, religion is an opium (at the time it was), take from the burghers. On either side of orthodox Marxism lay revisionism, which infuriated Marx but which reigned a century later in all communist countries, and "working" socialism, involving the nationalization of key social services (England served as inspiration here). Revisionist Marxism prevailed in the "inner core" European nations, joining housebroken republicanism. In the "outer core" of Western nations, anarchists and syndicalists urged the masses respectively to repudiate all government or to trust in the trade unions to govern properly. Great Britain was characterized by "gas-and-water" socialism and trade unions identified with political parties. Trade unions working outside political structures typified the United States' approach to the problem of labor. The U.S. was the last bastion of liberal capitalism with its preachment that the lowliest can make himself the mightiest by his own efforts.

Cultural developments as the age swung from realism to neo-Romanticism emanated from intellectuals who, on their own admission, were unable or unwilling to think in any traditional sense of metaphysical certainty. This is not to say that the age was bereft of good thinkers, but they were largely scientists. Their Romantic parasites illegitimately jumped from an "advance" in science to "advance" in cultural things. No matter what Darwin said (and what he finally said made him so unsure that he called himself an agnostic), racists, materialists, imperialists, irrationalists, and nationalists all interpreted him as they would.

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[8] Barbara Tuchman, *The Proud Tower* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967 [1962]), 310.

Planck's Quantum Theory, Einstein's relativity of the bodies, and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle were used to found absolute relativism.

Neo-Romantic literature opened the chasm between the artist and the man in the street who always remains basically a positivist. Neo-Romantic art increasingly reflected anti-bourgeois individualism. That liberalism had undergone a change in a century from individualism to democracy was one of the ironies of the age. Metaphysical philosophy had disappeared from the late twentieth-century scene. Comte's positivism or scientism marked the enshrinement of sociology, giving the final *coup de grâce* to the historic relationship between metaphysical and revelational theology. The pragmatism of William James would have it that what works is true, what is known materially is real. Irrational wilful answers replaced cool rational ones. Nietzsche preached that the will to power explains what happens. Bergson's "*élan vital*" emanated from the will that could feed on truth "out there"; Unamuno claimed that reason was man's one great illusion, that it was inconsistent with the drive toward immortality. Only if you live alone, he counselled, can you be yourself. Surely this was the antithesis of Christianity, though he continued to fancy himself a Christian.

Threading all these cultural developments was the collapse of confidence in man's rational activity. It ended variously in pessimism, opting out, personal creativity, and incipient do-your-own-thingism.

The Christian religion, too, declined under the impact of positivism. Science battled theology, but science claimed too much and theology retreated to too little. Science, the story of rapidly changing hunches through time, maintained that only the limited was true. Theology, under the blows of liberal Protestantism, no longer knew that metaphysical philosophy insured its intellectual fiber. Science became human reason exclusively, and theology became societal activity. Renan, Strauss, and Harnack as members of the School of Higher Criticism applied scientific rigor to the Scriptures; reason denied supernature. Since aristocrats and bourgeoisie favored the Church, the proletariat left it and turned to socialism and democratic capitalism. When the churches stopped preaching doctrine and reduced Christianity to an ethic, a way of life, social work, their doing inadequately what the state did much better decided many to conclude that Christianity, even in its tamed national forms, was *passé*.

The Christian bodies offered three responses to the attack of scientism. The conservative answer was United States fundamentalism and continental neo-classical Protestantism. The first consisted of biblical moralisms combined with fierce attacks on both liberal Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The left-wing attitude embraced Catholic Modernism and liberalized Protestantism.

The latter metamorphosed the Christian message into a vague secular humanism that served as the basis for personal beliefs, the more social the better. Catholic Modernists retained the "idea" of each doctrine but prescinded from historical frameworks. Jesus's Resurrection means something, but maybe He didn't really rise from the dead. The centrist response of Catholic Christianity rose upon the foundation of the Thomistic synthesis of nature and supernature, metaphysical philosophy and intelligible revelation. The call to recall Aquinas was issued by Pope Leo XIII, who in a series of startling encyclicals dealt with the social, political, economic, and spiritual conclusions of Aquinian principles. Neo-Thomists like Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson popularized Thomistic thinking for intellectuals, and Pope Pius XI ably added to the ramifications of Thomistic principles enunciated by Leo XIII.

In the meantime the Great War, the war that was probable but impossible (Bergson) because civilized people didn't do such a thing any longer, had dragged to a close. The alienated, even though alienated for superficial reasons, were right: "society had been heading for a fall. Artists who exhibited their creations in the New York Armory show in 1913 knew it."[9] Expressionists like Hermann Hesse predicted it. Most welcomed it. It would help clear the atmosphere. So popular had social Darwinism become that most welcomed a little war to see who was the most fit. Five stages marked the first World War: confidence, stoicism, frustration, futility, despair. For effects, the war, immediately or later, created big government, caused millions to die for ideas, liquidated the wealth of centuries, occasioned an inflation never again headed off, annihilated the sons of aristocrats (shot and bombed to death at the head of their troops), forged new nations to bedevil the political situation forevermore, and fatally checked the liberal bourgeoisie.

