

Social and Political Thought
of the French Revolution
1788—1797

An Anthology
of Original Texts

Selected, Translated and Edited with an Introduction
and Commentaries on the Texts by
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violent, where the governments themselves will be destroyed by its terrible and swift sword.

Thus, the great revolution that, according to Condorcet, is upon us is the eradication of the Christian religion⁷ and the transformation of every monarchy into a republic—which is to say, it is the revolution of atheism and anarchy. And this is what this philosopher calls perfecting society on the basis of enlightenment and human understanding. As for me, if I wanted to offer some prophecies based on the principles developed in this work, on history which is these principles in practice, and on the events which have been and will be their proof, I would venture to announce a wholly different future—one that witnesses the triumph of Christianity and the destruction of republican forms of government. For, “if the legislator does not understand his purpose and establishes a principle that is different from one that arises from the nature of things, society will continue to be troubled until this principle is either changed or abolished and invincible nature again holds sway.” And, as a matter of fact, unequivocal signs of demise are apparent in all the republics of the known world. I am not referring to France which has never been, and never will be, a republic; it is only a monarchy in revolution. But the aristocratic republic of the United Provinces is no longer. Poland has become a monarchy. The leaders of the United States are already suspected of ambitious designs. In England, tribunes have called upon the force of the people, and disturbing evidence has made clear that a leaning toward democracy exists which, sooner or later, will lead to the fall of the mixed constitution of this society. In some of the states of the Swiss Confederation, the governments have surrendered to the demand for the *Rights of Man*, and compliance of this kind, in a non-constituted state, is invariably an indication and a beginning of revolution. The structure of the Germanic Confederation is shaking on its ancient foundation; the independence of the Republic of Genoa is seriously threatened. A few small republics, sheltered by their weakness, will languish for a time in corruption and fear. A few contemptible sects will pass their remaining days in ignorance and obscurity. In all likelihood, some will only become politically constituted after suffering through the chaos of

⁷Amidst so many errors, Condorcet declares one great truth: “Any religion whose defense lies in the understanding that it is a belief that it is practical to leave to the people can anticipate little more than death-throes of greater or lesser duration.” A warning to *those who govern*, who want the people to have religion but who have no intention of having any themselves. [Note of Bonald]

democracy; other will pass through the void of atheism before their strength is revived with the religious constitution. Still, sooner or later, in political society, just as in religious society, the nature of beings will regain her rights. Religion will bring back the private virtues that make for human happiness, and the public virtues, which are the strength of every society, will be reborn with the monarchy.

The great question that divides the men and the societies of Europe—man creates himself and forms society or society creates itself and forms man—is thus reduced to factual proofs. Perhaps quite soon will principles be confirmed or systems destroyed by what happens.

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JOSEPH DE MAISTRE

Considerations on France¹

Nothing of Bonald's procedures here, no slow and methodical progression from the realm of ontology to the necessary organization of the human universe. Instead, the world of the Revolution illuminated by strobe light, a series of visions of God as puppet master, using individuals as tools to eradicate the radical evil that France had become. Certainly, there was nothing new about the impotent and outraged calling upon God, seeing God as their vindication, applauding their sacrifices, rewarding their pain. No new ground broken, then, when a counter-revolutionary views the Revolution as punishment for the sins of the time. In fact, it was a common motif in counter-revolutionary literature. What was new in Maistre was the power of the vision, the insistence that, in this time of miracles, God had made Himself accessible to the human understanding as never before so that those who were not willfully blind could see the workings of the divine behind the devastation of the Revolution. The Revolution, in Maistre's eyes, was indeed a miracle, though of an order wholly different from that claimed by its supporters. There could be no question of their plans succeeding, of the ills of centuries being redressed by declarations of human rights and constitutions formed on their basis. Nor could there be any possibility of a genuine republic standing where the monarchy once stood or of the people's exercising sovereignty. For all this was no more than a pipedream, a product of human ignorance and criminal pride. Human beings can no more change their form of government or give themselves rights or create a constitution than they can change the color of their skin. Consequently, what has always been, will be, for it must be. Indeed, when God's justice is done, the monarchy of France will be stronger than ever, for it will have been purged of dross and purified

¹Joseph de Maistre, *Les considérations sur la France*, Reprinted with the permission of Simon & Schuster from *THE WORKS OF JOSEPH DE MAISTRE* by Jack Lively, translator. Copyright 1965 by Jack Lively.

by fire and the mission of France, which is the mission of the Church universal will be that much further along. In short, for Maistre, the Revolution was the great purification, the divinity employing the vilest of instruments to regenerate by punishment. And, notes Maistre, there were many to be punished, far more than one might suspect. Clearly, the countless guilty and the nature of their crimes, both public and private, could never have been adequately chastised by the limited resources of human justice. God's justice was another matter entirely.

Think of the Revolution as the Celestial Gardener pruning His trees the better to enhance the health and vigor of His orchard. Think of human blood as God's preferred fertilizer. And think of Maistre in ecstasy before each falling drop and limb...

CHAPTER I ON REVOLUTIONS

We are all bound to the throne of the Supreme Being by a flexible chain which restrains without enslaving us. The most wonderful aspect of the universal scheme of things is the action of free beings under divine guidance. Freely slaves, they act at once of their own will and under necessity: they actually do what they wish without being able to disrupt general plans. Each of them stands at the center of a sphere of activity whose diameter varies according to the decision of the *eternal geometry*, which can extend, restrict, check, or direct the will without altering its nature.

In the works of man, everything is as poor as its author; vision is confined, means are limited, scope is restricted, movements are labored, and results are humdrum. In divine works, boundless riches reveal themselves even in the smallest component; its power operates effortlessly; in its hands everything is pliant, nothing can resist it; everything is a means, nothing an obstacle; and the irregularities produced by the work of free agents come to fall into place in the general order.

If one imagines a watch all of whose springs continually vary in power, weight, dimension, form, and position, and which nevertheless invariably shows the right time, one can get some idea of the action of free beings in relation to the plans of the Creator.

In the political and moral world, as in the physical, there is a usual order and there are exceptions to this order. Normally, we see a series of effects following the same causes; but in certain ages we see usual effects suspended, causes paralyzed and new consequences emerging.

A *miracle* is an effect produced by a divine or superhuman cause which suspends or is inconsistent with an ordinary cause. If in the middle of winter a man, before a thousand witnesses, orders a tree to cover itself suddenly with leaves and fruit, and if the tree obeys, everyone will pro-

claim a miracle and prostrate themselves before the thaumaturge. But the French Revolution, as well as everything that is happening in Europe at this time, is just as miraculous in its way as the instant fructification of a tree in January; yet men ignore it or talk nonsense about it, instead of admiring. In the physical order, into which man does not intrude as a cause, he is quite ready to admire what he does not understand; but in the sphere of his own activity, where he feels he acts freely as a cause, his pride easily leads him to see *disorder* wherever his own power is suspended or upset.

Certain actions within the power of man regularly produce certain effects in the ordinary course of events; if he misses his mark, he knows, or thinks he knows, why; he recognizes the difficulties, he appreciates them, and nothing astonishes him. But in revolutionary times, the chain that binds man is shortened abruptly, his field of action is cut down, and his means deceive him. Carried along by an unknown force, he rails against it, and instead of kissing the hand that clasps him, he ignores or insults it.

