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### **The Philosophy of History and the Philosophy of Religions in the work of Edgar Quinet**

Crossley, Evan

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The Philosophy of History and the  
Philosophy of Religions in the work of  
EDGAR QUINET

Evan Ceri David Crossley

Bangor University

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## SUMMARY

This thesis aims to give an account of the general movement of Quinet's religious and historical thought. The approach is broadly chronological. Biographical detail, however, is kept to a necessary minimum. Emphasis is placed upon the centrality of the religious dimension but at the same time attention is paid both to Quinet's own poetic production and to those publications in which he deals with aesthetic, political, social and more general philosophical matters. The underlying contention is that despite the seeming diversity of the topics under discussion the author remains fundamentally concerned with two subjects: history and religion. The major issues raised are those of the relationship between man and nature, between the individual and the collectivity and between man and God. The first three chapters cover the period before Quinet's departure into exile in 1851. Aspects of his work considered in detail include: his interpretation of the history of religions, his views on the contemporary condition of Christianity and his contribution to the debate concerning the existence of the historical Homer. Particular attention is given to a discussion of his conception of the messianic destiny of the French nation. Chapters four to six look at the development of Quinet's thought between 1851 and his death in 1875. The major concerns of these chapters are his interpretation of the meaning of the French Revolution, his struggle in difficult circumstances to retain his belief in the historical mission of the French nation and his attempt to reconcile recent developments in evolutionary theory with his own faith in freedom.



## INTRODUCTION

Throughout his writings Quinet attempts to impart a meaning to the unfolding of history. Is history the work of God or of man? Of the individual or of the collectivity? Of freedom or of necessity? Until the very end of his life he struggles to provide satisfactory answers to these questions which in turn raise further important issues concerning the relationship between man and nature, between the individual and humanity, and between man and God.

From the outset, however, it must be realised that Quinet's search for a purpose in history does not exist in isolation from his general diagnosis of the spiritual ills of contemporary Western society. The study of the past is not a disinterested activity. More often the hope persists that by means of our understanding of history we may both foresee the future and explain the present. Karl Löwith remarks that the historical consciousness, despite its object of knowing the thought of other men and other times, "cannot but start with itself".<sup>(1)</sup> What is particularly significant in Quinet's case is his conviction that he is living at a time of transition, characterised by profound religious doubt and uncertainty. The present is a time of crisis but this itself may be a sign that a great spiritual transformation is beginning: "l'humanité est sourdement travaillée dans ses entrailles comme si elle allait enfanter un Dieu".<sup>(2)</sup> This mood is successfully rendered in *Ahasvérus* (1833) and *Prométhée* (1838). Traditional Christianity is deemed incapable of providing a solution to the spiritual crisis of the nineteenth century. A new religion, or at very least a radical transformation of Christianity, is required. In this context the anguished cry of the Wandering Jew reflects the spiritual condition of his creator:

Pour me rendre le repos, c'est une religion  
nouvelle qu'il me faudrait, où personne n'aurait  
encore puisé. C'est elle que je cherche. C'est  
là seulement que je pourrai abreuver la soif  
infinie qui me dévore.<sup>(3)</sup>

Many French writers, thinkers and poets of Quinet's generation would have accepted that their time was one of crisis and transition. The idea was extremely widespread and it is difficult to underestimate its importance. In *Les Chants du crépuscule* (1835) Hugo depicts the character of this "époque livrée à l'attente et à la transition".<sup>(4)</sup> Ballanche, for his part, refers to the present as "un âge de crise pour la société, une ère nouvelle de l'esprit humain".<sup>(5)</sup> The Saint-Simonian distinction between organic and critical periods in many ways reflects the same mood. Transition, however, only has a meaning

within a wider context of change and movement. The first half of the nineteenth century understood history as a developing, unfolding process. This conception of history produced a new explanation of human nature itself. The historicity of human existence became central.(6) E. Bréhier writes that this attitude found its clearest expression in the philosophy of Hegel:

[...] l'être humain ne se définit que chargé d'histoire, et l'on n'atteindra pas l'humanité par une abstraction qui la dépouille de tout son acquis, mais au contraire par la loi même de cette acquisition qui la fait peu à peu ce qu'elle est. Ce trait de la pensée hégélienne est universel à cette époque: toute connaissance est médiate; elle n'a lieu qu'en réfléchissant le devenir qui l'a produit. [...] on n'étudiera ni la nature ni l'homme indépendamment de leur devenir; ils ne sont réels, substantiels que grâce à la suite des états par où ils ont passé.(7)

Hegel himself, it is to be noted, provides a celebrated example of the theme of transition in the preface to *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807):

[...] it is not difficult to see that our epoch is a birth-time, and a period of transition. The spirit of the age has broken with the world as it has hitherto existed, and with the old ways of thinking, and is in the mind to let them all sink into the depths of the past and to set about its own transformation.(8)

Despite the differences which separated thinkers such as Hegel, Quinet, Michelet and Comte they all shared certain assumptions concerning the nature of history. History was envisaged as a dynamic process which contained a number of stages and progressed towards a desired goal. Many, like Buchez, held that ideas governed history and believed that laws could be deduced from the study of the past in the light of which the future evolution of mankind could be foreseen. For some, confidence in history combined with the belief in the perfectibility of man to produce the dream of continuous and inevitable progress which could serve as a substitute for religious faith.(9) Those who sought a transformation of society often constructed philosophies of history in accord with their vision of the future. The present took on a new meaning when seen within the perspective of the history of mankind. Here, for example is Victor Considérant writing in 1848:

Pour quiconque sait voir les choses d'un peu haut, pour quiconque a une certaine intelligence du développement historique de l'humanité, il est évident que les sociétés civilisées ont atteint une de ces époques palyngénésiques [sic] où une transformation fondamentale dans leur constitution est imposée par une loi absolument invincible, par l'action toute puissante de leurs forces moléculaires; en un mot, par une NECESSITE, naturelle ou providentielle, comme on voudra dire, mais certainement impossible à conjurer, fatale.(10)

Life, however, becomes difficult to bear in a present which is experienced as a period of transition. It is unclear which direction the future will follow. At most, early signs of the coming transformation may be discovered in the present but the present itself remains a time of expectant waiting. "Est-ce que chacun n'est pas dans l'attente?" asks Lamennais in *Paroles d'un croyant* (1834). In *L'Ultramontanisme* (1844) the nineteenth century is described as "un siècle où tout le monde est dans l'attente et a besoin d'un guide".(12) In 1833 Quinet provides a particularly valuable definition of the sickness of the historical consciousness which he terms "le mal de l'avenir":

Au fond de nos âmes nous sentons déjà ce qui va être. Ce rien est déjà quelque chose qui palpète, là, sous notre main, dans notre sein. Nous le voyons, nous le touchons. Mais dans le monde, il tarde trop, en vérité. Le fardeau de ce qui n'est pas pèse sur nos désirs. Ce n'est pas la faiblesse de notre pensée qui nous tue; c'est son excès, c'est sa disproportion avec la vie; c'est le poids de l'avenir à supporter dans le vide du présent.(13)

In his examination of the period from 1800 to 1850 Bréhier insists upon "la connexité entre le renouveau de *philosophie religieuse* et la portée *métaphysique* que l'on attribue à l'histoire".(14) A reading of those works which Quinet published before his exile gives strong support to this statement. These texts reveal a preoccupation with religion which is inseparable from a reflexion upon the meaning of history. It is religion in its historical development which interests Quinet. Societies, institutions, laws and the arts are all shown to be products of religion - and not vice versa. Yet despite the priority which the author of *Le Génie des religions* (1842) assigns to religion in all forms of human activity he neglects to provide a definition of what exactly he means by the term "religion". Religion is at once a collective phenomenon and something deeply personal. Religion has to do both with the relationship between man and nature and the ethical standards according to which the individual lives his life in society. In view of this lack of definition it would be unwise to claim that Quinet was a philosopher of religion in the technical sense. Moreover, he leaves us uncertain as to his conception of God. We shall return to this point in the course of our analysis but it is nevertheless worthwhile pointing out at this juncture that while we find references to "dieu", "l'infini", "l'éternel", "l'esprit", "l'absolu", in Quinet's writings he never tackles the problem of the existence of God in isolation, from a philosophical or a theological point of view. If, however, we make use of the terms defined by Lovejoy in *The Great Chain of Being* Quinet's God would not seem to be the self-sufficient Absolute of otherworldliness but

a God whose self-realisation takes place in nature and in history and whose "essential nature requires the existence of other beings".(15)

In view of the close relationship between religion and history it is necessary at this point to distinguish between the philosophy of history as understood by Quinet and the accepted modern meaning of the term. A philosopher of today takes philosophy of history to designate:

[..] a critical enquiry into the character of historical thinking, an analysis of some of the procedures of the historian and a comparison of them with those followed in other disciplines, the natural sciences in particular. Thus understood, philosophy of history forms part of the branch of philosophy known as theory of knowledge or epistemology.(16)

Quinet and his contemporaries were, however, more concerned with attaining as complete as possible an understanding of events and their causes than with determining the conditions of historical thinking. Their common, although unjust, criticism of their predecessors in the Enlightenment was that the latter had restricted their task of historical enquiry to providing a bare relation of the facts.(17) The nineteenth century wished to go beyond what it considered an empirical analysis of historical data and substitute a wider explanation according to which events were understood in relation to a greater purpose. Hegel's celebrated distinction between original, reflective and philosophical history is indicative of this desire to look at history from a new point of view. As Sismondi pointedly remarked, however, the more speculative philosophy of history could not be carried out satisfactorily were it divorced from the conscientious study of detailed historical data. The two approaches were interdependent.(18) Many, nevertheless, found the attraction of a *priori* speculation in the field of history too strong to be resisted.

The advocates of the Romantic philosophies of history were in many respects proposing a secularisation of the Christian notion of Providence. In his early essays Quinet significantly points to the author of the *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681) as the great precursor in the field. Here once again we find that the dividing line between religion and history is becoming blurred. A writer such as Quinet who believes that history is divine revelation can without much difficulty conclude that religion and history are one. Hence the pre-eminent role played by the philosopher of history who, as the priest of the new religion, reveals to men God's purpose in the unfolding of history. In the lectures delivered at the Collège de France during the 1840's Quinet proclaims his faith in the destiny of the French people and declares his belief that the French Revolution marked the realisation of Christian principles in society. He argues that France and not Catholicism truly represents the

Christian spirit in the modern world. Nationhood is sacred, France has a mission to fulfil, mankind has become the new Church. Quinet thus transfers a number of traditional religious attributes from the Church to collective entities living in history. The struggle to keep religion and history apart in any discussion of Quinet's thought is doomed to failure. The one can only be adequately analysed in relation to the other. Thus the present time may well be presented as a period of transition between two religions, between two ideas of God, yet at the same time it is also seen as a time of crisis in the life of the French nation which is still suffering from the consequences of the humiliating defeat of 1815. Quinet seeks the resurrection of France as well as a rebirth of religion.