The November Revolution in 1917 was the overwhelming event as Tsarist Russia became the communist U.S.S.R. Lenin was arguably the most significant political figure since Charlemagne. For all that, the Russians remained the same: manipulators of men, expansionists, Janus-faced, that is, too skeptical (the result of an exaggerated rationality) and too mystical (the fruit of an exaggerated revelation that they were divine).

In the 1920s men enjoyed life, imagining that the Great War had not occurred. Only too happy to have survived, Americans and Europeans frantically made money and laughed as "normalcy" returned. Adults danced all night and bought everything in sight. Fascism became popular among the West European

[9] Eugen Weber, ed., *Paths to the Present: Aspects of European Thought from Romanticism to Existentialism* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1975 [1960]), 233.

nations; in stressing hardiness, nationalism, strength, and individualism to benefit the State, it would ensure walls to keep out infectious Soviet communism. The West refused to see that the old order, nineteenth-century complacency, was finished. Depression ruined the West and made everyone social-conscious. The twin pillars of nineteenth-century optimism, classical liberalism and national Christianities, collapsed forevermore. The artists and savants, returned to intellectual power, embraced the Russian communists who, pointing to their social records during the fifteen years, taunted that Western money had comforted only the few. In the United States, Franklin Roosevelt stole ideas from the communists and socialists while all the while beating the dead Republican elephant and so successfully matched for his country the accomplishments of Hitler and Stalin in theirs. In the late thirties communism revealed itself for what it was to those who had not destroyed the voices of moral nature within them. Russianism explained the Russo-Finnish War, and the absence of reality in "national socialism" (Nazism) and communism explained why the Germans and the Russians could unite in a pact intended to delay the destruction of each other.

A Second World War left in its wake any number of contradictory responses about how to cope with reality. Utopians insisted that we abandon pseudowords like freedom and learn to be programmed correctly; utopians planned eating, drinking, smoking, copulating, living, and dying. Their emphasis on the societal, rationalistic, and paradisaical increased in currency as the twentieth century entered its last third: surely B.F. Skinner with his *Walden II* and *Beyond Human Freedom* symbolized the utopians. The anti-utopians countered by warning of the society desired just yesterday as inhuman, anti-individual. Anti-utopians, personalists who advocated skepticism (hopelessness) or fideism, were represented by such as Aldous Huxley, Gabriel Marcel, George Orwell, and Virgil Gheorghiu. These two groups initiated the great debate of the late twentieth century; few saw that their struggle represented only the updating of the early nineteenth-century struggle between the liberals and the conservatives.

The existentialists, ultimately inspired by such apparently disparate thinkers as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and their second-generation followers, Jaspers and Heidegger, asserted something other than the glory of the revealing triune God as the purpose of life. For the medieval object of life, "Glory to God," they variously proposed human freedom, stoicism, action, return to Being, authenticity, individualism, the movement of human potency to act by man himself. Since the Christian God was dead, the question now ran, "Is Man [dead too]?" as André Malraux once asked. Since we were born into a world without God, the problem is what to do about it, said Jean-Paul Sartre. We must go on because everything

is absurd, we catch Albert Camus saying at one moment on his kaleidoscopic movement along the score of existentialisms; life is meaningless in itself. We are hobbled Prometheuses; we are Sisyphuses pushing stones uphill, knowing that they will escape from us, but also sure that we shall experience the satisfaction of trudging down after them to start them ascending again.

Three responses, diversely connected with historical Christianity, vied for the attentions of human beings. The neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Reinhold Niebuhr accused liberal Protestantism of the ideological justification for the adaptation of dogma to the increasingly secularized mind of the nineteenth century. Liberal Protestantism had sold out Christianity, they charged, in stressing ethics (how to live, how to relate to one's fellow man) rather than doctrine (how to relate to God, what God has said in time through Christ). The neo-orthodox concluded that we must return, within limits, to Luther's depravity of man. What theology suffered from most, complained Barth, was "*Plattfuss*" (flat-footedness or a flat tire): theology had been emptied of its divine Pneuma.

A broader, less denominational, more amorphous stream of theological thinking—let it be called contemporary theology—interpreted traditional doctrines in a secular way. Now that the antique Christian God no longer made sense, went the argument, time was escaping to understand the God of the Christian faith in a contemporary way, since transcendent God-language said nothing to the Pepsi-Cola generation. Man did not have to adapt himself to God anymore. It was God's task, or at least the task of current theology, to make God intelligible to scientific, tolerant, feeling humanity.