I don't understand anything is the popular catchphrase. The phrase is very sensible if it leads us to the root cause of the great sight now presented to men; it is stupid if it expresses only spleen or sterile despondency. The cry is raised on all sides, "How then can the guiltiest men in the world triumph over the world? A hideous regicide has all the success for which its perpetrators could have hoped. Monarchy is dormant all over Europe. Its enemies find allies even on thrones themselves. The wicked are successful in everything. They carry through the most immense projects without difficulty, while the righteous are unfortunate and ridiculous in everything they undertake. Opinion runs against faith throughout Europe. The foremost statesmen continually fall into error. The greatest generals are humiliated. And so on."

Doubtless, because its primary condition lays it down, there are no means of preventing a revolution, and no success can attend those who wish to impede it. But never is purpose more apparent, never is Providence more palpable, than when divine replaces human action and works alone. That is what we see at this moment.

The most striking aspect of the French Revolution is this overwhelming force which turns aside all obstacles. Its current carries away like a straw everything human power has opposed to it. No one has run counter to it unpunished. Purity of motive has been able to make resistance honorable, but that is all; and this jealous force, moving inexorably to its objective,

rejects equally Charette, Dumouriez, and Drouet.

It has been said with good reason that the French Revolution leads men more than men lead it. This observation is completely justified; and, although it can be applied more or less to all great revolutions, yet it has never been more strikingly illustrated than at the present time. The very villains who appear to guide the Revolution take part in it only as simple instruments; and as soon as they aspire to dominate it, they fall ingloriously. Those who established the Republic did so without wishing it and without realizing what they were creating; they have been led by events: no plan has achieved its intended end.

Never did Robespierre, Collot, or Barère think of establishing the revolutionary government or the Reign of Terror; they were led imperceptibly by circumstances, and such a sight will never be seen again. Extremely mediocre men are exercising over a culpable nation the most heavy despotism history has seen, and, of everyone in the kingdom, they are certainly the most astonished at their power.

But at the very moment when these tyrants have committed every crime necessary to this phase of the Revolution, a breath of wind topples them. This gigantic power, before which France and Europe trembled, could not stand before the first gust; and because there could be no possible trace of greatness or dignity in such an entirely criminal revolution, Providence decreed that the first blow should be struck by the Septembrists, so that justice itself might be degraded.

It is often astonishing that the most mediocre men have judged the French Revolution better than the most talented, that they have believed in it strongly while skilled men of affairs were still unbelievers. This conviction was one of the foremost elements of the Revolution, which could succeed only because of the extent and vigor of the revolutionary spirit or, if one can so express it, because of the revolutionary *faith*. So untalented and ignorant men have ably driven what they call *the revolutionary chariot*; they have all ventured without fear of counter-revolution; they have always driven on without looking behind them; and everything has fallen into their lap because they were only the instruments of a force more farsighted than themselves. They have taken no false steps in their revolutionary career, for the same reason that the flutist of Vaucanson never played a false note.

The revolutionary current has taken successively different courses; and the most prominent revolutionary leaders have acquired the kind of power and renown appropriate to them only by following the demands of the

moment. Once they attempted to oppose it or even to turn it from its predestined course, by isolating themselves and following their own bent, they disappeared from the scene....

In short, the more one examines the apparently more active personalities of the Revolution, the more one finds something passive and mechanical about them. It cannot be too often repeated that men do not at all guide the Revolution; it is the Revolution that uses men. It is well said that it has its own impetus. This phrase shows that never has the Divinity revealed itself so clearly in any human event. If it employs the most vile instruments, it is to regenerate by punishment.

CHAPTER II THOUGHTS ON THE WAYS OF PROVIDENCE IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Every nation, like every individual, has a mission which it must fulfill. It would be futile to deny that France exercises a dominant influence over Europe, an influence she has abused most culpably. Above all, she was at the head of the religious system, and it was not without reason that her king was called *most Christian*: Bossuet has not overstressed this point. However, as she has used her influence to pervert her vocation and to demoralize Europe, it is not surprising that terrible means must be used to set her on her true course again.

It is long since such an appalling punishment has been seen, visited on so many sinners. No doubt there are innocent people among the unfortunates, but they are far fewer than is commonly imagined.

All those who have worked to separate the people from their religious beliefs; all those who have opposed metaphysical sophistries to the laws of property; all those who have said, "Attack anything, so long as we gain by it;" all those who have meddled with the fundamental laws of the state; all those who have recommended, approved, favored the violent methods used against the king; even our restricted vision can perceive that all these have willed the Revolution, and all who willed it have most appropriately been its victims.

It is frightening to see distinguished intellectuals fall under Robespierre's ax. From a humane standpoint they can never be too much mourned, but divine justice is no respecter of mathematicians or scientists. Too many French intellectuals were instrumental in bringing about the Revolution; too many approved and encouraged it so long as, like

Tarquin's wand, it cut off only the ruling heads. Like so many others, they said, *A great revolution cannot come about without some distress*. But when a thinker justifies such means by the end in view; when he says in his heart, *A hundred thousand murders are as nothing, provided we are free*; then, if Providence replies, *I accept your recommendation, but you shall be one of the victims*, where is the injustice? Would we judge otherwise in our own courts?

The details would be odious; but, among those who are called innocent victims of the Revolution, it is not much of a Frenchman whose conscience would not remind him:

*Now you see the sad fruits that your faults have produced,
You can feel the blows that you yourselves have induced.*

Our ideas on good and evil, on innocence and guilt, are too often affected by our prejudices. We frown on men who fight with daggers, but a duel with swords is considered honorable. We brand a man who steals a halfpenny from a friend, but think it nothing if he steals his wife. We pardon even if we do not make a virtue of all those flashy offenses involving great or likable qualities, above all those rewarded by success: whereas, the brilliant qualities which surround the guilty man blacken him in the eyes of true justice, for whom his greatest crime is the abuse of his gifts.

Every man has certain duties to perform, and the extent of these duties depends on his position in society and the extent of his means. The same action is by no means equally culpable when committed by two different men. Not to stray from our subject, the same act which results only from a mistake or a foolish characteristic in an obscure person, thrust suddenly into unlimited power, could be a foul crime in a bishop or a duke or a peer.

Indeed, some actions, which are excusable and even praiseworthy from an ordinary point of view, are fundamentally infinitely criminal. For example, if someone says, *I have espoused the cause of the French Revolution in good faith, through a pure love of liberty and my country; I have believed in my soul and conscience that it would lead to the reform of abuses and to the general good*, we have nothing to say in reply. But the eye of him who sees into every heart discerns the stain of sin; he discovers in a ridiculous misunderstanding, in a small puncturing of pride, in a base or criminal passion, the prime moving force behind those ambitions we wish to present to the world as noble: and for him the crime is compounded by

grafting the falsehood of hypocrisy onto treason. But let us look at the nation in general.

One of the greatest possible crimes is undoubtedly an attack upon sovereignty, no other having such terrible consequences. If sovereignty resides in one man and this man falls victim to an outrage, the crime of lese-majesty augments the atrocity. But if this sovereign has not deserved his fate through any fault of his own, if his very virtues have strengthened the guilty against him, the crime is beyond description. This is the case in the death of Louis XVI; but what is important to note is that *never has such a great crime had more accomplices*. The death of Charles I had far fewer, even though it was possible to bring charges against him that Louis XVI did not merit. Yet many proofs were given of the most tender and courageous concern for him; even the executioner, who was obliged to obey, did not dare to make himself known. But in France, Louis XVI marched to his death in the middle of 60,000 armed men who did not have a single shot for their king, not a voice was raised for the unfortunate monarch, and the provinces were as silent as the capital. *We would expose ourselves*, it was said. Frenchmen—if you find this a good reason, talk no more of your courage or admit that you misuse it!