At this point it is necessary to outline Quinet's religious origins. "Fils de bourgeois de fortune médiocre", he was baptised and brought up within the Catholic faith.<sup>(19)</sup> The strongest influence on the young Quinet was, however, his mother who was a Protestant. According to Valès her Protestantism was "largement rationnel et s'accommodait fort bien de l'esprit d'examen".<sup>(20)</sup> She was probably responsible for developing in her son an attitude towards religion which gave priority to conscience and paid little attention to dogma. Her faith rested upon a direct communication between the individual and God. In

*Histoire de mes idées*, which appeared in 1858, Quinet writes as follows:

[...] ma mère, qui m'enseigna seule ses croyances, ne me parla jamais d'aucun dogme particulier à une Eglise. Je reçus d'elle, je ne sais comment, l'idée d'un Père tout-puissant qui nous voyait à toute heure, qui veillait sur nous. Il fallait le prier pour obtenir la sagesse, et nous le priions ensemble, partout où l'occasion se présentait, dans les champs, dans les bois, dans le jardin, dans le verger, jamais à des moments fixés d'avance [...]. Moi, catholique, je me trouvais ainsi engagé dans une conversation perpétuelle avec Dieu et je n'avais jamais entendu parler d'ange, ni d'Eglise, à peine du Christ.<sup>(21)</sup>

In this autobiographical work Quinet paints a picture of his childhood and youth which throws a critical light upon organised religion. It was evidently not in church that the young Quinet felt closest to God. Nevertheless he does admit that his first communion in 1816 was marked by great emotion and fervour. He claims, however, that this was a unique moment of ecstasy which once passed never returned.<sup>(22)</sup>

If we consult Quinet's correspondence of the early 1820's we discover a number of references which suggest a fidelity to the religious ideas of his mother. In a letter addressed to her from Paris in 1821 he remarks: "J'ai été trois fois dans ton temple. J'aime mieux prier Dieu dans ton église, je

m'y sens moins indigne de toi".(23) None the less it would appear that by 1823 Quinet's faith had been lost in the intellectual environment of Paris:

Hélas! ma chère mère, qu'est devenue la foi simple que vous m'aviez incluquée vous-même, dans mon enfance? Lorsqu'au milieu d'une solitude profonde et éternellement regrettée, vous m'expliquiez ces symboles, et que vous me les faisiez aimer, en les rattachant par mille liens au spectacle attendrissant de la nature que nous avions incessamment sous les yeux! Car sans trop vous arrêter à la partie des mystères qui pouvait provoquer plus tard la discussion ou l'examen, vous m'en enseigniez surtout la partie immortelle, et vous me nourrissiez du pain le plus pur de la tradition. Quoique vous fussiez d'un culte différent de celui dans lequel vous me laissiez élever, vous aviez si bien su entrer dans le coeur même du christianisme, qu'il me fallut de longues années avant de comprendre quelle différence pouvait exister entre votre culte et celui que les prêtres m'enseignaient. Qui n'eût pensé qu'une foi aussi bien dirigée, préparée avec tant de soin, dût être inébranlable? Et pourtant, à peine vous eus-je quittée, par combien d'influences opposées le siècle ne s'empara-t-il de moi? J'abandonnai promptement votre foi, dans laquelle j'avais trouvé le repos. Il n'eût tenu qu'à moi de m'estimer croyant, parce que, dans le contact du monde, j'avais appris à déguiser le manque de foi sous d'ingénieuses transformations; mais ce masque me semble honteux, et cette prétendue foi ainsi travaillée par l'art, par la philosophie, c'est-à-dire par tout excepté par la piété véritable, me semble, je le répète plus impie que le blasphème.(24)

"La société est aujourd'hui tourmentée d'un besoin de croyance qui se manifeste de toutes parts." Thus wrote Chateaubriand in his *Etudes historiques* (1831).(25) Many members of Quinet's generation were afflicted with doubts concerning the truth of traditional forms of Christianity. Yet this dissatisfaction did not result in a hostility towards religion *per se*. There was a widespread recognition of the decisive role played by religious ideas in the unfolding of history. Rather than turn against religion many critics of Catholicism in France embarked upon the quest for a new faith better suited, in their eyes, to the needs of the nineteenth century. Michelet, for example, having declared that mankind is gradually moving away from the altar of Christianity, is, nevertheless, led to exclaim: "mais, je vous en prie, oh! dites-le-moi, si vous le savez, s'est-il élevé un autre autel?"(26) Often the choice remained as described by de Maistre in his *Considérations sur la France* (1797):

[...] il me semble que tout vrai philosophe doit opter entre les deux hypothèses, ou qu'il va se former une religion nouvelle, ou que le christianisme sera rajeuni de quelque manière extraordinaire.(27)

But whether men believed that hope for the future lay in a "new" Christianity or in a new religion their prime concern was generally for the realisation of religious principles within the organisation of society. On the one hand we have the example of *L'Avenir*; on the other, the saga of the Saint-Simonian movement under the leadership of Enfantin. The following statement, taken from the correspondence of the young Ozanam, illustrates how, particularly after the July Revolution, the desire for spiritual rebirth went hand in hand with the desire to reform society:

La société doit-elle rester ensevelie sous les décombres des trônes renversés, ou bien doit-elle reparaître plus brillante, plus jeune et plus belle? Verrons-nous 'novos coelos et novam terram'? (28)

Many thinkers believed that it was the idea of God which determined the way in which men looked at the world. They held that man's attitude to nature, to his fellows and indeed to his own personality reflected - albeit on an unconscious level - a certain idea of the deity. It would be hard to underestimate the significance of this notion as far as Quinet's thought is concerned. For the moment, however, let us concentrate upon some of his contemporaries. Here is Alexandre Weill writing in his *Moïse et le Talmud* (1854):

C'est d'après l'idée que l'homme a de Dieu qu'il marche vers la liberté ou l'esclavage, vers la bonheur ou le malheur, vers la fraternité ou la barbarie, vers la justice ou le droit du plus fort. (29)

But will it not become necessary for nineteenth-century man to redefine his concept of God? This question was fraught with difficulties and it exercised a number of the most intelligent minds of the time. During the 1830's and 1840's we find men such as Secrétan, Lèbre and Saisset asking whether human freedom is dependent upon a theistic faith in a free personal creator. Was the value of the individual under threat if the idea of God was conceived in pantheistic terms? Writing to Mazzini in 1841, Lamennais underlined the importance of the issues which were at stake:

Tout l'avenir de l'humanité dépend de sa conception future de Dieu et jusqu'à ce qu'elle se soit formée, le monde, privé de direction, continuera de flotter au hasard, incapable de se fixer, incapable de sortir de la confusion présente. (30)

But perhaps no-one captured the gravity of the situation quite as well as did Adolphe Lèbre:

Nous avons le sentiment profond de l'immanence de Dieu. Or, l'idée d'un Dieu personnel a toujours, jusqu'ici, été mêlée de déisme. Il était donc naturel de n'en plus vouloir dans le premier effet

de la réaction, et de se jeter dans l'excès contraire. Nous ne pouvons y demeurer; nous cherchons un Dieu personnel et distinct du monde comme celui du déisme, et à la fois universel et immanent comme celui du panthéisme. Cette transformation des idées de Dieu, du monde et de leur rapport remue toutes les questions: elle est la crise qui agite et trouble aujourd'hui l'esprit européen. (31)

Quinet's early writings in general and *Ahasvérus* in particular contain many of the elements characteristic of the "mal du siècle": discontent with the present, doubt, inner emptiness, religious yearnings. Quinet, however, belongs to the generation of Sainte-Beuve and Balzac and not to that of Chateaubriand and Sénancour. His origins, environment and experience of life differ greatly from those of his illustrious literary forebears. In this context it is helpful to make use of the distinction drawn by Pierre Barbéris between "le mal du siècle aristocratique" (i.e. Chateaubriand) and "le mal du siècle bourgeois" (i.e. the generation of Balzac). (32) Barbéris does not deny that there was much common ground between the two phenomena. (33) He does, however, suggest that the former is "plus tourné vers la contemplation, plus installé dans un noble décor". "Le mal du siècle bourgeois", on the other hand, reflects the experience of living as an "enfant du siècle" growing up during the Empire and the Restoration. This condition was not so much marked by aristocratic "ennui" as by an "impatience d'avenir". (34) In his *Histoire de mes Idées* Quinet himself contrasts the sickness of his generation with that of René:

Quoique cette souffrance allât souvent jusqu'au désespoir, il n'y avait là pourtant rien là qui ressemblât au spleen, à l'ennui de la vie, à tout ce qu'on a appelé le vague des passions, vers la fin du dernier siècle. C'était, il me semble, à bien des égards, le contraire de la lassitude, de la satiété. C'était plutôt une aveugle impatience de vivre, une attente fiévreuse, une ambition prématurée d'avenir, une sorte d'enivrement de la pensée renaissante, une soif effrénée de l'âme après le désert de l'Empire. Tout cela, joint à un désir consumant de produire, de créer, de faire quelque chose, au milieu d'un monde vide encore. (35)

The fall of Napoleon and the advent of the Restoration had a profound effect on Quinet. These events prompted him to develop his own reflexions on the meaning of historical change:

[...] les grandes invasions de 1814 et de 1815 avaient laissé dans ma mémoire un fond d'impressions, d'images à travers lesquelles j'entrevois toutes choses. L'écroulement d'un monde avait été ma première éducation. Je m'intéressais dans le passé à tout ce



qui pouvait me présenter quelque ressemblance avec ces immenses bouleversements d'hommes qui avaient d'abord frappé mes yeux. Grâce à cette analogie, l'histoire que je ne pouvais souffrir devenait une chose vivante, de morte qu'elle était auparavant. Le passé était à bien des égards le présent qui m'agitait encore. (36)

There can be no doubt that Quinet's political pamphlets, his attack on the July Monarchy, his participation in the 1848 Revolution, his exile and his political activity after 1870 are all factors which shape his understanding of history. In fact throughout his life he wrote from what we might term a standpoint of political commitment. (37) This, however, is not to say that he can be described as simply expressing the views of a particular political grouping. Neither for that matter can he readily be classified as the spokesman for identifiable interests in contemporary French society. His thought is intensely personal and defies simple definition. What must be remembered at all times, however, is that his understanding of religion and history does not exist in a vacuum but reflects his preoccupation with the social and political problems of the time. (38)

But if in order to understand Quinet's religious and historical thought we need to attend to his more politically oriented writings we must also pay some attention to those works which are concerned with nature and the natural sciences. This was an interest which came to the fore in his later years and we find it primarily in two works: *La Création* (1870) and *L'Esprit nouveau* (1875). Here we learn how the meaning of history is inextricably bound up with the meaning of nature. Neither nature nor history is explicable without reference to a guiding principle which is ultimately responsible for the underlying harmony of the universe. In these later works Quinet identifies the cosmic force which is active in nature and history with Love. In the course of our analysis we shall endeavour to assess the implications of this theory as far as his religious thought is concerned.

Quinet's thought poses immediate problems on account of the many different areas which are involved: history, philosophy, religion, politics, aesthetics, poetry, literary criticism, natural history. Yet it rapidly becomes apparent to the student that to omit one or a number of these is to produce an unbalanced picture. The reader swiftly becomes aware that despite the seeming diversity of topics under discussion Quinet remains concerned with two subjects - religion and history. It is our intention, therefore, to concentrate upon these elements while paying due attention to other aspects of his thought. Our approach will be broadly historical. Biographical detail will, however, be kept to a necessary minimum. (39)

NOTES

- (1) K. Löwith, *Meaning in history*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 2.
- (2) *Ahasvérus*, Pagnerre edition, vol. 7, p. 4. Cf. Lamartine: "L'esprit humain, plus plein que jamais de l'esprit de Dieu qui le remue, n'est-il pas en travail de quelque grand enfantement religieux?" *La Chute d'un ange*, Paris, Flammarion, 1925, p. 10 and also Lamennais: "Posez la main sur la terre, et dites-moi pourquoi elle a tressailli./ Quelque chose que nous ne savons pas se remue dans le monde: il y là un travail de Dieu". *Paroles d'un croyant*, Paris, Garnier, n.d., p. 6.
- (3) *Ahasvérus*, p. 228.
- (4) V. Hugo, *Les Chants du crépuscule*, Brussels, Meline, 1843, p. 4.
- (5) P.-S. Ballanche, *Le Vieillard et le jeune homme*, ed. Mauduit, Paris, Alcan, 1929, p. 59.
- (6) See R. Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1957.
- (7) E. Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, Paris, Alcan, 1932, vol. 2, p. 574. On the question of the relationship between religion and Romanticism see F. P. Bowman, *Le Christ romantique*, Geneva, Droz, 1973; D. G. Charlton, *Secular religions in France. 1815-1870*, London, O.U.P., 1963; B. Juden, *Traditions orphiques et tendances mystiques dans le romantisme français (1800-1855)*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1971.
- (8) G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans., Baillie, London, Sonnenschein, 1910, vol. 1, p. 10.
- (9) See J. Bury, *The Idea of Progress*, London, Macmillan, 1928; J. Passmore, *The perfectibility of man*, London, Duckworth, 1970; B. Reizov, *L'Historiographie romantique française. 1815-1830*, Moscow, Editions en langues étrangères, n.d.
- (10) V. Considérant, *Le Socialisme devant le vieux monde ou le vivant devant les morts*, Paris, Librairie Phalanstérienne, 1848, p. 1. Cf. the letter from George Sand to Quinet of May 1845 published by G. Lubin in George Sand, *Correspondance*, Paris, Garnier, 1969, vol. 6, pp. 858-9.
- (11) Lamennais, op. cit., p. 6.
- (12) *L'Ultramontanisme*, Pagnerre vol. 2, p. 180.
- (13) "Ahasvérus", *Revue des deux mondes*, October 1833, p. 10.
- (14) Bréhier, op. cit., p. 575.
- (15) A Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1973, p. 315. Cf. Albert Réville: "Qu'est-ce en définitive que M. Quinet pense de Dieu, du christianisme, de l'Eglise, de l'avenir qui nous attend, que nous devons ou préparer ou conjurer selon nos forces? voilà ce qu'après une lecture attentive de ses oeuvres, je ne me sens pas encore en état d'affirmer. "M. Edgard Quinet - Etudes sur ses oeuvres philosophiques et religieuses", *Le Disciple de Jésus Christ*, 1860, p. 831.