Catholic Christianity continued to press for a reality that was not an ideology, one that avoided an idealistic conception of man, whether of an age long ago or of a short or long future away. It recognized man for what he empirically was: a sinner struggling for the divine, and capable of obtaining the divine. It warned that the divine would tolerate no surrogate, no matter "good faith." It contended that only if man acknowledged God before fellow-man would he be ultimately successful. Christianity was no success-philosophy; it mirrored the views neither of bourgeoisie nor of proletariat. On earth one had to be sufficiently spiritual and totally concrete; a unified body and spirit (but one had to begin always with the body); completely humanly rational and adequately supernatural (and the former was possible through the latter). It maintained that man was divine on two levels, by natural birth and through life in the God-Man. Within Catholic Christianity, the left stressed historicist, evolutionistic, culturalist ideas in an effort to keep up with the presumed intrinsic direction

of the world. The right preached the totally transcendental God and the past, the vertical relation to the divine and the reach into tradition without nuances. The center accented the "*Jetztzeit*" (the now-time), the necessity of living immersed in Jesus Christ, the perennial visible way to the Father, the anointed Man-God who had to pray to the transcendental Father, and unto whom we must mystically (and therefore, really) cleave. The center insisted that the truth consisted in being correctly idealist because totally realistic; and we had to begin with "The Man" who was also the expression of the Father. All matter and all spirit had to be consciously focused upon and inundated by the Son of God whose dying figure on the Cross became obvious to all who glance away from themselves to Him.

1

# Conservatism, Romanticism, Nationalism

To highlight the sort of world that the conclusion of the Wars of Napoleon produced, a brief glance at the history of the connection between Christianity and the world will be helpful. From all eternity the Father generates the Son, and the Holy Spirit is their mutual spiration; such is the mystery of the Trinity. The derivative mystery is that of the Incarnation. The Son of God joined himself in hypostatic union with Man to become the visible image of the invisible Father, the only one who has ever seen God, and therefore the one necessary to contact in order to associate with the other members of the divine Trinity of Being. God became man so that men living in the Man-God could ascend to divinity with whom Adam and Eve had once had some contact but nothing comparable now to what redeemed human beings could become, sons of God through association with Jesus. John the Evangelist pointed to Jesus Christ as the long-sought Logos, the missing key to unlock the mystery of the relationship between created men and the unknown.

Under the impact of Thomistic thought, from which the official Catholic Church has never departed, Catholic Christianity went beyond the Platonic epistemology of Augustine to embrace the purified realism of Aristotle as propaedeutic for the life of knowledge by faith. Metaphysical Catholic thinking maintained that men, at least those who were willing and able to do so, could reason to the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the immaterial nature of ultimate reality. Unable to proceed farther, thinkers, still hungry for truth, and opening their eyes and ears to the preambles of the intellectual nature of faith available in Jesus Christ, could then embrace faith in the Man-God who is immanentized in the visible institution of the Catholic Church. There was never a time when the Church was anti-institutional; she proceeded directly from the synagogue. In the sixteenth century, biblical Protestant Christianity successfully challenged traditional and ecclesiastical Catholic Christianity.

Though the Protestants denied the separate realm of the sacred (all was secular; humans were corrupted), their working in the world ended in their embracing of the world and the diminution of their pristine transcendentalism. The Peace of Westphalia ended the religious wars. Calvinistic forms of Christianity had joined Lutheranism and Roman Christianity as legitimate forms of Christian worship. Soon the suspicion rose in some minds that any one of these three might lead to God; originally an idea of the Roman senators who used it to justify their request that the Statue of Victory be replaced in the Senate to make pagan armies victorious once more, Christians now utilized it to justify heresy. Somewhat later, to cap a tolerance without legitimate parentage, intellectuals began to say that perhaps no one form of the Christian message monopolized the truth. Unbelief lay not far away. For a long while, most continued to believe because authority commanded it, but gradually the revelation of God was metamorphosed into ethics (a way of life), deism (the premise of a god distant and vague), or pietism (emotional devotions), all of which agreed in deemphasizing dogma. No dogma meant that there was nothing to teach, no doctrine. At the end of the eighteenth century, orthodox Catholic Christianity and classical biblical Christianity presented no serious threat to *philosophes* and proto-Romantics.[10]

Rationalism received the blame for the incendiary French Revolution, for the Voltaireans had advocated an abstract idealism, a rationalist utopia, natural religion, universal domination of concepts born in France (thus nationalistic vis-à-vis other civilizations), and potential egalitarianism based upon the new privilege of money. The Romantic ideas arising from the Revolution produced Optimism: popular sovereignty and anti-aristocracy, equality of rights for all, self-determination of peoples, and nationalism. God was not "out there"; He was "right here" in the spirit of the *citoyens*. Wordsworth said that happiness was to be found here or not at all.[11] Since happiness was not what Christians meant by joy, he was quite correct. The hope that the French Revolution occasioned, an example of a Christian idea that now fraudulently sought its ancestry in a secular view of life, lasted for a century, 1815–1914, a century even more generally optimistic than its second-century paragon. The Great War, itself the product of intellectuals, shattered the illusion. Conservative political philosophy

[10] R.R. Palmer, *Catholics and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1939).