The indifference of the army was no less remarkable. It served the executioners of the king much better than it had served the king himself since it had betrayed him. It never showed the slightest sign of discontent. In sum, never have so many taken part in such a great crime (although no doubt in varying degrees).

It is necessary to add one important remark: it is that every offense committed against sovereignty, in the name of the nation, is always to a greater or lesser degree a national crime, since it is always to some degree the fault of the nation if any faction whatever is put in a position to commit the crime in its name. Thus, although no doubt not all Frenchmen have willed the death of Louis XVI, the immense majority of the people have for more than two years willed all the follies, injustices and offenses leading up to the catastrophe of January 21st.

Now, every national crime against sovereignty is punished swiftly and terribly; that is a law without exception. Not many days after the death of Louis XVI, someone wrote in the *Mercure universel*, "Perhaps it was not necessary go to so far; but since our legislators have taken this act on their shoulders, let us rally round them: let us smother all hatreds and question it no longer." Good—it was not perhaps necessary to assassinate the king, but since the deed is done, let us talk of it no more and let us all be good

friends. What madness! Shakespeare showed more understanding when he said:

The single and peculiar life is bound,
With all the strength and armour of the mind,
To keep itself from noyance; but much more
That spirit upon whose weal depend and rest
The lives of many. The cease of majesty
Dies not alone; but, like a gulf, doth draw
What's near it with it.²

Each drop of Louis XVI's blood will cost France torrents; perhaps four million Frenchmen will pay with their lives for the great national crime of an antireligious and antisocial insurrection, crowned by a regicide.

Where are the first national guards, the first soldiers, the first generals who swore an oath to the nation? Where are the leaders, the idols of that first guilty Assembly, for whom the epithet *constituent* will stand as a perpetual epigraph? Where is Mirabeau, where is Bailly with his "beautiful day?" Where is Thouret who invented the term "to expropriate?" Where is Osselin who reported to the Assembly on the first law proscribing the émigrés? The names of revolutionary activists who have died a violent death would be numbered in the thousands.

Yet it is here that we can appreciate order in disorder; because it is evident, however little one reflects on it, that the great criminals of the Revolution can fall only under the blows of their accomplices. If force alone were to bring about what is called the *counter-revolution* and replace the king on the throne, there would be no means of doing justice. For a sensitive man, the greatest misfortune would be to judge the murderer of his father, relatives, and friends or even the usurper of his property. However, this is precisely what would happen in the case of a counter-revolution, as the word is understood, because the higher judges, by the very nature of things, would belong to the injured class, and justice, even when it was aimed only at punishment, would have the air of vengeance. Moreover, legitimate authority always retains some moderation in the punishment of crimes in which large numbers have been involved. When it executes five or six criminals for the same crime, this becomes a massacre; if it goes beyond certain limits, it becomes detestable. In short, great crimes unfortunately demand great punishments; and in this way it is easy

to pass the limits when it is a question of crimes of lese-majesty and flattery becomes the executioner. Would the sacred sword of justice have fallen as relentlessly as Robespierre's guillotine? Would all the executioners of the kingdom and every artillery horse have been summoned to Paris in order to quarter men? Would lead and tar have been melted in vast boilers to sprinkle on limbs torn by red-hot tongs? Moreover, how could different crimes be characterized? How could punishments be graduated? And above all how could punishments be imposed without laws? It might be said that *some of the most guilty would have to be chosen and all the rest would have to be pardoned*. This is precisely what Providence would not wish. Since it is omnipotent, it is ignorant of pardons produced by inability to punish. The great purification must be accomplished and eyes must be opened; the French metal, cleared of its sour and impure dross, must become cleaner and more malleable to a future king. Doubtless in times past Providence had no need to punish in order to justify its courses; but in this age, it puts itself within our range of understanding and punishes like a human tribunal.

There have been nations literally condemned to death like guilty individuals, and we can understand the reasons for this. If it was part of God's designs to reveal to us his intentions with regard to the French Revolution, we should read the chastisement of the French as if it were a legal decree. But what should we understand beyond this? Is not this chastisement apparent? Have we not seen France dishonored by a hundred thousand murders? The whole territory of this fair kingdom covered with scaffolds? And this unhappy land drenched with the blood of its children through judicial massacres, while inhuman tyrants squandered it abroad in a cruel war, sustained in their own private interests? Never has the bloodiest despot gambled with men's lives with so much insolence, and never has an apathetic people presented itself for butchering more willingly. Sword and fire, frost and famine, privations and sufferings of every kind, none of these disgust it with its punishment: everything that is laid down must accomplish its destiny: there will be no disobedience until the judgment is fulfilled.

Yet, in this cruel and disastrous war, there are points of interest, and admiration follows grief turn by turn. Let us take the most terrible epoch of the Revolution; let us suppose that, under the government of the diabolical Committee of Public Safety, the army by a startling change became suddenly royalist; let us suppose that it rallied the primary assemblies to its side and freely named the worthiest and most enlightened men to guide

²Hamlet, Act III, Scene iii. [Note of Maistre]

it in this difficult position; let us suppose, finally, that one of these representatives of the army rose and said:

"Brave and loyal soldiers, there are occasions when all human wisdom is reduced to choosing between different evils. It is no doubt hard to fight for the Committee of Public Safety, but it would be yet more disastrous to turn our arms against it. The moment the army meddles in politics, the state will be dissolved and the enemies of France, profiting from this period of disorder, will invade and divide it. We must act, not for the moment, but for the future: above all, the integrity of France must be maintained, and this we can do only by fighting for the government, whatever it may be; because by those means France, in spite of her internal dissensions, will preserve her military power and international influence. To press the point home, it is not for the government that we fight, but for France and for the future king, who will be indebted to us for an empire much greater perhaps than that found by the Revolution. It is therefore our duty to overcome the repugnance which makes us hesitate. Perhaps our contemporaries will calumniate our conduct, but posterity will do us justice."

This man would have spoken very wisely. In fact, the army has appreciated this hypothetical argument without knowing it; and the terror on the one hand and immorality and extravagance on the other, have done precisely what a consummate and almost prophetic wisdom would have dictated to the army. Fundamentally, it can be seen that, the revolutionary movement once having taken root, France and the monarchy could be saved only by Jacobinism.

The king has never had an ally; although he was never imprudent enough to state the fact, it is quite evident that the coalition had no love for French territorial integrity. However, how was the coalition to be resisted? By what supernatural means could the European conspiracy be broken? Only the evil genius of Robespierre could achieve this miracle. The revolutionary government hardened the French spirit, by drenching it in blood: it heightened soldiers' morale and doubled their power by a ferocious despair and contempt for life which derived from fury. The horror of the gallows, pushing the citizen to the frontiers, built up military strength in proportion as it destroyed the least internal resistance. Every life, all wealth, every power was in the hands of the revolutionary government; and this Leviathan, drunk with blood and success, the most appalling phenomenon ever seen and doubtless that ever will be seen, was both a frightful punishment of the French and the only means of saving France.

What were the royalists asking for when they demanded a counter-revolution such as they envisaged, that is to say, brought about suddenly and by force? They were asking for the conquest of France, and therefore for its division, the destruction of its influence and the abasement of its king, that is to say, perhaps three centuries of massacre, the inevitable result of such a breakdown of equilibrium. But our descendants, who will not bother themselves much with our sufferings and will dance on our graves, will laugh at our present ignorance; they will easily console themselves for the excesses that we have seen, and which have conserved the integrity "of the most beautiful kingdom after that of Heaven."³

It seems that all the monsters spawned by the Revolution have worked only for the monarchy. Through them, the luster of victories has won the world's admiration and has surrounded the name of France with a glory not entirely dimmed by the crimes of the Revolution; through them, the king will return to the throne with all his brilliance and power, perhaps even with an increase in power. And who knows if, instead of miserably sacrificing some of his provinces to obtain the right of ruling over the others, he will not be restored with the pride of power which gives what it can withhold? Certainly, less probable things have been seen to happen.