- (16) W. H. Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History*, London, Hutchinson, 1967, p. 117.
- (17) See E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Princeton, Princeton U.P., 1951, pp. 197-99.
- (18) S. de Sismondi, *Précis de l'histoire des Français*, Paris, Treuttel et Würtz, 1839, vol. 1, pp. 1-6.
- (19) A. Valès, *Edgar Quinet. Sa vie et son oeuvre*, Vienne, Aubin et fils, 1936, p. 23.
- (20) *Ibid.*, p. 30. At a young age Quinet was reading Voltaire's theatre with his mother.
- (21) *Histoire de mes idées*, Pagnerre, vol. 10, pp. 112-3.
- (22) *Ibid.*, pp. 203-4.
- (23) *Correspondance. Lettres à sa mère*, Paris, Germer-Baillière, n.d., vol. 1, p. 114. Cf. pp. 120, 166, 189, 266.
- (24) Quoted by Mme Quinet in *Edgar Quinet avant l'exil*, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1887, pp. 59-60.
- (25) Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres*, Paris, Hingray, 1838, p. 296. Cf. Lamartine: "Nous sommes à une des plus fortes époques que le genre humain ait à franchir pour avancer vers le but de sa destinée divine, à une époque de rénovation et de transformation sociale pareille peut-être à l'époque évangélique; la franchirons-nous sans périr?" "Lettre [...] sur la politique rationnelle", *Revue Européenne*, 1831, vol. 1, p. 131.
- (26) J. Michelet, *Introduction à l'histoire universelle*, (1831), *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. P. Viallaneix, Paris, Flammarion, 1972. vol. 2, p. 236.
- (27) Quoted by Mauduit in his edition of *Le Vieillard et le jeune homme*, p. 129.
- (28) Fr. Ozanam, *Lettres*, Paris, Lecoffre, 1865, vol. 1, p. 5. Another letter (*Ibid.*, p. 17) shows that Ozanam, like Quinet, is fascinated by what the study of the past may reveal of the future: "[...] le présent, qui vient du passé contient l'avenir. Si donc il est vrai que l'humanité va subir une recomposition nouvelle à la suite des révolutions qu'elle éprouve, il faut reconnaître que les éléments de cette synthèse définitive doivent se retrouver dans le passé." Cf. Ballanche: "le présent raconte le passé, et le passé raconte l'avenir". Quoted by Mauduit, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
- (29) A. Weill, *Moïse et le Talmud*, Paris, Amyot, 1854, pp. XL-XLI.
- (30) Quoted by B. Reardon in *Liberalism and Tradition*, London, Cambridge U.P., 1975, p. 101.
- (31) Ad. Lèbre, "Crise de la philosophie allemande", *Revue des deux mondes*, 1842, vol. 4, p. 589. See E. Caro, *L'Idée de Dieu et ses nouveaux critiques*, Paris, Hachette, 1864.
- (32) P. Barbéris, *Balzac et le mal du siècle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, vol. 1, pp. 59ff.

- (33) Quinet remarks that when he read *Atala* and *René* while at school "ces pages [...] firent sur moi l'effet d'une vision". *Mélanges*, p. 403. *Atala* also appears in *Ahasvérus*.
- (34) Barbéris, op. cit., pp. 59 and 88.
- (35) *Histoire de mes idées*, p. 261. See Mme Quinet, op. cit., pp. XIII-XIV.
- (36) *Ibid.*, p. 233.
- (37) G. Monod appositely described Quinet's writings as "une oeuvre de publiciste et d'homme d'action". *La Vie et la pensée de Jules Michelet*, Paris, Champion, 1923, vol. 1, p. 57.
- (38) It would be interesting to look at *Ahasvérus* from this point of view. After 1830 Quinet, a liberal during the Restoration, fell out with both Guizot and Cousin. He denounced Eclecticism and attacked the July Monarchy for not remaining true to its principles. Quinet moves to the left of his former heroes who have become the defenders of the established order. He has an article dealing with the workers rising at Lyons refused by the *Revue des deux mondes*. (Mme Quinet, op. cit., p. 188) To what extent does *Ahasvérus* stand beside *Lorenzaccio* and *La Peau de chagrin* as an expression of the mood of disillusionment which followed the betrayal of the hopes of the July days?
- (39) For the details of Quinet's life and career see R. H. Powers, *Edgar Quinet. A Study in French Patriotism*, Dallas, Southern Methodist U.P., 1957.

## CHAPTER ONE

In this chapter we shall examine the main elements of Quinet's thought presented in a number of his early publications: the essays which accompany his translation of Herder's *Ideen*, an essay on mythology, an article dealing with the future of religion and the long epic poem in prose, *Ahasvérus*. The publication of these works extends over the years 1827 to 1833.(1)

The appearance in 1827-28 of Quinet's translation of the *Ideen* is generally considered to mark a highly significant date in the development of the philosophy of history in France. He had begun work upon the translation in 1824 and had made use of an earlier English version by T. O. Churchill.(2) The German thinker's emphasis upon organic development, his conception of the nation, his reflections upon the role of religion in history and his understanding of the relationship between man and nature were all to leave a lasting impression upon the mind of the young translator. Other influences, however, were also at work. Quinet's friendship with Michelet and his association with Cousin date from 1825. Michelet, whose abridged translation of the *Scienza nuova* also appeared in 1827, could bring to Quinet his enthusiasm for Vico and in Cousin Quinet could find a mentor with a wide knowledge of contemporary German thought. In December 1826 he left France for Heidelberg with the image of Germany created by Mme de Stael firmly fixed in his mind. At Heidelberg he studied under Daub and Creuzer and discovered at first hand the riches of German philosophy. His works and correspondence of these years contain references to, among others, Görres, Oken, Fr. Schlegel, Jacobi, Kant, Fichte and Schelling. At the close of 1828, however, Quinet left Germany in order to take part in the French archeological expedition to Greece. In 1832-33 he visited Italy and in 1834 he married Minna Moré, a German.(3)

The two essays which accompany Quinet's translation are his *Introduction* and his *Etude sur le caractère et les écrits de Herder*.(4) These are to be found in the first and third volumes respectively. At the centre of the writer's argument is the notion that self-knowledge is inseparable from historical knowledge. Since the individual remains to a large extent the product of the history of mankind it follows that in order to know himself he must first study universal history. Within the individual self all the past of humanity lies buried:

[...] pour comprendre le secret de mon être, il me fallait aller interroger les débris de l'Orient, les oracles muets de la Grèce, les bruyères des Gaules, les forêts silencieuses de la Germanie.(5)

It is man's consciousness of time which separates him from the rest of creation which is condemned to live in an eternal present. This historical sense is moreover coexistent with human freedom itself. Man alone struggles to understand the past, to create a future in accordance with his highest aspirations and to impart an element of duration and continuity to the spectacle of flux and transience.

According to Quinet the philosophy of history represents an attempt to bring order to historical phenomena by the introduction of what are termed elements of fixity.<sup>(6)</sup> The events of the past can only be properly understood in relation to a transcendent purpose. Only then can the unfolding of history be interpreted as an ordered, meaningful movement which progresses in accordance with certain laws. Upon closer examination, however, it is possible to discern within these essays two differing but nevertheless closely interrelated interpretations of the historical process. These we shall term respectively anthropocentric and theocentric.<sup>(7)</sup> According to the man-centred interpretation, history is understood as the creation of free individuals and man is judged to be responsible for progress. According to the God-centred interpretation, on the other hand, the free activity of the individual is in varying degrees subordinated to the realisation of a higher purpose. The term theocentric is applied because in its most acute form this conception of history reduces the individual to a mere expression of the life of the Absolute thus calling into question the reality of his freedom. The use of these terms does not however signify either that God is absent from the former or that man is absent from the latter. It is above all a question of emphasis - but a change in emphasis is sufficient to deprive the individual of responsibility for his actions.

The character of Quinet's philosophy of history emerges in the context of the criticisms which he makes of Herder. He maintains that Herder had gone so far in considering man as a part of the natural universe that all change and movement were rendered impossible. In order to explain the act of emancipation by which man separated himself from nature and attained self-consciousness and consciousness of time the German thinker had no choice but to have recourse to the theory of a direct divine intervention. Quinet, on the other hand, declares that this act was neither unique nor mysterious. At all times and regardless of the dangers involved men have chosen to modify, change or overthrow prevailing conditions in order to create for themselves a new destiny. Freedom is the content, the very stuff of history:

En un mot, l'histoire, dans son commencement comme dans sa fin, est le spectacle de la liberté, la protestation du genre humain contre le monde qui l'enchaîne, le triomphe de l'infini sur le fini, l'affranchissement de l'esprit, le règne de l'âme: le jour où la liberté manquerait au monde serait celui où l'histoire s'arrêterait.(8)

What is more, the growth of freedom is inseparable from an accompanying development of the self, of man's individuality and personality. History may also therefore be envisaged as:

[...] une vaste et éternelle déduction du général au particulier: c'est le travail du *moi* qui se fait jour peu à peu, se dégage par degrés de ce qui lui est étranger, et aspire à se produire sous sa forme la plus libre.(9)

Quinet proceeds to divide universal history into a number of periods which correspond to the progressive emancipation of the personality and the growth of individual freedom. Rapidly the reader notices that no clear line of separation distinguishes the philosophy of history from the history of religion. Quinet's analysis begins with Oriental pantheism, the earliest form of religion, which he associates with India. At this point in his development man did not clearly differentiate between past, present and future: he possessed a cosmogony and a theogony but no history; his powers of reflection remained undeveloped. The personality did not possess an independent existence since the individual was, as it were, absorbed into divine nature. The next period comprises the empires of the Medes, the Persians, the Egyptians and the Assyrians. Here the individual remained unfree, essentially dependent upon the society to which he belonged. A greater degree of freedom was attained in Greece and Rome but the personality was still not free since the self remained "encore à demi confondu avec la cité".(10) The coming of Christianity signalled the birth of true individuality. This was not, however, the end of the process since Quinet considers that it was carried further by the Reformation and by Cartesian philosophy.

Quinet casts no doubt upon the reality of intellectual and moral progress but he places the responsibility for progress upon the shoulders of mankind. Humanity may be "poussé par une main invisible" but the existence of a wider providential plan does not imply a severe restriction of individual freedom.(11) History is above all the struggle between free men on the one hand and the resistance and inherent fatalism of the universe on the other.(12) Yet at the same time we must ask whether the anthropocentric interpretation is sufficient of itself to give meaning to history? This would not appear to be the case. In order to give meaning

to the exercise of human freedom history must be understood in terms of the realisation of a divine purpose. Otherwise events take on a character of confusion and instability, especially when they are contrasted with the seeming permanence and immutability of the universe. An inadequate impression of the complexity of Quinet's thought is conveyed if we concentrate exclusively upon the anthropocentric aspect. Quinet is not a modern existentialist creating his own values in the face of the blind indifference of an absurd universe. On the contrary he remains convinced that a divine purpose is at work in both nature and history and he aspires to a greater unity capable of reconciling in a higher synthesis man and nature, freedom and necessity.