[11] "Not in Utopia—subterranean fields—or some secreted island, Heaven knows where! But in the very world, which is the world of all of us—the place where in the end, we find our happiness or not at all!"

contributed to the growth of Romanticism. Edmund Burke neared, as any Englishman could, the Hegelian exaltation of the State. Condemning the slogans of the French Revolution as vague, doctrinaire, and abstract, he contrasted England secure through the work of history and experience. A true nation relied on the wisdom of the past, Christian foundations, and tradition. A progressive conservative, one who believed in the organic conception of growth, Burke surely was romantic, for there is no way of proving that nations evolve biologically. Voltaire, convinced that an historian had to work discretely in finding great events in history, had betrayed his proximity to Christianity in more than one way. Burke, the card-carrying Christian, substituted the past for truth, as many conservative Christians continued to do. Rights were established by prescription, he argued, not by legal abstractions. In any case, his conservatism strengthened the case for nationalism, and nationalism interrelated with Romanticism, too. The latter stressed truth through group experiences; nationalism laid claim to the independence of each cultural unit as sources of valuable literature and art.

Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century suggested the bifurcation of future thinking. He maintained that each one could only subjectively see the objective, that things were real but their appearances depended upon the way our minds saw. This thinking he called the Phenomenal. He founded the science of empirical realism. The really real, he said, was the realm of value, of moral and esthetic experience (the noumenal), but was rarely attained if at all. Thus he likewise established transcendental idealism. Serving as the basis for the noumenal was not the phenomenal, but a sort of heart-faith, akin to Pascal's two hours of "*Feu*," which does prove the existence of God, freedom of the will, immortality of the soul. Skeptical about what both the human mind can do and the intellectual nature of divine revelation, he updated William of Ockham who had destroyed the Thomistic metaphysical synthesis in favor of a radical separation between mind and faith. Little wonder that Lutheran Church authorities asked the Prussian King to silence one who would challenge the need for Revelation, though they did not seem to mind his qualified attack on the mind.

In the nineteenth century some thinkers emphasized the phenomenal, and proceeded to end in positivism; others accented the noumenal, and culminated in idealism or mysticism. Kant had divided the spirit-matter unity into the rationalist Enlightenment and spiritual Romanticism. The efforts of Fichte and Schelling to weld them together again were crowned by the philosophy of history of Georg Hegel. Kant firmly established hypothesis over pure empiricism as *the* scientific method. His ethical rule or "categorical imperative" included individual freedom, hence the moral autonomy of the person, human beings

as ends, the supremacy of the individual. Men went on to "feel" the truth; they could not "know" it.

Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel offered to substitute for the Christian God the individual as the reverse coin of the Absolute. In that each person was the concrete manifestation of the world spirit, each person was God (Fichte). The infinite manifests itself in finite form in art; the artist merges the unconscious, the finite (the real objective physical world), with the conscious, the infinite (the ideal and subjective) (Schelling). What an inspiration this provided for Romanticism! Hegel had every human event, every human being, as the concretization of the rational World-Spirit. The latter realized itself only in time, in space, in history. The World-Spirit manifested itself in religion, in art, in philosophy, especially in the state. The way was prepared for each omnipotent nation-state of the late nineteenth century. These three men agreed in having man effectively replace God. They provided the philosophical credential for triumphant twentieth-century man. Man was the necessary manifestation of God. Romanticism now agreed with the Renaissance: man was the image of God. Traditional Christianity had claimed that the individual could realize himself in the Church, the Body of Jesus. Romanticism breathtakingly claimed more: that man was divine because he lived and moved and breathed in the state.

To assess the influence that Kant and Hegel have exercised upon Christianity, it is only necessary to contrast briefly the relationships binding the modern world, Christianity, the private individual, and the state. Kant turned the absolute into personal morality, personal ethics. The modern world is pluralist in that strategies of "redemption" are well-nigh infinite in some earthly sense of the term. Kant placed the Absolute beyond our reason, so that Christianity is not only a matter of personal faith but a matter of personal choice: it is but one option among many for worship. Since every individual is private, he is free to act as he wishes up to the point that he interferes with the freedom of another. Relativism in religion has been the dubious legacy of all this.

Hegel turned God into Thought: whatever *is* here below *is* God, or at least divine. Man realizes the absolute God in time and space. Indeed, that is the only realm where God is to be found; He has lost his transcendental dwelling-place. Since for Hegel the Divine Idea manifests itself especially in the state, the state has increasingly declared its own autonomous morality. In Catholic political theory, the state had possessed independence, but subserved God's laws of moral nature. The modern state, the product of warm life infused into Hobbes's Leviathan, "An Artificial Man," went on to declare man to be wholly physically natural, and therefore in exchange for paying his taxes he could control births,

abort fetuses, sterilize the unfit, terminate the lives of the ancient useless, foster divorce, and wink at indiscriminate sexuality "as long as it hurt no one." Not until the second half of the twentieth century did serious protest at least make the state pause, but the protests, based upon individualistic Romanticism, warred civilly before being subverted by the resurgent state.