This same idea that everything works for the advantage of the French monarchy leads me to believe that any royalist revolution is impossible before the war ends; for the restoration of the Crown would weaken suddenly the whole machinery of the state. The black magic operating at this moment would vanish like a mist before the sun. Kindness, clemency, justice, all the gentle and peaceful virtues would suddenly reappear and bring back with them a certain general gentleness of character, a certain cheerfulness entirely opposed to the somber rigor of the revolutionary regime. No more requisitions, no more legal thefts, no more violence. Would the generals, preceded by the white flag, call *revolutionary* the inhabitants of the invaded areas who legitimately defended themselves? And would they enjoin them not to move on pain of being shot as rebels? These horrors, very useful to the future king, could not, however, be employed by him; he would then have only human means at his disposal. He would be on a level with his enemies; and what would happen at that moment of suspension which necessarily accompanies the transition from one government to another? I do not know. I am well aware that the great

³Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, Dedication to Louis XIII. [Note of Maistre]

conquests of the French seem to put the integrity of the kingdom beyond dispute. (I even intend to touch here on the reason for these conquests.) However it still appears more advantageous to France and the monarchy that peace, and a glorious peace for the French, should be achieved by the Republic, and that, when the king returns to the throne, a stable peace should remove him from every kind of danger.

On the other hand, it is clear that a violent revolution, far from curing the people, would confirm them in their errors and they would never pardon the power that snatched their dreams from them. Since it was the *people*, property speaking, or the masses, that the rebels needed to overturn France, it is evident that in general they have had to spare the people and that the heaviest burdens have had to fall first of all on the wealthy class. Thus the usurping power needs to weigh for some time on the people in order to disgust them with it. They have only seen the Revolution; they must feel it and enjoy, so to speak, its bitter consequences. Perhaps, at the moment when I write, this is not yet sufficiently the case....

Let us now glance at the outrageous persecution stirred up against the national religion and its ministers: it is one of the most interesting facets of the Revolution.

It cannot be denied that the French clergy was in need of reform; and, though I am very far from taking up the vulgar attacks on the clergy, nonetheless it appears to me incontestable that wealth, luxury, and a general tendency toward laxity had lowered this great body of men; that it was often possible to find under the surplice a man of the world rather than an apostle; and finally that, in the years immediately before the Revolution, the clergy had fallen, almost as much as the army, from the place it had occupied in public esteem.

The first blow aimed at the Church was the appropriation of its estates; the second was the constitutional oath; and these two tyrannical measures started the reformation. The oath screened the priests, if it can be so expressed. All who took it, save a few exceptions whom we can ignore, saw themselves led by stages into the abyss of crime and disgrace; opinion has only one view of these apostates.

The faithful priests, recommended to this by an initial act of firmness, won even more renown by the bravery with which they have been able to bear sufferings and even death in defense of their faith. The massacre of Carmes is comparable in its beauty to anything of this sort that ecclesiastical history can offer.

No more revolting tyranny can be imagined than that which expelled

them from their country by thousands, against all justice and decency; but on this point, as in all the others, the crimes of the French tyrants became the weapons of Providence. It was probably necessary for French priests to be shown to foreign nations; they have lived among Protestant peoples, and this closeness has greatly diminished hatreds and prejudices. The considerable migration of the clergy, and particularly of the French bishops, to England especially seems to me a remarkable event. Surely words of peace will have been spoken and schemes of rapprochement formed during this remarkable reunion. Even if only common hopes were created, this would still be a great deal. If ever Christians draw together, as everyone asks them to, it seems that the impulse must come from the Church of England. Presbyterianism was a French, and consequently an exaggerated, creation. We stand too far away from the adherents of this insubstantial religion; there are no means of communication between us. But the Anglican Church, which touches us with one hand, touches with the other those whom we cannot approach; and although, from a certain point of view, it is exposed to attacks from the two sides, and although it presents the slightly ridiculous sight of a rebel who preaches obedience, it is nevertheless very valuable from another standpoint and can be seen as a catalyst, capable of combining elements incompatible of themselves.

The property of the clergy having been dissipated, no despicable motive can for a long time to come attract new members to it: so that everything combines to revive the clergy. There is reason to believe, moreover, that the contemplation of the work with which it is charged will give to it a degree of exaltation which raises men above themselves and makes them capable of great things.

Add to these circumstances the ferment of ideas in certain European countries, the inspiring opinions of several great men, and that kind of disquiet which is affecting religious people, especially in Protestant countries, and is pushing them along unwonted paths.

Notice at the same time the storm rumbling over Italy, Rome menaced as well as Geneva by the power that wants the destruction of all sects, and the national supremacy of religion abolished in Holland by a decree of the National Convention. If Providence *deletes*, it is no doubt in order to *rewrite*.

I notice that when the great systems of belief have established themselves in the world, they have been favored by great conquests in the formation of great sovereignties, and the reason can clearly be seen.

How indeed have these remarkable schemes which have baffled all

human foresight come about in one day? In truth, there is a temptation to believe that political revolution is only a secondary object of the great plan which is developing before our eyes with such terrible majesty.

I talked, at the beginning, of the leadership that France exercises over the rest of Europe. Providence, which always fits means to ends and gives to nations, as to individuals, the instruments necessary to accomplish their destiny, has in this way given to the French nation two weapons and, so to speak, two hands with which to mold the world, its language and the spirit of proselytism that forms the core of its character; so that it has always the ability and the wish to influence other men.

The power, I almost said the *royalty*, of the French language is apparent; this cannot be seriously disputed. As for the spirit of proselytism, it is as obvious as the sun; from the dress designer to the philosopher, it is the foremost trait of the national character.

This proselytism is commonly ridiculed, and really it often merits it, particularly in the forms it takes, but fundamentally it has a *function*.

It is a constant law of the moral world that every *function* produces a duty. The Gallican Church was the cornerstone of the Catholic system or, more properly, since there is in truth only one system, the Christian system. Although perhaps they doubt it, the Churches opposing the universal church exist only by virtue of it, being like those parasitic plants, those sterile mistletoes which draw their nurture from and weaken the tree that supports them.

From the fact that the action and reaction of opposing powers is always equal, the greatest efforts of the goddess of Reason against Christianity were Made in France; the enemy attacked the citadel.

The French clergy should not therefore fall asleep; it has a thousand reasons for believing that it is called to a high destiny; and the same arguments that show it why it is suffering allow it also to believe itself fated for a crucial task.

In a word, if a moral revolution does not occur in Europe, if religious feeling is not strengthened in this part of the world, the social bond will be destroyed. Nothing can be predicted, and anything may be expected. But if any change for the better does come, either analogies, induction, and conjectural skills are useless or else it is France that is called to produce the change.

This is above all what leads me to believe that the French Revolution is a watershed in history and that its consequences of every kind will be felt far beyond the time of its outburst and the limits of its birthplace.