According to the anthropocentric interpretation of history it is the exercise of freedom which gives coherence and direction to history. This viewpoint requires that there exists opposition between the individual and the external world and also implies a degree of opposition between the individual and his fellows. Only by virtue of such an opposition can the individual assert his freedom. The theocentric interpretation, on the other hand, tends to move the centre of gravity away from the individual in the direction of the divine. Nature and history are considered primarily as expressions of the Absolute. Contradictions and oppositions are transcended. Tensions are dissipated. Although this idea is not yet fully developed in the essays on Herder we nevertheless find Quinet pointing to analogies, to correspondences between nature and history. He seeks to convince us that the actions of humanity are really in harmony with the natural universe:

[...] en passant de la science des choses à la science des volontés, vous ne faites que revoir sous des formes analogues et plus épurées le même ordre, la même stabilité qui s'était offerts à vous dans la contemplation du monde physique. (13)

When looked at from this point of view the vicissitudes of history no longer appear as the result of "un vain caprice des volontés". History too has its harmony since like nature, it moves in accordance with laws which have "leurs fondements dans les entrailles mêmes de l'univers". (14) Nature and history are "la figure changeante d'une indivisible unité" and history itself may be described as "la plus haute puissance de la nature". (15)

A similar harmony exists between the individual and mankind in general. All the past of humanity lives on in the soul of the individual and for this reason mankind and the individual cannot be said to exist in isolation. Moreover, an underlying harmony unites the individual, the people of which



he forms a part and mankind in general. Although the lifespan of the individual is much shorter than the historical existence of an entire people, each within its own sphere progresses in an identical fashion and possesses equal value. At the same time, however, mankind as a totality appears to take precedence over the individual. We are told that humanity should arouse in us "un respect profond et pour ainsi dire religieux".(16) The orderly unfolding of history possesses a quasi-religious authority which consoles and reassures Quinet: "[...] travaillons [...] selon nos forces à vivre et à mourir dans la place que le genre humain nous a confiée".(17)

Quinet can develop these ideas because he searches for a transcendent element and seeks evidence of the presence of a divine order in nature and in history. History is to be understood in terms of appearance and reality; events take on true being only insofar as they can be shown to constitute a stage in a progression towards a specified goal. "Le chaos apparent des âges", must be made to reveal "la pensée divine."(18) In the final analysis, however, Quinet's assertions that mankind, the individual and nature all develop in harmony would seem to rest upon the belief that God, "l'Eternel", "l'Absolu", is responsible for imparting to them a direction, an element of finality. "L'ombre suppose l'objet", declares Quinet, "l'accident suppose la substance."(19) His argument recalls that put forward by Victor Cousin. According to Cousin a mere knowledge of events is unsatisfactory; it is necessary to discover the order which lies hidden behind what at first sight appears to be "des évènements insignifiants et les jeux accidentels d'une destinée capricieuse". The world of contingency must be understood in relation to the world of ideas:

Mais cet accidentel, dira-t-on, c'est précisément le réel? Assurément; mais le réel n'est pas le vrai. Le réel ne tombe sous la connaissance que par son rapport à la vérité qu'il réfléchit, à laquelle il est conforme. C'est dans cette conformité que le réel a sa vérité [...]. Au-dessus du réel est sa raison d'être; ce monde qui passe en contient un qui ne passe point, qui constitue l'essence, la vérité et la dignité de l'autre.(20)

But this world of ideas is not really that of immutable Platonic essences since its realisation takes place within history:

Ce monde [des idées] plane sur le premier [le monde extérieur], il s'y réfléchit et s'y réalise; il le suit dans tous ses développements et dans toutes ses révolutions; leur marche est relative et parallèle; ils se touchent et se pénètrent par tous points.(21)

Quinet's position is similar when he refers to the goals of mankind in history. These are reason, justice and liberty which he identifies with revelation:

[...] au-dessus des formes qui passent s'élève la puissance de la raison, de la justice et de la liberté, qui vont se grossissant de chaque année qui s'écoule, de chaque vertu qui s'exerce en silence [...] Les royaumes se brisent, mais la justice et la raison s'enrichissent de leurs débris et dominent leurs formes passagères. (22)

Insofar as the Deity is transcendent and allows men freedom of choice the moral autonomy of the self is not threatened. Neither is mankind's capacity to create its own destiny in history in danger if God is a metaphysical abstraction, "une cause première, immuable autant que supérieure à la durée". (23) However, as we have already seen, Quinet's God is more akin to infinite life expressing itself through the finite. At the conclusion of his *Introduction* he writes lyrically of the harmonies of nature and of history but in such a manner as to suggest that history is as much an expression of universal life as the creation of the free acts of individuals. For Quinet, as for Cousin and Schelling, history is transformed into a poem:

S'il [Dieu] a penché selon de justes lois l'urne des fleuves, [...] s'il a varié jusqu'à l'infini les attitudes des plantes, la voix des animaux et les harmonies qui en résultent, il a de même répandu avec sagesse, dans le temps, les générations et les familles, les nations et les langues; chaque cité apparaît quand son jour est venu, sous la forme que le monde réclame. A toutes il a donné une forme particulière, une physionomie propre; et certes, si l'on a pu dire, sans paraître insensé, que la voûte des cieux, que l'écho des montagnes, que ce bassin des mers [...] sont les expressions de ses idées; c'est, je le jure, une autre poésie, une autre éloquence qui s'échappent toutes vivantes des harmonies des âges [...] Chaque peuple qui tombe dans l'abîme est un accent de sa voix; chaque cité n'est elle-même qu'un mot interrompu, qu'une image brisée, qu'un vers inachevé de cet éternel poème que le temps est chargé de dérouler. Entendez-vous cet immense discours qui roule et s'accroît avec les siècles, et qui, toujours repris et toujours suspendu, laisse chaque génération incertaine de la parole qui va suivre? Il a, comme les discours humains, ses circonlocutions, ses exclamations de colère, ses mouvements et ses repos, pendant lesquels on n'entend que les soupirs des peuples haletants, et le sourd craquement des empires vieilliss. (24)

Quinet might have replied that freedom was not threatened since the ultimate creative principle realising itself in the world was liberty

itself. (25) But would such an explanation be sufficient? Could not these lines be interpreted as signifying that the existence of suffering, and ultimately of evil, can be adequately explained in terms of the circumlocutions of the divine "discours"? (26)

The problems faced by Quinet had already been encountered by Herder who while defending the significance and the reality of human freedom nevertheless continued to point to the action of final causes. The exercise of freedom by mankind is used to further the realisation of a divine intention or goal. M. Rouché sums up Herder's achievement as follows:

L'humanisme de Herder réalise ce tour de force: proclamer l'autonomie morale du genre humain, conformément à l'exigence no. 1 de tout humanisme, sans pour autant céder à l'exigence no. 2, qui est l'anthropocentrisme absolu. L'humanisme chez Herder demeure lié à la théologie où il puise son optimisme, qui est à la fois confiance en l'homme et confiance en Dieu. (27)

Quinet, however, cannot follow without some difficulty the optimistic path of Herder. This is suggested by the very emphasis which he places upon the inner peace which came to him as a result of reading the *Ideen*: [...] "ce livre a été pour moi une source intarissable de consolations et de joie". (28) Quinet perceptively points to the rock of certainty upon which Herder's philosophy is based when he remarks that in the writings of the German thinker:

La conscience de l'être, le sentiment religieux, pur, universel comme la conviction spontanée du génie, sont [...] tellement inhérents à toute connaissance [...] qu'ils suppléent partout au point de départ du *moi* philosophique qui se proclame par eux. (29)

At this point we should remember that Lessing was the forerunner of Herder and the precursor of much of the philosophy of history of the nineteenth century. (30) The understanding of history which was proposed by *The Education of the Human Race* (1780) pointed in the direction of a denial of transcendence. (31) Such was the real importance of the famous analogy between revelation for mankind and education for the individual:

A l'individu l'éducation ne donne rien qu'il n'aurait pu tirer de lui-même [...] De même, la révélation n'enseigne au genre humain rien que la raison humaine laissée à elle-même n'aurait pu trouver, mais par ce moyen l'humanité a reçu et continue à recevoir l'enseignement des vérités essentielles plus tôt qu'elle n'aurait pu l'avoir par elle-même. (32)

Lessing's short work was to exert a considerable influence in France during the Romantic period and notably among the Saint Simonians. Quinet for his part pays tribute to *The Education of the Human Race* in the course of his *Introduction*, describing it as:

[...] un petit écrit étincelant de verve et d'une rare importance lorsqu'on y voit un essai dans lequel la pensée humaine, tout en cessant de considérer la révélation comme le dernier terme de la progression universelle, ne va point encore jusqu'à la ranger dans la classe des phénomènes purement historiques, et cherche un milieu qui satisfasse également, et au besoin de croire, et aux exigences de la nouvelle science. (33)

Karl Barth remarks that Lessing brought to German theology of the eighteenth century the discovery that there was an active, dramatic element in history. But, continues Barth, does it make any difference to Lessing's interpretation of the course of history:

[...] whether we say 'God' or whether we say 'human understanding' in the significant places, and whether we interpret revelation as being education by an educator or self-education or even more simply development, and thus allow the Lord of history to coincide with history itself, or alternatively with its subject, with the humanity educating, or alternatively, developing itself. (34)

Herder's view of revelation is an extension of that of Lessing. Herder, although not a pantheist in the strict sense of the term, did not hesitate to see the presence of God revealed directly in nature and in history. Karl Barth contrasts Herder with Kant stating that the latter recognised, much more than did the former, the problem of a realm beyond the human:

In the theology of Herder, the saviour of theology and prophet of the religion of God, [...] with its impetuous equation of human experience, religion and revelation, of the quality of being in the image of God and the quality of the Divine, that problem of a realm beyond the human, continually threatens, in spite of several starts in another direction, to founder completely inside this human world. (35)

The extent to which Quinet adopts the views of Herder on these important matters is expressed in the *Etude*:

Admettre (et comment s'en défendre?) que, s'il y a eu une révélation, elle a été faite pour la raison humaine, c'est prononcer en d'autres termes que pour savoir ce qu'elle fut, il faut savoir ce qu'elle dut être, ou ce que l'homme a pu comprendre. Nous ne connaissons les limites de la parole qu'en connaissant les limites de l'intelligence [...] toute question de théologie se résoudra dans une

question d'histoire. Notre polémique sera de l'archéologie, et nous ne saurons sur les dogmes que ce que nous en apprendra l'étude comparée des langues et des traditions populaires. (36)

Quinet does, however, criticise Herder on two counts: firstly, on the grounds of his alleged pantheism and secondly for having allowed the possibility of a direct divine intervention into history. Like his friend Michelet Quinet understands history in terms of a movement of peoples, ideas and religions in which the conflict between freedom and necessity is the driving force. (37) The two thinkers share a common concern for the cause of justice. In his *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* (1831) Michelet emphasises the Promethean character of mankind struggling to create its own world in history. He refuses to allow man to become merely the instrument of Providence. According to P. Viallaneix, Michelet remains loyal to the French voluntaristic tradition from Descartes to Maine de Biran and this explains why he is suspicious of any belief in the presence of an ideal or supernatural force in history. Michelet is very conscious of the fragility of the victories won by freedom in the course of history and he is wary of the Hegelianism which produced the historical optimism and fatalism defended by Cousin. The insistence upon freedom and responsibility prevents Michelet from whole-heartedly accepting the conclusions of the German philosophies of history, including that of Herder. (38)

Despite the many similarities between the two men Quinet is perhaps more inclined than his friend to seek the presence of a providential element in history. Like Cousin he praises Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681) and recognises in its author a great precursor in the field of the philosophy of history. Michelet, on the other hand, believes that Bossuet sacrificed freedom to Providence, mankind to God. Should we discern here a continuing attachment on Quinet's behalf for the "theological" history disliked by his friend? (39)

Furthermore, what interpretation should be placed upon the brief section of Quinet's *Introduction* which is devoted to Vico? Here the idealism of the Neapolitan thinker is contrasted with the sensualism of Herder but what is emphasised is Vico's theory of ideas, that is the metaphysical side of his thought rather than his understanding of the development of mankind in history. Gabriel Monod comments:

Mais s'il y a dans Vico ce qu'y voit Quinet, ce fonds de platonisme qui annonce Schelling, ce n'est que l'enveloppe philosophique d'un système de l'histoire très concret, où le relatif et le

contingent non seulement ont leur place, mais la première. Quinet n'a oublié qu'une chose dans Vico: l'humanité créant elle-même le monde civil à travers les péripéties des trois âges. (40)

In Monod's opinion the explanation lies in the fact that Quinet composed his *Introduction* before Michelet had completed his translation or his *Vie et système de Vico*. At the same time, however, could not Quinet's interpretation of Vico be seen to reflect a desire to retain a more meta-physical frame of reference which would make history something much more than the creation of man?

The real danger for the moral integrity of the individual arises, however, when, as described above, Quinet brings together nature and history and speaks of history as divine discourse. If, instead of the divine realm collapsing into the human, the human realm is itself identified with an ideal or divine power realising itself in history then the danger exists that the free activity of the individual may to a greater or lesser extent be subordinated to the unfolding of a higher purpose. In this context we must now turn to an essay which appeared in 1830 entitled *De la Nature et de l'histoire dans leurs rapports avec les traditions religieuses et épiques*. (41) Despite the fact that admirers of Quinet have tended to view this essay as an isolated aberration its importance should not be underrated. (42) Far from being isolated from the general movement of his thought, it represents a development of the theocentric tendencies of the earlier essays. Moreover, the ideas put forward here are not without their importance for a correct understanding of Quinet's writings of this period, notably *De la Grèce moderne et de ses rapports avec l'antiquité* (1830), "De l'Avenir des religions" (1831) and *Ahasvérus* (1833).