It is the moment to define Romanticism, but it cannot be done. Born of objection to the rationalist Enlightenment, it was essentially negative, a movement against all the "ins" by the independent alienated: liberals, conservatives, mass society. Romantics revolted against whatever or whoever was dominant. Romantics reacted intellectually against the sense of balance on which European civilization had rested ever since the Greeks had thought well enough to produce a harmony of proportion, order, and balance. Romantic nationalists reacted against French political and cultural dominance, rejecting French contentions that "French" thought was universal thought, that Frenchmen were the ancient Greeks resuscitated. The new Romantic intelligentsia believed that their task was to "*épater le bourgeois*."[12] Romanticism consisted of "romanticisms," Lovejoy put it, for the principle of romanticism was diversity. Sismondi said Romanticism was "Protestantism in letters and the arts." Since Romanticism was originally a revolution in literature and artistry against the imitative neoclassicism of the late eighteenth century, it was indeed accurate to recall that Protestantism had already destroyed medieval conceptions of philosophy and politics, for it had denied metaphysical philosophy and paradoxically enshrined the state after declaring it to be totally secular. Romanticism was the ultimate Protestantism, a protest against all precise divine revelations.

Despite its origins, did not some Romantics try to make something positive of it? Surely. Some made it the thought that comes from emotion, sensibility, the sublime, "*frissons*." Coleridge rejected analytical reason in favor of an intuitive "eliciting of truth at a flash," and thus added one more chapter to the dreary history of "truths" discovered by sudden inspiration, begun by Luther and Calvin, extended by Descartes and Pascal, supported by such as Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and all those who would find substitutes for the slow, arduous, intellectual objectivizing of reality by leading lives of obedience to moral nature and to the self-revealing divine Trinity. One source of Romanticism was very positive if intellectually incoherent: German philosophy and poetry, the philosophy of subjective and intuitive truth emanating from the spiritual nature of man as a divine substitute. The

[12] Shock or scandalize the middle class. See Weber, *Paths to the Present*, 10.

poet played the role of joining the conscious with the unconscious, of seeing the unconscious as the unique source of truth. Man, said this new synthesist philosophy, by using his mind creatively, reflects the mind-stuff out there! The media of literature and art have always percolated to the wider public of intellectuals and masses the ideas conjured by conceited thinkers such as Descartes, Hegel, Marx, Fourier, and all those who would replace objective reality with subjective opinion. The man-in-the-street as well as the savant-in-the-school, the former unconsciously, the latter willingly and pridefully, have all been infected by the range of solutions that run from skepticism through mysticism, from extreme positivism to radical idealism.

In what consisted the neoclassicism against which Romanticism was revolting? The neoclassicists held that beauty was perfection made visible, that beauty was one, universal, true for all and for all time, but it was only an imitative ideal. It denied belief in the new. A renewal of the Renaissance, its ideal of man made in the Image of God was even less Christian that its Renaissance form. Romanticism claimed that beauty was moral, didactic, socially conscious, and could be obtained not from the realm of Platonic values (such had been the error of neoclassicists) but by analyzing effervescent physical nature and homogeneous cultures.

A traditional Christian in critiquing Romanticism from a revelational view would charge that Romanticism was, variously, pantheism (man is a necessary part of God); transcendentalism (man necessarily manifests God); direct communication with the deity (by bypassing Jesus Christ, the sole entrance to the Father); a "*renaissance orientale*" (Quinet) in Germany (betraying that Luther's removal of the Germanies from the Catholic synthesis had brought it back to transcendental anti-metaphysical Eastern thought patterns); the identification of one's thoughts with the soul of the universe (Blake's substitution of bedrock religious experience for truth from revelation), and Christian doctrine proceeding from interior experience. This latter, the idea of Friedrich Schleiermacher, inverted the traditional Christian source of revelation. Catholics and Calvinists alike had viewed the interior experience as resulting from the revealed truth. In the early nineteenth century Schleiermacher opened the way for liberal Protestants and Catholics alike to deny traditional doctrines that conflicted with the yardstick of individual insights. The subject of theology has never been the same, though Catholics, traditionally more obedient to the visible authority of the papacy, resisted longer the changing intellectual patterns to which Protestants succumbed more easily because of their insistence that the world was the only sphere of their activity.

It is significant that the representative Protestant theologians were German, personalist in their approaches, and finally influential on Catholic biblical scholars. Since to a Romantic science served as no bridge toward the theological, since the physical reality provided no preparation for the spiritual reality, they denied any grounding in physical reality, emphasizing Jesus Christ known by faith alone. Romantic Protestant theologians agreed that metaphysics could not provide a propaedeutic to the ultimate, a preamble to faith. Similar to their classical ancestors they did not accept that the study of the inherent natures of things possessed relationship to theological truths contained in revelation. To them, human reason and divine revelation were disjunct, unconnected. They advanced beyond their classical forbears in formulating revelation from emotional experiences.