Political considerations confirm this view. How many European powers have deceived themselves over France! How many have dreamed up vain endeavors! You who think yourselves free because you have no judges on this earth, never say: *This suits me*; DISCITE JUSTITIAM MONITI! What hand, at once severe and paternal, scourged France with every imaginable plague, and held sway with supernatural means by turning every effort of its engines against themselves? Let no one come to speak to us of assignats and the power of numbers, for the possibility of assignats and of the power of numbers is itself the work of the supernatural. Moreover it is neither through paper money nor through numerical advantage that the winds guided the French ships and thrust back those of their enemies; that winter gave the French bridges of ice just when they needed them; that kings who impede them die conveniently; that they invade Italy without artillery and that the most reputedly brave armies of the world, although equal in number, throw down their arms and allow themselves to be taken captives....

In fact, the punishment of the French breaks all the ordinary rules, as does also the protection accorded to France: but these two miracles combined serve to reinforce one another, and present one of the most astonishing sights of human history.

As events unfold, other and more wonderful reasons and relationships will show themselves. Moreover, I see only a fraction of those which a more perceptive insight could have discovered at this time.

The horrible effusion of human blood caused by this great upheaval is a terrible means, yet it is a means as much as a punishment, and can give rise to some interesting reflections.

CHAPTER III OF THE VIOLENT DESTRUCTION OF HUMANITY

Unhappily, that king of Dahomey, in the interior of Africa, was not so very wrong when he said a short time ago to an Englishman; *God made the world for war; all kingdoms, both great and small, have indulged in it at all times, although on different principles.*⁴

History proves unfortunately that war is in a sense the habitual condition of mankind, that is to say that human blood must constantly flow

⁴ Archibald Dalzel, "The History of Dahomey," *Bibliothèque Britannique*, May, 1796, Vol. II, No. 1, p. 87.

somewhere or other on earth; and that for every nation peace is no more than a respite.

The closing of the temple of Janus under Augustus can be cited, as also can the one year in the stormy reign of Charlemagne (the year 790) when there was no war. There can be quoted a short period after the Peace of Ryswick in 1697, and another equally short after the Peace of Carlowitz in 1699, in which there was peace, not only throughout Europe but even in the whole of the known world. But these periods are only isolated exceptions. And who can know what is happening over the whole globe at a given time?

The century which is ending started for France with a bloody war which ended only in 1714 with the Treaty of Rastadt. In 1719, France declared war on Spain; the Treaty of Paris put an end to it in 1727. The election to the Polish throne rekindled war in 1733; peace came in 1736. Four years later, the terrible war of the Austrian Succession broke out and lasted without break until 1748. Eight years of peace started to heal the wounds of eight years of war, when English ambition forced France to take up arms. The Seven Years' War is only too well known. After fifteen years' respite, the American Revolution dragged France once more into a war whose consequences no human wisdom could have foreseen. Peace was signed in 1782; seven years later, the Revolution started; it has lasted to this day and has so far cost France three million men.

Thus, looking at France alone, here are forty years of war out of ninety-six. If some nations have been more fortunate, others have been much less so.

But it is not enough to consider one point in time and one place on earth; a quick glance should be thrown on that long sequence of massacres which has soiled every page of history. War has raged ceaselessly like a persistent fever marked by terrifying crises....

If one goes back to the childhood of nations or if one comes down to our own day, if one looks at societies in every possible stage of development from barbarism to the most advanced civilization, war will always be found. Through this primary cause and all the others connected with it, the spilling of human blood has never ceased on earth. At one time it flows thinly over a wide area, at another it flows fast in a restricted area, so that it remains about constant. But occasionally unusual events come about which augment the flow prodigiously, like the Punic Wars, the Triumvirates, the victories of Caesar, the barbarian invasions, the Crusades, the wars of religion, the Spanish Succession, the French Revolution, and so on.

If tables of massacre were available like meteorological tables, who knows if some law might not be discovered after centuries of observation? Buffon as very clearly shown that a great member of animals are destined for a violent death. He could apparently have extended this argument to man; but the facts speak for themselves.

There is, moreover, good reason for doubting if this violent destruction is in general as great an evil as is believed; at least, it is one of those evils that play a part in an order of things in which everything is violent and *against nature* and which has its compensations. First, when the human spirit has lost its resilience through indolence, incredulity, and the gangrenous vices that follow an excess of civilization, it can be retempered only in blood. It is far from easy to explain why war produces different effects in different circumstances. What is sufficiently clear is that humanity can be considered as a tree that an invisible hand is continually pruning, often to its benefit. In fact, if its trunk is hacked or if it is pruned badly, a tree can die, but who knows the limits for the human tree? What we do know is that a great deal of bloodshed is often connected with a high population, as has been seen particularly in the ancient Greek republics and in Spain under Arab domination. The platitudes on war mean nothing: no great intelligence is needed to know that the more men killed, the fewer at that moment remain, just as the more branches are cut, the fewer remain on the tree. It is the results of the operation that must be considered. However, to stick to the comparison, the skilled gardener prunes less to ensure growth as such than to ensure the fructification of the tree; he requires fruit, and not wood or leaves from the plant. Now the true fruits of human nature—the arts, sciences, great enterprises, noble ideas, manly virtues—spring above all from the state of war. It is well known that nations reach the apex of the greatness of which they are capable only after long and bloody wars. Thus the most glorious hour of the Greeks was the terrible era of the Peloponnesian War; the Age of Augustus followed immediately the civil war and proscriptions; the French genius was roughhewn by the League and polished by the Fronde; all the great men of the age of Queen Anne were born amidst political upheavals. In a word, it could be said that blood is the manure of that plant we call *genius*.

I am not sure if those who claim that *the arts are the friends of peace* know what they are saying. At the least, this proposition would have to be explained and limited; because I see nothing in the least peaceful in the ages of Alexander and Pericles, of Augustus, of Leo X and Francis I, of Louis XIV and Queen Anne.

Is it possible that the spilling of human blood has not had a great cause and great effects? Let us reflect on it; history and myth, the discoveries of modern psychology and ancient traditions, unite to provide materials for these reflections. We should not be more ashamed to proceed cautiously on this point than on a thousand others less relevant to man. Let us still thunder against war and try to turn sovereigns from it, but let us not share the imaginings of Condorcet, the philosopher so dear to the Revolution, who spent his life preparing the "perfection" we now possess, benignly leaving the future to our ancestors. There is only one way of restraining the scourge of war, and that is by restraining the disorders that lead to this terrible purification....

I know very well that, in all these discussions, we are assailed continually with the wearisome picture of the innocents who perish with the guilty. But, without penetrating far into this extremely profound question, it can be considered solely in its relation to the universally held dogma, as old as the world itself, *that the innocent suffer for the benefit of the guilty*.

It seems to me that it was from this dogma that the ancients derived the custom of sacrifices that they practiced throughout the world and that they judged useful not only to the living but still more to the dead, a typical custom that habit has made us regard without astonishment, but whose roots are nonetheless difficult to trace.

The self-sacrifices, so famous in antiquity, spring again from the same dogma. Decius believed that the sacrifice of his life would be accepted by the Divinity and that he could redress the balance for all the evils that threatened his country.

Christianity consecrated this dogma, which is completely natural to men, although it appears difficult to arrive at by reasoning.

Thus, there could have been in the heart of Louis XVI, in that of the saintly Elizabeth, such an impulse, an acceptance, capable of saving France.

It is sometimes asked what the purpose is of those harsh austerities practiced by certain religious orders, which are also self-sacrifices; it might as well be asked what the purpose of Christianity is, since it is wholly an extension of the same doctrine of innocence paying for crime.

The authority approving these orders chooses certain men and *isolates* them to make them into *guides*.