The general philosophical standpoint adopted in *De la Nature et de l'histoire* is strongly reminiscent of the thought of Schelling and Hegel. (43) Nature and history are both directly associated with the Absolute which objectifies itself as unconscious nature and attains self-consciousness in the history of mankind:

L'histoire est la conscience de l'univers ou l'organe par lequel il se révèle à son auteur  
[...]. Quand le temps aura développé sous des formes analogues, tout ce que l'espace renferme, quand le monde de réflexion aura reproduit le monde entier de la spontanéité, et qu'à chaque fait nécessaire répondra un fait de liberté, le sens de l'univers sera accompli; l'absolu se connaîtra lui-même. (44)

It does not necessarily follow, however, that we should describe these statements as pantheistic. Quinet is writing in the tradition of the German idealists who conceived of the infinite "not as something set over against the finite but as infinite life or activity which expresses itself in and through the finite". God is not identified with the visible universe as such in *De la Nature et de l'histoire*; the objects of nature remain symbols. It would seem that for Quinet as for Schelling, nature is the "consequence of the first principle, not the first principle itself". (45)

Quinet, unfortunately, devotes very little space to speculations of this kind despite their obvious importance for an understanding of his philosophy of history. H. J. Hunt remarks that "the Hegelian note rings loudly" in the lines quoted above. (46) Similarities also exist between this essay and the thought of Schelling. The German philosopher writes in the following manner of the relationship between nature and history:

History is the higher potency of nature, in so far as it expresses in the ideal what the latter expresses in the real; but in essence the same thing is in both, only altered by the determination or potency under which it is placed. If the pure essence could be seen in both, we would recognise the same thing which is represented in history as ideal, represented in nature as real. (47)

In fact a very similar impression is produced by reading *De la Nature et de l'histoire*. Schelling believes in the absolute identity of nature and history, freedom and necessity, the ideal and the real. Quinet for his part refers to the ideal identity of nature and history and in the first paragraph of his essay he writes as follows:

L'homme n'est ni le maître ni l'esclave de la nature; il est son interprète et sa parole vivante [...]. (l'homme) achève ses pensées imparfaites; il donne une voix à ses symboles muets. Le secret qu'elle cache aux entrailles du globe, il le proclame à travers les siècles. De là l'idée cosmogonique qui, sans se savoir elle-même, se cristallise avec le règne inorganique, rampe avec le cryptogame, court avec les fleuves, gravite avec les cieus, venant à se connaître, s'apparaît à elle-même sous la figure du monde civil. (48)

The philosophical considerations of the opening pages of *De la Nature et de l'histoire* determine the interpretation of myth and religion which follows. We learn that all myths contain elements derived from nature and from history but that the relative proportion of these elements varies. (49) In the earliest form of religion, Oriental pantheism, man

was unfree, the slave of nature and this explains why "l'élément cosmogonique [...] la formation primitive de la nature" predominated in the myths of that period. Subsequently, as man became less subservient to nature, the historical aspect or "l'élément humain" began to play a part. (50) This historical element is related to the moment when the collectivity attains self-consciousness:

[...] elle [une nation] se devient à elle-même un objet d'étonnement et d'adoration. Ses migrations, ses conquêtes, ou plutôt la pensée qu'elle accomplit dans le monde, se concentre dans un être divin où toutes les générations s'évanouissent. (51)

Mythology develops organically and possesses a life of its own. In the course of time the historical element may come to obscure completely the earlier cosmogonic aspect. In Greek mythology these two elements (the cosmogonic or "l'infini sanctifié dans l'espace et la durée" and the historical or "l'apothéose de la force divine dans le temps et dans l'histoire" combine. (52) Dionysos, for example, is at one and the same time "le symbole de l'âme du monde" and the symbol of the migrations from Bactra to the Mediterranean. These reflexions lead Quinet to conclude that:

[...] partout où je regarde, les religions antiques n'expriment rien autre que la similitude, et je voudrais presque dire, l'identité idéale de la nature et de l'histoire. (53)

This notion of ideal identity evidently rests upon the belief that nature and history share a common origin in the Absolute.

Quinet believes that a divine thought or idea is present in the genius of a particular people or race. The idea, however, is not only history, it is also nature. Going far beyond the theories of Montesquieu and Herder concerning the influence of environment on man, Quinet believes that a harmony exists between the national genius and its creations on the one hand and its natural surroundings on the other. (54) A network of correspondences exists linking all these different aspects since they are all expressions of the same divine idea. A civilisation is a totality including both man and nature:

Une civilisation est une pensée de l'âme du monde où la gloire du conquérant, le chant du poète, les souvenirs des générations, l'instinct naissant de la fleur, la voix inarticulée du fleuve, l'harmonie silencieuse du règne inorganique, mêlés, confondus, s'expliquant et s'achevant l'un par l'autre, ne forment plus qu'une idée, qu'une vie, qu'une parole prononcée dans l'infini. (55)



The influence of these theories is strongly felt in *De la Grèce moderne* which contains numerous comparisons between nature and history. Human societies are not simply influenced by nature; nature and man both give expression to the same thought:

Assurément l'arbre du Gange [...] cache, sous ses profondes ombres, la même pensée que ces poèmes dont chaque fragment est une épopée, que ces dieux dont chaque parole est un monde. (56)

"Dirai-je ce voyage ou ce poème?" asked Michelet when he referred to *De la Grèce moderne* in the course of his own *Histoire romaine*. (57) Many a reader might well ask the same question when he encounters the numerous comparisons between nature and history in the pages of Quinet's "voyage". Such comparisons are not however flights of fancy or examples of poetic licence; they are founded on the philosophical premises which we have described. Thus it becomes possible for Quinet to see analogies between societies and religions on the basis of botanical similarities:

[...] le peplidium du Delta ressemble au gratiola du Mexique, autant que les pyramides et les hiéroglyphes de Memphis aux monuments de Cholula et des nations Aztèques. (58)

The relationship between religion and nature is such that Greece as the home of polytheism can never be fully won over to Christianity.

This theory also determines Quinet's understanding of the migrations of nations and races. He believes that the birth of a nation inevitably results in a migration since the new idea represented by the people concerned does not find its analogue in the environment in which it first finds itself. For this reason a migration in search of new natural surroundings ensues. In this manner the Dorians continued their migration-invasion until they reached the land which corresponded to their national genius. A similar result is produced by the birth of a new religion which also seeks a new natural environment in which to develop.

In "De l'Avenir des religions" (1831) Quinet emphasises the role played by nature in the development of religion and by so doing he modifies somewhat the ideas put forward in the essays on Herder. Then, like Lessing, he considered revelation in terms of the education of mankind; revelation was closely bound to the development of the human intelligence. As a result, Quinet's understanding of the history of religion in terms of the progressive emancipation of the individual tended to make the history of religions synonymous with the history of the human spirit. In this situation nature had stood in opposition to man, limiting his freedom and restricting his personality. In "De l'Avenir des religions" on the

other hand the role played by nature in religion is quite different:

[..] une religion n'est pas un fait social, mais une idée cosmogonique, le cri tout entier de l'univers, une parole depuis long-temps contenue dans la création, et que chaque objet vient à prononcer par la bouche d'un peuple. (59)

This conception of religion reflects the theories of *De la Nature et de l'histoire*. The Absolute objectifies itself as nature and comes to self-awareness in history, which implies that it comes to know itself in its two manifestations as history and as nature, freedom and necessity, consciousness and unconsciousness, subjectivity and objectivity. As we have already seen, mythology by reconciling the two worlds of nature and history, realises their ideal identity. (60) The religious consciousness of humanity would therefore seem to be the point where the Absolute apprehends itself. Quinet envisages the history of religion as a westward movement of peoples; different natural environments are unconscious objective representations of divine thoughts or ideas which are then given conscious, subjective expression by certain collectivities (nations, peoples, races). In religion nature and history are reconciled which implies that the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity is transcended. The idea of God produced by each religion is the fullest realisation possible of the divine present in nature at that point. The history of religion is above all the history of these ideas of God, each of which represents a moment in the Absolute's own journey to self-knowledge:

[..] l'idée de Dieu, telle que la terre peut la produire, ne sera pleinement achevée que lorsque toutes les traditions humaines s'y étant peu à peu amassées, et le type éternel de tous les points de l'univers s'y trouvant déposé, chaque île dans ses flots, chaque climat dans sa zone, chaque mont dans sa chaîne pourra dire de lui, par l'organe d'un peuple: Il est né dans l'Orient; il a grandi en Perse; il est venu dans la Judée, dans le Caucase, dans les Alpes; il a passé par mon chemin; il a bu de mes sources et dormi sous mes ombres; et maintenant la terre a enfanté son Dieu. (61)

At this point we may look in more detail at the manner in which Quinet at this period envisages the unfolding of the history of religions. The general division remains as before: Oriental pantheism, classical Greek civilisation, Christianity.

The earliest form of religion was neither mon<sup>o</sup>theism nor polytheism but Oriental pantheism which contained within itself the notion of unity and that of variety. This pantheism resulted directly from man's "première intuition de l'univers". (62) The theory of a primordial revelation

as advocated by many thinkers of the period including Bonald, de Maistre and Ozanam is absent from Quinet's work.<sup>(63)</sup> Neither, for that matter, does he follow Creuzer in attributing to a caste of priests a decisive role in the myth-making process; mythology is rather the creation of the activity of the collective consciousness. On the other hand Quinet does accept that there once existed a primitive religious unity of mankind the disintegration of which brought about the great movement of the migrations of races. The causes of this event, however, remain obscure. Despite their varied forms the different mythologies spring from a common source. From the banks of the Ganges to the shores of Iceland "un mythe unique étend ses voiles d'or sur les berceaux des peuples".<sup>(64)</sup> According to Quinet the religious systems of the Orient - a wide-embracing term including religions/civilisations as diverse as those of Egypt and India - have in common a symbolic and sacerdotal character and, whilst marking a certain progress with regard to one another, they all have pantheism as their common denominator. Human freedom and individuality are barely developed at this stage and man, far from imposing his will upon nature, is content simply to imitate and reproduce the harmony of the universe.

This world of Oriental pantheism forms the subject of the first act of *Ahasvérus*. Here the creation, the early migrations which colonise India, Persia and Egypt, the great empires and finally the scene of Christ's nativity unfold before the reader's eyes. Perhaps rather surprisingly, Greek civilisation does not have an important part to play in Quinet's epic. *De la Grèce moderne*, however, makes it plain that Greece marks the emancipation of mankind from the bonds of Oriental pantheism: the battle of Salamis signals "l'émancipation de l'adolescence du genre humain".<sup>(65)</sup> In Greece the human personality frees itself from nature and creates for itself "un type idéal d'humanité" in Greek mythology; here the "inertie sacerdotale" of the East is replaced by a "vie active". As we shall demonstrate below, Greek religion and Greek art are one and together form for Quinet a unique moment of serenity in the history of mankind. Within the field of myth and religion it is necessary to note that Quinet emphasises the Oriental element in Greek mythology. At a time when the followers of Otfried Müller and those of Creuzer disagreed as to what extent the Greek myths were indigenous in origin, Quinet states that: "L'Olympe hellénique est [...] le reflet de l'existence universelle développée dans l'Orient".<sup>(66)</sup> Many different peoples' contrasting religious traditions came together in Greece where they finally achieved unity. The fusion of the different traditions formed the Greek idea of God:

Des sommets de l'Himalaya, des plaines de l'Euphrate, des oasis de l'Ethiopie, des gorges de la Colchide, des bords du Tanaïs, toutes les sources religieuses débordèrent dans la Grèce, et l'idée de Dieu, jusque là répandue et divisée par fragments entre les races, se concentra et rayonna tout entière dans la merveille de la théologie orphique. (67)

What then is the status of Christianity in the unfolding of the history of religion? Is the Christian revelation true and valid for all periods? Or is relativism inevitable once it is accepted that the idea of God apprehended by different religions in different ways nevertheless always refers ultimately to the same reality? Relativism may easily lead to scepticism, as Quinet realised.