Romanticism linked the classicism of the eighteenth century with the subjectivism of the twentieth century. Subjectivism was the basic factor of the intellectual revolution called Romanticism. It may be defined as the participation of the mind in shaping reality. Kant had triumphed, though in a manner of which he would have disapproved. As Romanticism grew, so did subjectivism: man is free, man is freed from rules, man is freed from moral conventions and from all external restraints. Each must follow his own genius, proclaimed the subjectivists. Individualism had triumphed, but then, so had organic society. What sort of principle was it that could produce contraries? Was there some resolution to paradoxes, as there had been in abandoned (because out-of-date) Christianity? If so, it eluded common agreement. In fact, the stress on diversity destroyed a style; content had long since been disputed. Romanticism proceeded to produce a nineteenth century that was eclectic, pluralistic, filled with human men, and bereft of divinized men in the Catholic sense of those who know the divine by leading a mystical life in Jesus.

The Romantic artist may be characterized as one who learned from contact with the dynamic nature of natures. This attitude burgeoned in the twentieth century to become the obsession of almost all artists. As the twentieth century limped to a close, the artists of whatever civilization merely reflected the disintegration going on ubiquitously. Only a rare Solzhenitsyn called for a moratorium on this in favor of a return to the transcendental revelation that once made human reality satisfactorily comprehensible. No significant thinking has ever replaced the intellectual work of Thomas Aquinas. The chaos of philosophy since Descartes has been adequately mirrored by the artist, the savant, the man in the street, and the priest, as this volume will make eminently clear. The nineteenth century was an age of contradiction, an age of conflicting

ideologies, a phase of un-synthesis, an age divided into an early phase of Romanticism, a middle phase of realism, and a questioning neo-Romanticism that at least made the positivists pause. In the last third of the twentieth century, Romanticism had triumphed in that man depended almost wholly upon his self. Equally not an age of synthesis, it was preeminently an age of introspective analysis. Despite the glib talk of politicians everywhere in the world, the truly perceptive expressed naught but pessimism about the future of man but refused to listen to the voices of Christianity who, for the most part, presented a false understanding of the conclusions rising from the revelation by Jesus Christ of the threefold nature of reality.

2

# Some Romantics

In the eighth year of the French Revolution, William Wordsworth called for a revolution in literature based on imagination. By that magic word the Romantics intended to complete human intellection. The poet, he maintained, must contact the lower and middle classes, those who led a "common life" because "in low and rustic life the essential passions of the heart find a better soil."[13] This view represented the resurfacing of the idea that Roman civilization owed its genius to life on the land, in the villa, from earthly things. *Romanité* was the ultimate source of Romanticism. It culminated in the civilization of the United States, in the westward movement, the myth of the yeoman farmer. (For all of its desired "holism," Romanticism called for the maintenance of tradition, a return to the past as the source of truth, flight from the city, shunning the golden future. This explains why agricultural communities have always understood Christianity so poorly, preferring a return to the presumed pure Christianity of the past to an alleged transformation by a new revelation.[14] Rousseau's spirituality looked for insight in the primitive past; Voltaire loved what the arts and the sciences had done to build the fair cities and to advance human knowledge.

To the medieval scholastic view of art as materialized intellectual forms,[15] Wordsworth preferred the language of the farm masses (the English Romantics seemed not to defend the thought-patterns of the working masses) as "a far more

[13] All references to Wordsworth's Preface are in the 1800 edition of his *Lyrical Ballads* and can be found in W.J.B. Owen, *Wordsworth's Preface to "Lyrical Ballads"* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1957).

[14] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971 [1949]).

[15] Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism* and *The Frontiers of Poetry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974 [1962]).

philosophical" one. Good poetry, rather than an intellectual comprehension of what the run of men understand somewhat, he defined as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." In approvingly quoting Aristotle that poetry was the most philosophic of all writing, he misunderstood the Stagirite to be saying the poet arrives at truth "by passion" rather than by a more profound reworking of the objective reality within him. Wordsworth was the first of a line of nineteenth-century rhapsodists who believed that the poet would some day celebrate the achievements of science. Since the poet interested himself in the true and the general, a scholastic thinker would demur, and science concerns itself with changing theories about limited created reality, poetry would never universalize the accomplishments of science "in the very language of men." In describing the poet as one who can express the thoughts and feelings and passions of men more deeply than the generality of men "without immediate external excitement," he subtly proposed the self as a new mediator in place of the repudiated Christ. William Wordsworth was at best a dull Pascal even at 39, the age of Pascal's long overdue demise. The older Wordsworth became duller and more detached as he continued to affirm the moral nature of men as source for all truth.