There is nothing but violence in the world; but we are tainted by modern philosophy which has taught us that *all is good*, whereas evil has polluted everything and in a very real sense *all is evil*, since nothing is in

its proper place. The keynote of the system of our creation being lowered, the whole melody is lowered in proportion, following the rules of harmony. *The whole of creation bemoans its fate*⁵ and strives, with effort and grief, for a new order of things.

Observers of great human tragedies must be led to these sad conclusions, but let us not lose our courage; there is no punishment which does not purify, no disorder which the ETERNAL LOVE does not turn against the principle of evil. It is refreshing amid general upheaval to get a glimpse of the plans of Divinity. Never shall we see the whole scheme of things in our voyage through life, and we shall often mislead ourselves, but in every possible science, except the exact sciences, are we not reduced to conjecture? And if our conjectures are plausible, if we can find an analogy for them, if they rest on universally accepted ideas, above all if they console us and make us better men, what do they lack? If they are not true, they are good; or more accurately, since they are good, are they not true?

Having looked at the French Revolution from a purely moral point of view, I shall turn my attention to politics, without, however, forgetting the primary aim of my work.

CHAPTER IV

CAN THE FRENCH REPUBLIC LAST?

It would be better to put a different question: *Can the Republic exist?* This is assumed much too quickly, and the preliminary question seems justified, for nature and history agree that a great and indivisible republic is an impossibility. A small number of republicans contained within the walls of a town can no doubt rule over millions of subjects, as was the case with Rome, but there cannot exist a great free nation under a republican form of government. This is so clear in itself that theory can dispense with experience; but experience, which decides every question in politics as in science, is here in perfect accord with theory.

What arguments have been put to Frenchmen to persuade them that a republic of twenty-four million people is possible? Only two: (1) There is nothing to prevent something being created that has never been known before; (2) the discovery of the representative system allows us to do things which our predecessors could not do. Let us examine the force of

⁵Romans 8:22. [Note of Maistre]

these two arguments.

If it was said to us that a dice, thrown a hundred million times, always showed only the five numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, could we believe that there was a 6 on one of its faces? The answer is undoubtedly no; and it would be obvious to us as if we had actually seen it that one of the six faces was blank or that one of the numbers had been duplicated.

Very well, if we look at history, we shall see what is called *Fortune* throwing dice endlessly for four thousand years: has it ever brought a GREAT REPUBLIC? No. Therefore this *number* was not on the dice.

If the world had witnessed the successive growth of new forms of government, we would have no right to claim that such and such a form is impossible just because it has never been known; but the contrary is the case. Monarchies have always been known, and republics have sometimes been known. If one wishes to enter into subdivisions, one can call *democracy* the government in which the masses exercise sovereignty and *aristocracy* that in which sovereignty belongs to a more or less restricted number of privileged families.

That is the end of the matter.

The comparison with the dice is therefore perfectly exact: the same numbers having always been thrown from the dice box of fortune, we are allowed by the theory of probabilities to maintain that there are no others.

Let us not confuse the essences of things with their modifications; the first are unalterable and always recur; the second change and alter the picture a little, at least for the multitude; for every practiced eye easily sees through the changing garb in which eternal nature dresses according to time and place....

Thus, there is nothing new, and a great republic is impossible, since there has never been a great republic.

As for the representative system, by which it is believed the problem can be resolved, I feel tempted to digress, if the reader will pardon me.

Let us begin by pointing out that this system is by no means a modern discovery, but a *product*, or more properly a *part*, of feudal government, when it reached that point of maturity and balance which made it, on the whole, the most perfect in the world.

Having formed the local communities, the royal authority called them to the national assemblies; they could appear there only through deputies, and from this arose the representative system. . . .

One would have to have very little insight into what Bacon called *interiora rerum* to believe that men could have achieved such institutions

by an anterior process of reasoning and that such institutions could be the product of deliberation.

Moreover, national representation is by no means peculiar to England: it is found in every European monarchy, but it is living in Great Britain, whereas elsewhere it is dead or dying. It is no part of the plan of this small work to consider if its suspension works to the harm of humanity and if it would be advisable to draw nearer to the old forms. It is sufficient to point out from history: (1) that in England, where national representation has gained and retained more power than anywhere else, there is no mention of it before the middle of the thirteenth century; (2) that it was not an invention, or the product of deliberation, or the result of the action of the people making use of its ancient rights; but that in reality an ambitious soldier, to satisfy his own designs, created the balance of the three powers after the Battle of Lewes, without knowing what he was doing, as always happens; (3) that not only was the calling of the commons to the national council a concession of the monarch, but that in the beginning the king named the representatives of the counties, cities, and boroughs; (4) that, even after the local communities had assumed the right of naming their representatives in Parliament during Edward I's journey in Palestine, they had there only a consultative voice; that they presented their grievances, like the Estates-General in France; and that concessions by the Crown following from their petitions were always *Granted by the king and his spiritual and temporal lords, on the humble prayers of the Commons*; (5) finally that the co-legislative power attributed to the House of Commons is still very new since it goes back at the most to the mid-fifteenth century.

If, therefore, the term "national representation" is taken to mean a *certain* number of representatives sent by *certain men*, taken from *certain* towns or boroughs, by virtue of an old concession by the sovereign, there is no dispute, for such a government exists—it is England.

But if it is intended that *all* the people should be represented, that they can be represented only by virtue of a mandate,⁶ and that every citizen is capable of giving or receiving these mandates, with a few physically and

⁶Through bad faith or inattention, it is fairly often assumed that a *proxy* alone can be *representative*. This is an error. Every day in the courts, children, the insane and absentees are represented by men who derive their mandate solely from the law. Now the *people* unite to a high degree the three qualities, for it is always a *child*, always *foolish*, always *absent*. Why then can its *guardians* not dispense with its mandates? [Note of Maistre]

morally inevitable exceptions; and if it is still more intended to add to such a system the abolition of all hereditary distinctions and offices, this representation is a thing that has never been seen and that will never be successful.

America is often cited to us: I know nothing so provoking as the praise showered on this babe-in-arms: let it grow.

But to bring as much light as possible into this discussion, it should be pointed out that the supporters of the French Republic are obliged to prove, not only that *perfected* representation (as they put it) is possible and desirable, but also that the people can by these means retain its sovereignty (as they also put it) and form as a whole a republic. This is the crux of the matter, for if the *Republic* is in the capital and the rest of France is *subject* to the Republic, it is not accountable to the *sovereign people*.

The committee that was last charged with devising a method for revising the third estate put the French population at thirty millions. Let us accept this number and assume that France retains its conquests. By the terms of the constitution, every year two hundred and fifty people leave the legislature and should be replaced by two hundred and fifty others. It follows that, if the fifteen million men (implied by this total population) were immortal, capable of being representatives, and nominated in strict rotation, each Frenchman would come to exercise in time the national sovereignty every sixty thousand years.

Since, however, it must be admitted that men will die from time to time in such a period, that moreover some men will be reelected and that a good number of individuals by nature and good sense will always be incapable of representing the nation, the imagination boggles at the enormous number of sovereigns condemned to die without having reigned.

Rousseau held that the *national will cannot be delegated*; one is free to agree or disagree, and to wrangle for a thousand years on these academic questions. But what is certain is that the representative system is completely incompatible with the exercise of sovereignty, above all under the French system in which popular rights are limited to electing electors, in which not only can the people not impose specific mandates on their representatives but also the law takes care to break any relationship between representatives and their respective constituencies by warning them that *they are by no means representatives of those who have elected them*, but of the *nation*, a splendid and extremely convenient word since one can make of it whatever one wishes. In short, it is impossible to conceive a constitutional code better calculated to destroy the rights of the people.