The evidence provided by *De la Nature et de l'histoire* and by "De l'Avenir des religions" does not support the view that the Christian religion alone corresponds to the truth. Here, as a reading of the earlier essays would lead us to expect, Christianity stands within the general continuity of the "traditions religieuses":

[...] l'Orient tout entier, vaincu et expirant, concentre sa pensée dans la foi de Jérusalem. Jérusalem, près de sa fin, éclate dans la parole du Christ. Lui-même il faut qu'il meure, comme l'Egypte et la Chaldée, pour que le génie de tout le passé, les mystères des prêtres du Gange, le verbe étincelant de Zoroastre, la sagesse de Thèbes, la tristesse de Palmyre, sortis avec lui du sépulcre, se transmettent en son nom à toutes les générations futures. (68)

Furthermore, "De l'Avenir des religions" implies that Christianity - rather than just Catholicism - is a spent force, falling into decline together with the peoples which gave it expression. Christianity marks a stage in the history of religions interpreted in terms of the relationship between nature and history and there seems no reason to expect that it should not in turn be replaced by a new religion. Some expressions from the text, which disappear in later versions, support this view. For example we are told that in the Middle Ages "l'Eternel était là, sous la forme du Christ" and later we find Quinet including Jesus together with Moses and Mahomet in a list of the prophets of past religions. (69)

"De l'Avenir des religions" is naturally concerned with the future as well as with the past. According to Quinet, the East-West movement of World history and religion indicates that America will be the birthplace of a new religious transformation. Whereas elsewhere Quinet frequently defends democracy on the North American model, in this article he is interested in the religious and the historical meaning of America.

We have already described how Quinet defines a religion not only in human terms but also in relation to nature. In "De l'Avenir des religions" the role played by nature is central to his thesis. He argues that each religion needs to "s'assimiler un monde physique, aussi nouveau que lui".(70) Thus Christianity journeyed to Western Europe in order to find a suitable environment:

Alors, au sein d'une nature jeune comme lui, inspirée comme lui, il s'incorpore à elle; et, jusque là flottant et dénué, il achève de s'organiser dans le catholicisme.(71)

In this manner the birth of a religion explains the migrations of races and peoples:

[...] à mesure qu'une face nouvelle de sa propre pensée se découvre à l'humanité, elle va chercher, pour l'y développer, un univers nouveau comme elle [...] toute idée religieuse, sitôt qu'elle est éclosée dans le génie d'un peuple, se lève, et va chercher à travers la nature le type qui la doit arrêter.(72)

When applied to the present this theory points to a movement from Europe to America. It is the destiny of mankind in general to repeat Chateaubriand's *Voyage en Amérique*:

Ce qu'un homme a fait à l'aventure, l'humanité le fera après lui quand elle sentira en elle la venue d'une ère religieuse, elle ira se reconstruire sur le plan des Cordillères [...] Je ne sais quel prophète, mais il y aura un prophète [...] qui se lèvera avant le jour pour surprendre le secret de ce monde endormi; en le mêlant avec le secret de l'homme, il composera le nouvel Evangile du nouvel univers.(73)

Quinet is not alone in developing these ideas. K. Löwith writes that from the beginning of the nineteenth century thinkers in Germany admitted the possibility "that the world spirit might emigrate from Europe".(74) In this context America became for Hegel the land of the future:

America is [...] the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself - perhaps in a contest between North and South America. It is a land of desire for all those who are weary of the historical lumber-room of old Europe. Napoleon is reported to have said: "*Cette vieille Europe m'ennuie*". It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed itself.(75)

In France we find Hugo in 1829 developing views similar to those which Quinet will propose in 1831. According to Hugo, world history comprises three main periods: "[les] trois théocraties successives d'Asie, d'Afrique et d'Europe". Europe is in decline; America is the land of

of the future:

Ne semble-t-elle pas [la civilisation] déjà se pencher vers l'Amérique? [...] Est-il si hasardeux de supposer qu'usée et dénaturée dans l'ancien continent, elle aille chercher une terre neuve et vierge, pour se rajeunir et la féconder? (76)

America is the continent where a new principle will be applied: "(le) principe d'émancipation, de progrès et de liberté, qui semble devoir être désormais la loi de l'humanité". (77)

Two pamphlets of 1833 by the Saint-Simonian Charles Duguet again illustrate how America is associated with hopes for a new religion, a new revelation. (78) In America, writes Duguet, the Saint-Simonian "pontificat humanitaire" will be realised:

[...] je vais en AMERIQUE préparer un GITE à cette REVELATION qu'en Europe ébaucha le PERE, et qu'aux limites de l'Afrique et de l'Asie pourra très bien polir la MERE (...) Or les rêves que l'EUROPE discute, MERE des Bolivar et des Washington, l'AMERIQUE impatiente les réalise. (79)

In the virgin land of America the opposition between East and West will be replaced by a new harmony:

A ce nouveau monde est promis l'héritage de la révélation nouvelle. Là, là seulement, au centre de nos continents et de nos mers, peut s'élever la couche nuptiale de l'Orient et de l'Occident amoureux unis. Là doivent être jetés les fondements d'une autre Jérusalem, d'une autre Rome. (80)

This theme of the reconciliation between East and West naturally reappears in Emile Barrault's *Occident et Orient* (1835). Unlike Duguet, however, Barrault's main hope is that this reconciliation, understood as a fusion between Christianity and Islam, will take place in the East. Barrault, nevertheless, cannot ignore America since it is the conclusion of the East-West movement of mankind. Barrault, however, sees America as dominated by Christianity. In America, Christ "(le) maître jaloux [...] se promène comme le Seigneur dans la paradis terrestre". (81) But Barrault still hopes that a further transformation will occur. America is described as "une divinité sans nom, plus forte, plus gracieuse, plus imposante que Cybèle, Isis ou Pan". The new world has welcomed "l'esprit austère, libre et viril de l'humanité" with "la ferveur d'un amour vierge, et la vigueur d'une fécondité neuve". It is Barrault's wish that the conflict between these two principles will ultimately lead to their reconciliation: "[...] seul à seul, le Verbe divin de l'humanité et le Verbe divin des mondes vont s'écouter, se répondre, s'aimer!" (82)

As a final example we may cite Victor Considérant. In his book *Au Texas* Considérant urges the followers of the ideas of Fourier to leave Europe and emigrate to America. Once again, however, a justification of this is seen to lie in humanity's general movement from East to West:

L'Amérique est, aujourd'hui déjà et dans la plus grande signification du mot, *l'Occident du Monde* [...] Quand on observe la marche générale de l'humanité, on reconnaît facilement que le progrès, en se faisant dans le temps, se déplaçait dans l'espace, et que le foyer de lumière et d'impulsion sociale a toujours procédé d'Orient en Occident, comme le soleil.<sup>(83)</sup>

Other writers could be quoted to illustrate the theme of America.<sup>(84)</sup> The examples referred to above are, however, sufficient to place Quinet's speculations in a wider context. A number of common elements emerged from these texts: the importance attributed to the Westward movement of mankind, the desire for a reconciliation between East and West and the wish to restore harmony between man and nature. In 1831 Quinet's hopes for a religious renewal are based upon his interpretation of the relationship between man and nature in America. The extent to which this implies the decline of Western European civilisation and, what is more important, the decline of Christianity itself is a question which comes to the fore in *Ahasvérus*.

*Ahasvérus* portrays the victory of Christianity over Oriental pantheism but above all it is concerned with Quinet's yearning for a great religious renewal in the present. Is Christianity dying? What new religion can replace it? These are the questions which haunt Quinet in this poem where the mood is often one of doubt and despair. Does Mob, the spirit of negation, speak the truth about the present when she declares that it often happens "qu'un dieu est mort et enterré dans le ciel, et que nous l'adorons encore sur la terre"?<sup>(85)</sup> Often in *Ahasvérus* the cry is one of doubt: "o Christ! o Christ! pourquoi nous as-tu trompés?"<sup>(86)</sup> In the scene in Strasbourg cathedral a clear statement of this doubt is provided by Pope Gregory VII:

Malheur! le paradis, l'enfer, le purgatoire,  
n'étaient que dans mon âme; la poignée et la  
lame de l'épée des archanges ne flamboyaient  
que dans mon sein; il n'y avait de cieux infinis  
que ceux que mon génie pliait et déployait lui-  
même pour s'abriter dans son désert [...]<sup>(87)</sup>

The words spoken by the choir of devils between the first and second "journées" point more directly still to the mood of underlying metaphysical unease which is present in so many pages of *Ahasvérus*. Is there really a

divine purpose at work in the universe? Is the world appearance or reality? Is life a dream? Even the philosophy of history which Quinet had found in Germany seems incapable of providing a solution or an explanation. Thus the Devil asks:

[...] n'avons-nous pas cru tous, mes frères, que l'Eternel, devenu fou, jouait une divine comédie, dont il était l'unique personnage? (88)

What is more, does *Ahasvérus* imply that God himself is responsible for evil and suffering? Such was Eckstein's interpretation of the *Prologue*:

Dans l'*Ahasvérus* [...] c'est [Dieu] lui-même qui s'est servi d'une mauvaise argile; c'est donc sa faute si l'homme n'a pas mieux réussi; en accusant l'humanité ses reproches retombent sur lui-même; scepticisme fataliste qui prive l'homme de sa liberté. (89)

Quinet is preoccupied by the spectacle of the rise and fall of religions none of which is able to resist the forces of time. Such change may signify progress. On the other hand, the words spoken by the figure of "l'Enfer" are disturbing and echo in the reader's mind: "Plus tard, le jugement dernier sera refait, et le juge sera jugé". (90) Some contemporary critics accused Quinet of proclaiming the death of Christianity. A. Vinet, for example, detected in *Ahasvérus* an atheistic note. (91) How else could be interpreted the epilogue where Christ himself is assailed by doubt before returning a second time to the sepulchre? In reply, Quinet contended that the last act and epilogue of his poem should really be interpreted as an allegory of the contemporary condition of Christianity which, although suffering from doubt, was not dying:

Cet épilogue a pour but de montrer que le Christ, c'est-à-dire tout le système chrétien, est descendu aujourd'hui avec le doute des temps modernes, dans un tombeau moral comme autrefois dans son tombeau de pierre. Mais de ce sépulchre il doit ressusciter une seconde fois et se transfigurer dans un nouvel avenir. Ce sera le même Christ, le même Dieu, mais agrandi et monté au niveau de l'intelligence humaine [...]. (92)

But if traditional Christianity (i.e. Catholicism) is judged insufficient to serve contemporary needs what precisely is this new form which Quinet considers to be capable of taking its place and rejuvenating the Christian spirit? Charles Magnin envisaged Quinet's poem as part of a wider movement of spiritual change and renewal where Christianity was developing in a pantheistic direction. (93) Quinet himself defines his position thus:



Comme le paganisme alexandrin portait en lui un germe de christianisme, le christianisme contient un nouveau monde qui commence à poindre. Dans le calice de l'évangile littéral est caché un évangile cosmogonique, qui brise déjà son enveloppe. A présent, le livre c'est la vie, l'homme c'est le genre humain, l'Eglise c'est le monde, le Christ c'est l'infini. Tout se meut, tout gravite, tout est emporté dans ce progrès. Ce qui était personnel est devenu social, ce qui était social est devenu cosmogonique. Dans cette transformation, le disciple se fait peuple, le peuple humanité, l'humanité univers, l'univers éternité, l'éternité Dieu [..](94)

In the *Revue de Paris* A. de Saint-Cheron raised the vital question of the meaning of Christ's mission according to *Ahasvérus*: "Si le Christ n'est pas venu racheter l'homme de sa chute, que devient le christianisme?"(95) The scene of the fall of man is indeed absent from *Ahasvérus* and Christ appears more as the representative of a vital stage in the development of individuality than as the redeemer of the sins of mankind. Quinet repudiates all belief in original sin and professes his faith in the doctrine of infinite progress. At the same time we should not forget that *Ahasvérus* is described as the new or second Adam and that the historical process itself is considered in terms of mankind's journey through division and suffering to its final reintegration in God.