The popularizer of English Romantic literature, William Hazlitt, saw the origins of the "Lake school of poetry" in the French Revolution that even Immanuel Kant in his retreat at Königsberg hailed as the dawn of a new liberty.[16] Hazlitt praised the Romantics for activities that evermore characterized their ideology well into the twentieth century: truth as subjectivism, egalitarianism (in fact, common denominator egalitarianism), difference for the sake of difference, all things as fit subjects for literature. It represented the triumph of the left, the triumph of new ideas without any provable relationship to objective reality. It is not incidental that left, gauche, sinister, liberal, opposed the dexterous, the right, the materialized reality. What was absent in such an analysis was the transcendental center.

François-René de Chateaubriand lauded the Christian religion in his *Génie du Christianisme* (1802) as a thing of beauty for souls searching for consolation. He thought that the work fell on good soil because men had tired of the rationalistic dryness of the eighteenth century, of the intellectual barrenness of ideas intended to substitute for Christian mysteries, such as pantheism, humanitarianism, utopian schemes of mundane life—heresies all: "That which is

[16] All references to William Hazlitt are in *Lectures on the English Poets*, 3rd ed. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1841; reissued 1968), 310ff.

placed before us as progress and discovery is so much old lumber hawked about for centuries in the schools of Greece and the colleges of the Middle Ages."[17] The beauty of patristic writings, the interest in the buildings of the Middle Ages, the historical effects that would have flowed had Constantine not tolerated Christianity and had the Faith succumbed to fifth-century barbarians—the pointing out of these facts, Chateaubriand was sure, had made his work popular.

In these remarks, he exhibited the early nineteenth-century misconception of Christianity merely as the religion of traditional and consoling beauty; he emphasized "the redeeming and Messianic thought as the only basis of social equality," how "Christianity has changed ideas, rectified notions of justice and injustice, substituted assertion for doubt, embraced the whole of humanity in its doctrines and precepts." Christianity has been grand because it is catholic; for it urges, "Let us pray for every suffering thing upon earth." He concluded: "What religion has ever spoken in this way? The Word was not made flesh in the man of pleasure, it became incarnate in the man of sorrow, with a view to the enfranchisement of all, to a universal brotherhood and an infinite salvation." But then, he asked by way of retrospect, "In 1803, when nothing was granted to the old religion, when it was the object of scorn, when none knew the first word of the question, would one have done well to speak of future liberty as descending from Calvary, at a time when people were still bruised from the excesses of the liberty of their passions?" Chateaubriand had no illusions about the intrinsic value of the *Génie du Christianisme* but he might have feared preaching the accurate message of Christianity for fear of appearing irrelevant. Christianity has historically contended that the truth is attractive for those open to truth, and all are that, provided that they have not frustrated their naturally moral sensibilities. In any case, the dying Chateaubriand surely saw as he dictated his memoirs what sort of Christianity ought to have replaced the superficial Romantic Christianity of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Religious historians customarily dismiss Victor Hugo as anti-Christian, disastrous in his influence, another who enshrined the concrete, the commonplace, the pedestrian, the particular without attempting to understand the Christian inspiration behind his efforts to do so. An analysis of his preface to *Cromwell* urges the reader to make some necessary nuances that reveal his considerable understanding of the historic role and meaning of original Christianity, though he later abandoned it completely. In fact, Hugo had probably never even been baptized. Starting from a view that the history of the human

[17] All references to Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-Tombe* are from Weber, *Paths to the Present*, 29–36.

race as a biological organ had progressed from childhood to impressive old age, he viewed primitive man expressing his incomprehension in the ode, the book of Genesis, the spiritual lyric. Man in his youth changed his religion into poetry, changed law into religion, gave birth to Homer who celebrated man's achievements in the epic. The advent of Christianity spiritualized religion: "This religion is complete, because it is true."[18] It taught that man was animal and intellect, body and soul, the highest of the terrestrial beings as he was the lowest of the celestial ones. But Hugo reflected the prevalent view of Christianity in 1830 by observing that Christianity split spirit and matter, placing an abyss between the soul and the body, an abyss between man and God. Here clearly the Kantian division between the empirical mind and the transcendental God exemplified once more what had happened to the Thomistic orientation of man as a metaphysical thinker attracted by faith in answer to revealing information proceeding from a God who had spoken in time. Pristine Christianity had contended that the Man-God bridged the gap between fallen created being (man as naturally divine) and uncreated Necessity (the Divine Trinity of Being). For all that, Hugo saw accurately that Christianity and barbarism were compatible, that a struggle was being waged between the carnal and the spiritual parts of man, that the two opposing principles disputed the possession of man from the cradle to the tomb. Hugo would have it that the modern genius was born of the fruitful union of the sublime and the grotesque. From the contest between the sublime, the soul purified by Christianity, and the grotesque, the part always played by the human beast, has issued a new poetry: comedy. Three burlesque Homers reigned in Europe: Ariosto in Italy, Cervantes in Spain, Rabelais in France. Modern poetry, under the impact of a Christianity that had finally done more than veneer the body, was now, at long last, real. It can be even more real, and hereby Hugo believed that man had surpassed, overtaken, the role that Christianity had performed—if we accept new liberty in "the one place where freedom is most natural—the domain of thought. . . . There are neither rules nor models; or, rather, there are no other rules than the general laws of nature, which soar above the whole field of art." In Hegelian fashion, he viewed traditional Christianity as no longer germane. In a fashion similar to Wordsworth, he had soared beyond Christianity to nature, to the moral nature of man in general, and to the moral nature of each divergent man whereby each could express his own understanding of the conflict between the