Thus that vile Jacobin conspirator was nevertheless quite right when he asserted roundly during a judicial inquiry: "*I believe the present government to be a usurper of authority, a violator of all the rights of the people, whom it has reduced to the most deplorable slavery. It is a dreadful system aimed at the happiness of a small number and founded on the oppression of the masses. The people are so muzzled, so bound in chains by this aristocratic government, that it is becoming more difficult than ever for them to break them.*"⁷

What does this empty benefit of representation mean for the *nation* when it is involved so indirectly and when millions of individuals will never participate? Are sovereignty and government any less alien to them?

But, it has been said in reply, what does it matter to the nation that representation is a vain honor, if this system establishes public liberty?

This is irrelevant, for the question is not whether the French people can be *free* under the constitution that has been given to it, but whether it can be *sovereign*. The question is changed to avoid the argument. Let us begin by leaving out the exercise of sovereignty and insist on the fundamental point that the sovereign will always be in Paris, that the whole fuss about representation means nothing, that the *people* remain quite alien to government, that they are subject to government more than in a monarchy, and that a *great republic* is as self-contradictory as a *squared circle*. For both can be demonstrated with mathematical precision.

So the question is reduced to deciding if it is in the interest of the French people to be subject to an executive directory and two councils instituted according to the 1795 constitution rather than to a king ruling according to ancient forms.

It is very much less difficult to resolve a problem than to pose it.

It is necessary to dismiss this word *republic* and to talk only of the government. I shall not discuss whether it is capable of acting for the general happiness; the French can judge this well enough! Let us see only if, such as it is and whatever name is given to it, it can last.

Let us first of all raise ourselves to the height that befits intelligent beings and, from this elevated viewpoint, consider the origin of this government.

Evil has nothing in common with life; it cannot create, since its power is purely negative. *Evil is a fissure in being; it has no reality.*

⁷See the interrogation of Babeuf, June, 1796.

What distinguishes the French Revolution and what makes it an event unique in history is that it is radically *evil*; no element of good relieves the picture it presents; it reaches the highest point of corruption ever known; it is pure impurity.

In what scene of history can be found so many vices acting at once on the same stage, such an appalling combination of baseness and cruelty, such profound immorality, such a disdain for all decency?

The age in which liberty grows has such striking characteristics that it is impossible to mistake it. In such a period, love of country is a religion and respect for laws a superstition; individuality is outstanding, general habits of life are austere, every virtue flourishes at once, parties work for the good of the country since they fight only for the honor of serving it; everything, even crime, carries the imprint of grandeur.

If this picture is compared to that offered by France, how can one believe in the continuance of a liberty which grows from a canker? Or more exactly, how can one believe that this liberty can be born (for it still does not exist) and that from the heart of the most loathsome corruption can emerge that form of government that requires virtues more than any other. Listening to these so-called republicans talk of liberty and virtue is like seeing a faded courtesan playing the virgin with blushes of rouge....

No doubt the French Revolution has gone through a number of different phases, yet its general character has never varied, and even at birth it showed everything it was destined to become. There was a certain inexplicable delirium, a blind impetuosity, a shameful contempt for all human decency, an immorality of a new kind that jested about its crimes, above all an insolent prostitution of reasoning and of all those words designed to express ideas of justice and virtue....

Can there then emerge from this bloodstained mire a durable government? It is not a valid objection that ferocious and licentious barbarian peoples have nevertheless become civilized, for no doubt ignorant barbarism has been the seedbed for a number of political systems, but clever barbarism, systematic atrocity, calculated corruption, and above all irreligion have never produced anything. Greenness leads to maturity; decay leads to nothing.

Has there ever been seen, moreover, a government, and more particularly a free constitution, started in spite of its members and dispensing with their consent? Yet this is the sight that would be presented to us by this meteor called the *French Republic* if it could last. This government is thought to be strong because it is violent, but strength differs from violence

as much as from weakness, and this government's astonishing method of operation at this time furnishes of itself sufficient proof that it cannot endure for long. The French nation does not *want* this government, it *suffers* it, and remains submissive either because it cannot shake it off or because it fears something worse. The Republic rests only on these two unsure foundations; it can be said that it relies entirely on two negatives. It is also very remarkable that the apologists of the Republic are not at all keen to show the benefits this government brings, feeling rightly that this is the weak spot in their armor. They say only, as boldly as they can, that it is possible; and, passing as lightly over this argument as if it were hot coals, they want solely to show the French that they will expose themselves to the gravest dangers if they return to their old government. It is on this topic they become eloquent; they never stop talking of the evils of revolution. If pressed, they are the kind of people to admit that those who created the present government committed a crime provided it is conceded that it is unnecessary to start a new revolution. They throw themselves at the feet of the French nation; they beg it to guard the Republic. Everything they say about the stability of the government seems to be the result not of reasoned convictions but of fanciful hopes...

[...] CHAPTER VI

OF THE DIVINE INFLUENCE IN POLITICAL CONSTITUTIONS

Man can modify everything in the sphere of his activity, but he creates nothing: Such is the law binding him in the physical as in the moral world.

No doubt a man can plant a seed, raise a tree, perfect it by grafting, and prune it in a hundred ways, but never has he imagined that he can make a tree.

How has he thought that he has the power to make a constitution? Was it through experience? See what it can teach us.

All free constitutions known to the world took form in one of two ways. Sometimes they *germinated*, as it were, in an imperceptible way by the combination of a host of circumstances that we call fortuitous, and sometimes they have a single author who appears like a freak of nature and enforces obedience.

In these two assumptions can be seen the signs by which God warns us of our weakness and of the right he has reserved to himself in the formation of governments.

1. No government results from a deliberation; popular rights are never

written, or at least constitutive acts or written fundamental laws are always only declaratory statements of anterior rights, of which nothing can be said other than that they exist because they exist.

2. God, not having judged it proper to employ supernatural means in this field, has limited himself to human means of action, so that in the formation of constitutions circumstances are all and men are only part of the circumstances. Fairly often, even, in pursuing one object they achieve another, as we have seen in the English constitution.

3. The rights of the *people*, properly speaking, start fairly often from a concession by sovereigns, and in this case they can be established historically; but the rights of the sovereign and of the aristocracy, at least their essential rights, those that are constitutive and basic, have neither date nor author.

4. Even the concessions of the sovereign have always been preceded by a state of affairs that made them necessary and that did not depend on him.

5. Although written laws are always only declarations of anterior rights, yet it is very far from true that everything that can be written is; there is even in every constitution always something that cannot be written, and that must be left behind a dark and impenetrable cloud on pain of overturning the state.

6. The more that is written, the weaker is the institution, the reason being clear. Laws are only declarations of rights, and rights are not declared except when they are attacked, so that the multiplicity of written constitutional laws shows only the multiplicity of conflicts and the danger of destruction.

This is why the most vigorous political system in the ancient world was that of Sparta, in which nothing was written.

7. No nation can give itself liberty if it has not it already. Its laws are made when it begins to reflect on itself. Human influence does not extend beyond the development of rights already in existence but disregarded or disputed. If imprudent men step beyond these limits by foolhardy reforms, the nation loses what it had without gaining what it hopes for. In consequence, it is necessary to innovate only rarely and always moderately and cautiously.