Quinet's critics also seized upon the ambiguity of the figure of Eternity in the epilogue in order to cast doubt upon the genuineness of Quinet's Christainity. In his reply Quinet claims that Eternity is identical with the "Père Eternel" of the earlier scenes once the latter is no longer seen through the anthropomorphic eyes of the Middle Ages and has been "ressuscité dans son idée pure et éternelle".(96) This pantheistic Eternity is much closer to the Absolute of *De la Nature et de l'histoire* than to the Christian conception of the God of love. Quinet's Eternity seems more to take the form of a life-force beyond good and evil: "Dans mon sein, je n'ai ni amour, ni haine".(97) For Vinet the meaning of the epilogue was clear:

Qu'est-ce que l'Eternité succédant au Père Eternel, sinon l'expulsion du Dieu personnel et vivant, et l'abandon de l'univers aux mains de fer de la nécessité.(98)

Vinet, moreover, saw no reason to modify his opinion in the light of Quinet's reply to Saint-Cheron's article in the *Revue de Paris*.

Quinet's understanding of Christianity cannot be dissociated from the theory of the development of the awareness of individuality:

[...] le Christ arrive; il apporte le glaive, et encore quelque chose; il apporte la lutte, il apporte l'individualité [...]. La personnalité des nations s'engage, plus tard ce sera celle de l'individu. (99)

The development of individuality forms the framework upon which *Ahasvérus* is built and provides the key to Quinet's understanding of the contemporary religious crisis. The fourth act of *Ahasvérus* is an allegory of the spiritual ills of modern times. A crumbling, dying world is portrayed where from all sides the cry resounds that God is dead. These pages which echo the argument of "De l'Avenir des religions" show the extent to which Quinet is no longer satisfied with the man-centred interpretation of history. The development of individuality has been carried to excess and has resulted in an acute state of disharmony where the individual finds himself in conflict with nature and with mankind:

Au troisième acte (au moyen-âge et dans le monde moderne), le drame est tout haletant; il pleure, il palpète, il sanglote; il s'est individualisé; il est arrivé à sa dernière péripétie [...]. C'est l'homme, lui, tout seul d'un côté, une fois Hamlet, une fois Pascal, une fois Byron, une fois un autre; - et contre lui le peuple, le genre humain, le monde. (100)

In "De l'Avenir des religions" Quinet speaks of the Middle Ages as a religious, sacerdotal epoch brought to an end by the Reformation which in turn led to the French Revolution. The subject matter of in particular the fourth act of *Ahasvérus* is the spiritual climate produced by the Revolution as it is described in the article of 1831. Here we learn that the French Revolution marked the beginning of an exclusive preoccupation with man:

Sa loi [de la Révolution], sa loi terrible est de dire adieu au monde religieux. On le lui a reproché, et c'est en effet sa mission prochaine; car il est des temps où il faut que l'homme marche seul et montre ce qu'il sait faire sans Dieu [...]. Que chacun achève donc son oeuvre; mais que nul n'attende la visite du maître; il ne viendra que lorsque, la tâche se trouvant accomplie, il faudra en donner une nouvelle au monde. (101)

In "De l'Avenir des religions" Quinet, dissatisfied with this state of affairs, longs for a return to religion which would overcome the individual's estrangement from nature and from mankind. This desire takes the form of his vision of America as the land of a great religious transformation, of a new harmony between man and nature. This theme is echoed in *Ahasvérus* where Quinet goes one step further and suggests that

the islands of the Pacific may one day produce "un Christ nouveau".(102) History is again a westward movement circling the globe expressing the divine thoughts unconsciously present in nature. Once this process is completed "l'universelle harmonie" is restored. Estrangement, alienation and conflict cease at the conclusion of the fourth act of *Ahasvérus*:

La nature, le genre humain, l'individualité ont épuisé la lutte. En grandissant, chacun d'eux est devenu infini; et à ce sommet de l'être, leur harmonie se retrouve. Une même parole les explique l'un à l'autre. Le même mot qui juge le passé crée l'avenir. Tout se rapproche, tout se confond; tout se comprend, tout est consommé.(103)

Despite this return to harmony we should not assume that the reconciliation of man with the universe in the divine reason is close at hand. The Wandering Jew is the symbol of humanity journeying through history in search of God. In history no return to the past is possible; all action is directed towards the future. Having successfully borne the burden of Christ's cross in history *Ahasvérus*-humanity becomes "le pèlerin des mondes à venir et le second Adam".(104) *Ahasvérus* and Rachel, doubt and faith, earth and heaven finally fuse to become the androgynous angel of mankind. Mankind's destiny is to be never satisfied but always to march onward in search of the Infinite even if in this quest Christianity - or at least Catholicism - no longer satisfies man's needs:

Ni Dieu, ni fils de Dieu, ni Christ, ni Ange, ni Créateur, ni mondes ne l'ont [Le vide dans mon coeur] pas encore rempli. Demain peut-être!  
C'est là tout le mystère.(105)

Mankind is a collective being whose historical existence is conceived as a journey and a quest. In history mankind abandons the world of nature, of spontaneity, of necessity in order to enter into a world of suffering and conflict which however is also the world of freedom and aspiration. History is a drama, a struggle between men, and between man and nature. In *Ahasvérus* Quinet presents God, le Père Eternel, as a spectator of the "play" of history performed by the seraphim. He is spectator rather than actor:

Dans ce drame, il y a trois personnages, Dieu, l'homme et l'univers; mais l'action et la péripétie ne se passent, à véritablement parler, qu'entre les deux derniers.(106)

*De la Nature et de l'histoire* had, however, presented the reader with an Absolute active in the nature and history, far removed from a personal transcendent God. From the standpoint of the Absolute the conflict between man and nature becomes merely "une lutte apparente".(107) Once nature and history are understood in this manner the opposition between them

which had been essential to the anthropocentric conception of history disappears. History is not so much the story of mankind as the story of God. As was the case with Schelling time "becomes part of the eternal history of God". (108)

History may still take the form of the development of individuality but the meaning of history has ceased to be directly dependent upon the free activity of the individual and as a result the life of the individual has become dangerously close to being merely an instrument of the Absolute expressing itself in and through the finite. Do we expect a thinker who has placed so much emphasis on individual freedom to speak of the events of history in the following manner?:

La suite entière du monde civil n'est qu'une suite de symboles que l'Eternel évoque de son sein, comme l'âme de l'humanité se peint toute idéale dans sa Psyché de Thespie et son Prométhée de Samothrace. (109)

Other similarities exist between Quinet and Schelling. In *The Ages of the World* (1810) the German philosopher awaits the coming of the new Homer who "speaking once again in the undivided language of mythology, but of a higher mythology which has incorporated the discoveries of modern philosophy, will sing the new epic of a reunified age". The theme of this epic will be "the restoration of a lost unity of the human intellect with itself and with nature". (110) At the conclusion of *De la Nature et de l'Histoire* Quinet, too, calls for a new Homer and defines his task thus:

Et maintenant, qu'un homme dispose des annales de l'humanité comme Homère de celles du peuple grec, que pour unité il choisisse l'unité de l'histoire et de la nature, qu'il rapproche des être réels à travers les siècles dans la voie merveilleuse de l'infini [...] Moins achevé dans ses contours que les poèmes homériques, il les surpassera en grandeur et en élévation. Sa mission est de dégager des voiles mystiques de la comédie divine et du paradis perdu, et des saints livres du christianisme, le côté réel de l'humanité, comme l'Iliade a extrait la figure grecque du système des épopées symboliques des Achéens et des Pélasges. (111)

Both Quinet and Schelling speak of history as a drama; Schelling, however, envisages an interpretation of the drama which reconciles Spirit and human freedom:

If we think of history as a drama in which everyone who has a part in it plays his role with complete freedom and at his own discretion, then a rational development of this confused play can be conceived only if it is one Spirit which composes in all, and if the poet, to whom the individual actors are mere

fragments (*disjecti membra poëtae*), has so harmoniously arranged in advance the objective outcome of the whole with the free play of all the individuals that at the end something actually rational must result. But if the poet *were* independent of his drama, we would be only the players who execute what he has composed. But if he *is* not independent of us, but reveals and discloses himself only successively through the play of our freedom itself, so that without this freedom he himself *would* not be, then we are fellow-poets of the whole and our own designers of the roles we play. (112)

What is more, Quinet's conception of history as presented in "De l'Avenir des religions, *De la Nature et de l'histoire* and in *Ahasvérus* - "le mystère de l'idée divine" - recalls Schelling's famous lines:

History is an epic composed in the mind of God; its major parts are: that which represents the going-forth of mankind from its centre to the greatest distance from Him, the other which represents the return. The former is the Iliad, the latter the Odyssey of history. In the former, the direction was centrifugal, in the latter it is centripetal. The great design of the entire appearance of the world expresses itself in this manner in history. The ideas, the spirits, had to fall away from the centre and enter into nature, the general sphere of the Fall, into particularity, in order that afterwards they might, as particulars, return into the indifference, be reconciled to it, and be in it without disturbing it. (113)

Quinet, however, in his letter to the *Revue du progrès social* rejects the idea of the fall of man considering it to be a specifically Jewish tradition. Unlike many of his contemporaries he does not overtly have recourse to the idea of the fall of man, or of a cosmic fall, in order to explain the initial impulse to history and progress. However, while not explaining the origin of the historical development of mankind in terms of disruption of the original unity of man and God in paradise, Quinet does speak of mankind as a traveller, like Ulysses forever searching for Ithaca. The East-West movement of civilisation may be interpreted as a journey where mankind returns through time and space to its land of origin, its home. The movement is circular but it is clearly implied that a transformation has taken place in the course of history. Thus the Wandering Jew becomes a second Adam and America a semi-paradise. Near the conclusion of *Ahasvérus* harmony is restored. But if God and the reestablishment of harmony is the end of history, why was the original harmony sundered? No clear reply is given. Quinet's God is not the personal God of Christianity. Each religion marks a stage in a process

wherein nature contemplates herself in and through the human consciousness. For Schelling "God *is* not [...] if He *were* we would not be; but He *reveals* himself continually".(114) God only *is* at the end of history. Similarly the disturbing figure of "l'Eternité" appears at the close of *Ahasvérus*.

The separation of man from nature can, however, be interpreted more directly in terms of the fall of man into history, a life of suffering which contrasts with the unconscious world of nature. Quinet admits that the "permanence du monde matériel" may well arouse "de vains regrets" in man condemned to transience. Similarly the individual may be tempted to identify so completely with the peoples of the past that his personality becomes absorbed, not this time by nature, but by history itself.(115) Man, however, means nothing to Quinet without his personality, activity and his aspiration to freedom and infinity. It would be incorrect to interpret Quinet's desire to overcome the division between man and nature in a naively pantheistic manner as a desire to return to nature. The human condition requires the separation of man from nature even though the action of mankind in history may be interpreted as achieving the redemption of nature. When harmony is restored nature too, has become infinite.

The dynamic force of history lies in the development of individuality and freedom. This is also a movement from spontaneity (the East, nature) to reflexion (the West, the mind). In recent times it is clear that the development of the intellect has reached a crisis point in the evolution of German philosophy since Kant. In the *Etude*, referring to the disagreement between Kant and Herder as witnessed in the latter's *Metakritik*, Quinet remarks that, had Herder approached Kant's philosophy with an open mind, he would have recognised that:

[...] cette philosophie [celle de Kant] dans ses vastes et obscurs développements, est l'expression historique d'une condition de la conscience du genre humain, et que c'est à lui qui l'a créée qu'il faut en rapporter, ou l'honneur ou le blâme. Comme dans l'Orient, l'homme naissant lui [Herder] avait apparu caché sous les liens de l'univers, l'univers à l'extrémité des temps lui aurait apparu voilé et presque enseveli sous l'oeuvre et la pensée de l'homme. En effet, le jour où la personnalité libre eut tout envahi et tout dompté, ne cherchant que soi et ne trouvant que soi, dans ce silence de toutes choses n'entendant plus que l'harmonie de ses invisibles sphères, elle se prit à s'adorer. [...] Si ce fut là une tentative ou vaine ou glorieuse de la philosophie, elle ne fit d'ailleurs que mettre en lumière et pousser à ses extrêmes conséquences le principe qu'exprimait à son insu toute l'humanité moderne dans ses actes, ses arts, ses cultes, et le système entier de sa régénération civile.(116)

Elsewhere Quinet draws a deliberate parallel between recent developments in German philosophy and the events of the French Revolution and Empire. Thus the philosophy of Kant is linked to the Constituent Assembly, Fichte to the Convention, Schelling to the Empire and Hegel to the Holy Alliance. (117) The association between Fichte and the Convention is revealing since Quinet is linking that particular revolutionary regime with the philosophical system which carried furthest the emphasis upon the will, the activity of the Self creating the world. (118) In both philosophy and history an extreme point has been reached. Hegel too had seen the Revolution as a moment of crisis:

[...] in the *Phenomenology* the events of the Revolution and the Reign of Terror are translated into the major *crise de conscience* both of Hegel as an individual and of the collective mind of mankind. These events are the dark night of the Hegelian spirit, recovery from which sets it on the way toward fulfilment in the total discovery of its identity and destiny. The stage of the Revolution, Hegel says, is "spirit in the form of absolute freedom", the extreme point of the "interaction of consciousness with itself". (119)

But Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) in a mood of growing conservatism when the enthusiasm which he had originally felt for the Revolution together with Schelling and Hölderlin had long evaporated. Quinet, on the other hand, while interpreting the Revolution as a moment of crisis remains convinced that the Revolution was fulfilling its mission: "[...] il est des temps où il faut que l'homme marche seul et montre ce qu'il sait faire sans Dieu". (120) The Revolution retains its significance from a religious standpoint; as the English Revolution had been the expression of Lutheranism, so the French Revolution was the expression of Calvinism. A crisis point has nonetheless been reached and the argument of "De l'Avenir des religions" can be interpreted as an attempt to overcome the division between subject and object, between the intellect and nature.