[18] All references to Hugo are from John R. Effinger Jr., ed., *Preface de "Cromwell" and "Hernani"* (New York: Scott Foresman and Company, 1900), 52ff.

sublime and the grotesque. He finally had conceived of Christianity with its doctrine and its rules as too confining. His was representative of the general view of intellectuals since the destruction of the Baroque synthesis. Penetration into the Godhead through the mind of Jesus Christ was a lost reality to nineteenth-century thinkers of whatever persuasion—a lamentable heritage of the age of Enlightenment and of the unmystical lives of eighteenth-century Catholic prelates and thinkers.[19]

Hugo made the passionate physical nature of man the source of creativity: "The aim of art is almost divine: to bring to life again if it is writing history, to create if it is writing poetry." A later generation of neo-Romantics completed this revolution by inserting divinity into the artist, for the God of revelation had finally died in the late nineteenth century. Hugo quoted approvingly Aristotle's dictum that the artist should possess the rules rather than be possessed by them, but he seemed to know nothing about the very nature of intellectual reality, that the artist should above all else be subject to the intellectual forms in his own mind, forms in turn that are objective only if he lives a life of moral goodness and that can be even more startlingly concretized in matter to the degree that he lives a life of prayer and sanctity.

In his preface of *Hernani*, Hugo went on to define Romanticism as liberalism in literature, and therein he displayed the bias that has remained contemporary despite irrefutable evidence: a man can be free to the degree that he relies upon his own self. Hugo made the individual temperament the judge of artistic work. In his rejection of the "ultras" of his time, he included the Christianity with which conservatism had joined in a desperate attempt to return France to the *ancien régime*. He substituted youth for truth, for he forgot that youth as well as old age can be multivalent.

Charles Baudelaire, an artist of many physiognomies, in his hatred of the "damned compact liberal majority," heaped sarcasm on the bourgeoisie in ways probably too opaque for bourgeois minds:

> You are the majority—in number and intelligence; therefore you are the force—which is justice. Some are scholars, others are owners; a glorious day will come when the scholars shall be owners and the owners scholars. Then your power will be complete, and no man will protest against it. . . . You are the natural friends of the arts, because you are some of you rich men and the others scholars. . . . And so it is to you,

[19] Palmer, *Catholics and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France.*

> the bourgeois, that his book is naturally dedicated; for any book which is not addressed to the majority—in number and intelligence—is a stupid book.[20]

Rather than the art exhibitions at Paris in 1845 and 1846 with their products of mediocrity intended for the petite bourgeois mentality, Baudelaire saw painting come of true age in the works of Eugène Delacroix.[21] With "imagination, always incandescent imagination," Delacroix, Baudelaire judged, "has interpreted . . . our age . . . better than anyone else":

> It is the invisible, the impalpable, the dream, the nerves the soul; and this he has done—allow me, please, to emphasize this point—with no other means than color and contour: he has done it better than anyone else—he has done it with the perfection of a consummate painter, with the eloquence of an impassioned musician.

No mere positivistic realist, Delacroix possessed a mind "the most open to every sort of idea and impression; he was the most eclectic and the most impartial of voluptuaries" who believed that "all the faculties of the human soul must be subordinated to the imagination." Baudelaire could have been describing a fideistic Christian painter (and maybe was) in expressing a substantive criticism of Delacroix: "Delacroix was passionately in love with passion, and coldly determined to seek the means of expressing it in the most visible way. . . . An immense passion, reinforced with a formidable will—such was the man." "Almost at the dictation" of Delacroix, Baudelaire introduced the notion that romantic imagination was intended to substitute for the incarnate Son of God and for supernatural life called grace:

> A picture by Delacroix will already have quickened you with a thrill of *supernatural pleasure* even if it be situated too far away for you to judge of its linear *graces* or the more or less dramatic quality of its subject. You feel as though a magical atmosphere has advanced toward you and already envelops you. This impression, which combines gloom with sweetness, light with tranquility—this impression, which has taken its place once and for all in your memory, is *certain proof* of the true, the perfect colorist. And when you come closer and analyze the subject,

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[20] Baudelaire, *Critique littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 874–76.

[21] All references to Baudelaire's essay on Delacroix are in his *Critique littéraire*, 1114–41.