8. When Providence has decreed the more rapid formation of a political constitution, a man appears invested with indefinable powers: he speaks and exacts obedience: but these heroes belong perhaps only to the ancient world and the youth of nations. However that may be, the distinctive

characteristic of these legislators is that they are kings or high nobles; there is and can be no exception to this....

9. Even these legislators with their exceptional powers simply bring together preexisting elements in the customs and character of a people; but this gathering together and rapid formation which seem to be creative are carried out only in the name of the Divinity. Politics and religion start together: it is difficult to separate the legislator from the priest, and his public institutions consist principally in *ceremonies and religious holidays*.

10. In one sense, liberty has always been a gift of kings, since all free nations have been constituted by kings. This is the general rule, under which the apparent exceptions that could be pointed out will fall if they were argued out.

11. No free nation has existed which has not had in its natural constitution germs of liberty as old as itself, and no nation has ever succeeded in developing by written constitutional laws rights other than those present in its natural constitution.

12. No assembly of men whatever can create a nation; all the *Bedlams* in the world could not produce anything more absurd or extravagant than such an enterprise.

To prove this proposition in detail, after what I have said, would, it seems to me, be disrespectful to the wise and over-respectful to the foolish.

13. I have spoken of the basic characteristic of true legislators; another very striking feature, on which it would be easy to write a whole book, is that they are never what are called *intellectuals*; they do not write; they act on instinct and impulse more than on reasoning, and they have no means of acting other than a certain moral force that bends men's wills as the wind bends a field of corn.

In showing that this observation is only the corollary of a general truth of the greatest importance, I could say some interesting things, but I am afraid of digressing too much: I want rather to omit the intermediary arguments and simply to state conclusions.

There is the same difference between political theory and constitutional laws as there is between poetics and poetry. The famous Montesquieu is to Lycurgus in the intellectual hierarchy what Batteux is to Homer or Racine.

Moreover, these two talents positively exclude each other, as is shown by the example of Locke, who floundered hopelessly when he took it into his head to give laws to the Americans.

I have heard an ardent supporter of the Republic seriously lamenting

that the French had not seen in the works of Hume a piece entitled *Plan for a Perfect Republic—O coecae hominum mentes!* You cannot be sure that an ordinary man of good sense has not the making of a legislator, even if he has never shown in any way any external sign of superiority. There is no reason for a firm opinion either way; but as far as men like Bacon, Locke, and Montesquieu are concerned, you can be perfectly sure without hesitation that they have no such ability, for it is excluded by the talent they do possess.

The application to the French constitution of the principles I have just set out is perfectly clear, but it is useful to look more closely at it from a particular viewpoint.

The greatest enemies of the French Revolution must freely admit that the commission of eleven which produced the last constitution has apparently more intelligence than its work and that perhaps it has done all it could do. It worked on incalculable materials, which did not allow it to act on principle; although these "powers" are divided only by a wall, the division of powers is of itself still a splendid victory over the prejudices of the moment.

But it is not only a matter of the intrinsic merits of the constitution. It is no part of my purpose to seek out the particular fruits which show us that it cannot last; moreover, everything has been said on this point. I shall point out only the error of the theory on which this constitution is based and which has misled the French from the beginning of their Revolution.

The 1795 constitution, like its predecessors, was made for *man*. But there is no such thing as *man* in the world. During my life, I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, and so on; thanks to Montesquieu, I even know that one can be *Persian*; but I must say, as for *man*, I have never come across him anywhere; if he exists, he is completely unknown to me.

Is there a single country in the world in which there is a council of five hundred, a council of elders, and five leaders? Such a constitution may be offered to every human association from China to Geneva. But a constitution that is made for all nations is made for none: it is a pure abstraction, an academic exercise of the mind, according to some hypothetical ideal, that should be addressed to *man*, in whatever imaginary realm he inhabits.

Is not a constitution a solution to the following problem: *Given the population, customs, religion, geographical situation, political relations, wealth, good and bad qualities of a particular nation, to find the laws which suit it?*

Yet this problem is not even approached in the 1795 constitution, which

was aimed solely at *man*.

Thus every imaginable reason combines to show that this enterprise has not the divine blessing. It is no more than a schoolboy's exercise.

Already at this moment, how many signs of decay does it reveal!

[...] CHAPTER IX

HOW WILL THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION COME ABOUT IF IT HAPPENS?

When men form theories about counter-revolution, they too often make the mistake of arguing as if this counter-revolution should and could only be the result of some popular deliberation. *The people are afraid*, it is said; *the people want, the people will never consent, it is not agreeable to the people*, and so on. It is a pity, but the people count for nothing in revolutions, or at least they play a part only as a passive instrument. Perhaps four or five people will give France a king.... If the monarchy is restored, the people will no more decree its restoration than they decreed its downfall or the establishment of the revolutionary government.

I beg men to dwell on these thoughts, and I recommend them particularly to those who believe revolution to be impossible because there are too many Frenchmen attached to the Republic and because a change would cause suffering to too many men.... It can certainly be contested that the Republic has the support of the majority, but, whether or not this is the case, it does not matter in the least. Enthusiasm and fanaticism are not durable states. The human palate soon tires of this heady wine; so that, even supposing that a people, and particularly the French people, can will something continually, it is at least certain that they cannot will it ardently. On the contrary, once the fever has abated, despondency, apathy, and indifference always follow great bursts of enthusiasm. This is the case with France, which no longer desires anything strongly except tranquillity. Therefore even if it is assumed that there is a republican majority in France (which is indubitably false), what does it matter? When the king presents himself, certainly heads will not be counted and no one will object, first, because even those who prefer the Republic to monarchy still prefer tranquillity to the Republic, and then because those opposing royalty will not be able to join forces.

In politics is in mechanics, theory goes astray if it does not take into account the different qualities of the materials that make up *machines*. At first sight, for example, it seems true that *the previous consent of the*

French is necessary to the restoration of the monarchy. Yet nothing could be more false....

God has warned us that he has reserved the formation of sovereignties to himself by never entrusting the choice of their masters to the masses. Never do they get what they want; they always accept, they never choose. If the phrase is excused, it could even be called an *affectation* of Providence that the very attempts of a nation to attain its objects are the Providential means of frustrating it. Thus the Roman people gave itself masters whilst thinking it was struggling against the aristocracy following Caesar. This is the epitome of all popular insurrections. In the French Revolution, the people have continually been enslaved, insulted, exploited, mutilated by every faction, and these factions in their turn, playthings all of them, have continually drifted with the stream, in spite of all their efforts, to break up finally against the reefs awaiting them.

But if one wants to predict the probable result of time, it is enough to examine what unites all the factions. All of them have aimed at the degradation, even the destruction, of the universal Church and of monarchy, *from which it follows* that all their efforts will end in the glorification of Christianity and the monarchy.

Everyone who has written on or thought about history has admired the secret force that makes game of human plans.... But it is especially in the establishment and the overthrow of sovereignties that the working of Providence shows itself in the most striking manner. Not only do peoples as a whole participate in historical movements only like wood and rope used by a workman, but even their leaders are leaders only to inexperienced eyes: in fact, they are ruled just as they rule the people. These men who, taken together, seem the tyrants of the multitudes are themselves tyrannized by two or three men, who are tyrannized by one. And if this single individual could and would tell his secret, it would be seen that he himself does not know how he has seized power, that his influence is a greater mystery to him than to others, and that circumstances he was unable either to foresee or bring about have done everything for him and without him....

No nation can give itself a government; only, when such and such a right exists in its constitution and this right is unrecognized or suppressed, some men, aided by circumstances, can brush aside obstacles and get the rights of the people recognized. Human power extends no further....