Two contrasting views have emerged from the works that we have examined thus far. In the first place the meaning of history has been shown to lie in the exercise of freedom and this means above all freedom of the individual. History, moreover, reveals the progressive development of liberty, individuality and personality. Man first separates himself from nature and then from the political state to which he had alienated his freedom; finally he becomes conscious of himself as a free agent. This last state is identified with the coming of Christianity. This view recalls Michelet's picture of mankind as a Promethean figure creating itself in history. Humanity has created and destroyed its gods as it has advanced. At the same time, however, Quinet also aspires to a synthesis

which would give meaning to history within a wider framework including nature and God. An upward movement is manifested in nature which achieves consciousness in man. The aim of history becomes the self-knowledge of the Absolute and history itself is seen as the revelation of God. Although man stands in opposition to nature and necessity, nature herself is seen as the expression of the divine and it is the Absolute which journeys to self-knowledge in history. The history of religions becomes the history of God and not simply of man's thoughts about God.

Quinet, like Schelling and Herder, is faced with the problem of reconciling human freedom with the progressive revelation of God. In the words of Schelling: "Subjectively and for inner experience it is we who act; objectively it is not we but something else through us".(121) What, we ask ourselves, is the value of the individual within the context of a cosmic process of becoming wherein nature achieves self-knowledge in the mind of mankind. In so far as priority is given to the active role of mankind in realising the divine thoughts present in nature and in, so to speak, creating God in history the initiative remains with man; in so far as man is a passive vehicle for the expression of the Absolute his responsibility is diminished.



NOTES

- (1) Prior to this Quinet had published *Les Tablettes du Juif-Errant, ou ses récriminations contre le passé, sans préjudice au présent, écrites par lui-même*, Paris, Beraud, 1823. This work is written after the manner of the *Contes* of Voltaire.
- (2) See H. Tronchon, *Le Jeune Edgar Quinet ou l'aventure d'un enthousiaste*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1937 and R. H. Powers, *op. cit.*
- (3) See A. Monchoux, "L'Aventure allemande d'Edgar Quinet", *Revue de littérature comparée*, 1960, pp. 81-109.
- (4) J. G. Herder, *Idées sur la philosophie de l'histoire de l'humanité*, trans. Quinet, Paris, Levrault, 1827-28, 3 vols. *Introduction*, vol. 1, pp. 7-71; *Etude*, vol. 3, pp. 493-543.
- (5) *Introduction*, p. 59. Cf. Chateaubriand: "Je visitai d'abord les peuples qui ne sont plus; je m'en allai m'asseyant sur les débris de Rome et de la Grèce". *René*. Paris, Garnier, 1970, p. 194.
- (6) Cf. Fr. Schlegel: "La philosophie de l'histoire [...] ne gît pas dans la connaissance des événements et des faits historiques isolés, mais dans la découverte des principes qui les ont amenés et produits". *Philosophie de l'histoire*, trans. Lechat, Paris, Parent-Desbarres, 1836, vol. 2, p. 220. Similar examples could be multiplied.
- (7) Our use of the terms anthropocentric and theocentric is based upon their application by M. Rouché in his analysis of Herder's thought. According to Rouché Herder's philosophy of history stands midway between two tendencies. The first, generally associated with the name of Hegel considers men as unconscious instruments of God. The second, in contrast, places man at the centre of history; mankind has the task of organising history, society and even nature. Marx and Nietzsche are given as examples of this tendency. These points are made by Rouché in his long *Introduction* to his translation of extracts from the *Ideen*. See J. G. Herder, *Idées pour la philosophie de l'histoire de l'humanité*, trans. Rouché, Paris, Aubier, 1962.
- (8) *Introduction*, p. 34.
- (9) *Etude*, p. 500.
- (10) *Ibid.*, p. 501. See also the extracts from Quinet's unpublished early essays quoted by U. Molsen in *Philosophie und Dichtung bei Quinet*, Altona, Druck von C. Adolff, 1913.
- (11) *Introduction*, p. 34. There are however moments when progress appears almost inevitable: "Le triomphe du bien me paraît une chose claire comme la lumière, et il semble que je commence à comprendre l'ordre et l'harmonie du monde moral. Quand toutes les masses s'avancent vers le bien, je m'inquiète peu de quelques individualités qui n'ont que quelques jours de vie". *Correspondance*, vol. 1, pp. 350-1, August, 1825.

- (12) Cf. Victor Cousin: "[...] le MOI n'existe que pour le combat, c'est l'opposition du moi et de la nature qui forme le début de la vie intellectuelle." *Du Vrai, du beau et du bien*, Paris, Hachette, 1836, p. 29.
- (13) *Introduction*, p. 38. See A. J. George, *Lamartine and Romantic Unanimism*, New York, Columbia U.P., 1940 and M. Larroutis, "Sources Lamartiniennes. 1. Quinet 2. Ballanche", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de France*, 1960, pp. 219-227.
- (14) *Introduction*, p. 37.
- (15) *Etude*, p. 535.
- (16) *Introduction*, p. 65.
- (17) *Ibid.*, p. 71. Cf. *Correspondance*, vol., 1, p. 351, (August 1825): "[...] la certitude d'une vie future s'établit pour moi, non pas sur la parole isolée d'un peuple, d'un siècle, mais par la loi même inhérente à l'humanité et à l'individu, manifestée dans l'histoire".
- (18) *Introduction*, p. 68.
- (19) *Etude*, p. 535.
- (20) V. Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, 2nd ed., Paris, Ladrangé, 1833, pp. 228-29.
- (21) *Ibid.*, p. 230. Cousin defines God as "la pensée en soi, la pensée absolue avec ses moments fondamentaux, la raison éternelle, substance et cause des vérités que l'homme aperçoit". According to Cousin such a God "ne peut ne pas créer; et en créant, il ne tire pas du néant, il tire de lui-même [...]." *Cours de philosophie*, Paris, Pichon et Didier, 1828, pp. 12 and 36.
- (22) *Introduction*, pp. 12 and 39.
- (23) *Etude*, p. 535.
- (24) *Introduction*, pp. 68-9. This passage might also be compared with the famous lines of Chateaubriand (*Génie du christianisme*, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1966, vol. 1, p. 152.): "Il est un Dieu; les herbes de la vallée et les cèdres de la montagne le bénissent, l'insecte bourdonne ses louanges [...]. On pourrait dire que l'homme est la pensée manifestée de Dieu et que l'univers est son imagination rendue sensible".
- (25) Ravaisson, in a review of Quinet's translation, comments that Herder and Vico both forgot: "[...] ce qui affranchit l'homme de [la] double fatalité de l'idée et de la nature, la liberté". Freedom, according to Ravaisson, should not be seen as the exclusive possession of man: "C'était du commencement qu'il lui [la liberté] fallait partir, des entrailles mêmes de la cause, d'où l'intelligence s'est librement produite par toutes les formes de la nature, comme dans les époques du monde social, du règne de la volonté et de la moralité. Peut-être est-ce à ces profondeurs que nous découvrirons enfin le fondement tant cherché de l'harmonie des choses". *Journal général de l'instruction publique*, 1836, p. 154.

- (26) The comparisons between nature and history sometimes lend to the latter the character of necessity appropriate to the former: "[...] c'était une condition du monde que nous voyons, de faire naître à telle époque, telle forme de civilisation, tel mouvement de progression". (*Introduction*, p. 37); "Tout est bien, quand tout est conforme à sa loi; ce qui peut être produit, est produit; ce qui doit périr, périt", (*Ibid.*, p. 39). Change and progress become one: "L'ordre des choses la [l'humanité] condamne au changement; mais ces changements sont des progrès, et le même signe exprime sa faiblesse et sa force". (*Ibid.*, pp. 65-66).
- (27) Rouché, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- (28) *Introduction*, p. 55.
- (29) *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.
- (30) See D. G. Charlton, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- (31) See P. Grappin's introductory remarks to his edition of *L'Education du genre humain*, Paris, Aubier, 1968.
- (32) Lessing, *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- (33) *Introduction*, pp. 46-7.
- (34) K. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans., Cozens and Bowden, London, S.C.M. Press, 1972, p. 264.
- (35) *Ibid.*, p. 334.
- (36) *Etude* pp. 517-8 and 519.
- (37) The reader naturally recalls the famous lines of 1831 from the beginning of Michelet's *Introduction à l'histoire universelle*: "Avec le monde a commencé une guerre qui doit finir avec le monde, et pas avant; celle de l'homme contre la nature, de l'esprit contre la matière, de la liberté contre la fatalité. L'histoire n'est pas autre chose que le récit de cette interminable lutte". *op. cit.*, p. 229. With regard to justice some remarks which Quinet makes in a letter of 1827 point to the emphasis which he places upon man's responsibility for his condition and the necessity for effort and struggle: "Ce que j'ai senti, ce que j'ai vu, tout m'apprend que notre destinée à chacun est véritablement notre oeuvre. Notre mal, comme notre bien, vient de nous; s'il y a oppression et injustice, cela dépend de nous." *Correspondance*, vol. 2, p. 35.
- (38) P. Viallaneix, *La Voie royale*, new ed., Paris, Flammarion, 1971, p. 201.
- (39) *Ibid.*, pp. 172f. Quinet tells us (Pagnerre, Vol. 10, p. 318) that he wrote an essay on Bossuet. For further reactions to Bossuet see: A. Dollinger, *Les Etudes Historiques de Chateaubriand*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1932, p. 262; Th. Jouffroy, *Mélanges philosophiques*, 3rd ed., Paris, Hachette, 1860, pp. 59-63.

- (40) G. Monod, op. cit., p. 102. Cf. *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. 344 (10 August, 1825): "Je ne veux pas du tout m'abandonner au torrent de métaphysique qui vous mène on ne sait où. Il [Cousin] a abordé à l'*Illuminisme*, ou du moins il y touche. C'est une belle science que celle des abstractions; mais moi, je fais grand cas aussi de l'observation, des mouvements de l'âme et de tout ce qu'il y a de passionné dans le coeur; ce qui trouble la science, métaphysique pure".
- (41) Published as an appendix to *De la Grèce moderne et de ses rapports avec l'antiquité*, Paris, Levrault, 1830. References are to the first edition. The essay is dated 1828 in the Pagnerre edition.
- (42) Cf. Valès, op. cit., p. 84 and Mme E. Quinet, op. cit., pp. 127-30.
- (43) See G. Bär, *Edgar Quinets 'Ahasvérus' und seine Beziehungen zu Quinets Geschichtsphilosophie*, Rostock, 1917.
- (44) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, pp. 400-1.
- (45) F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, New York, Image Books, 1963, vol. 7, pt. 1, pp. 35 and 162. Cousin for his part judged that a theism without pantheism was a dead religion (*Cours de philosophie*, vol. 1, lecture 13, p. 19).
- (46) H. J. Hunt, *The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1941, p. 103. Cf. J.-L. Dumas, "Quinet et la philosophie allemande de l'histoire", *Revue de Littérature comparée*, 1973, pp. 384-98.
- (47) Schelling quoted by P. C. Hayner, *Reason and Existence*, Leiden, Brill, 1967, p. 66.
- (48) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, p. 399.
- (49) Cf. G. F. Creuzer, *Religions de l'antiquité*, trans., Guigniaut, Paris, Treuttel et Würtz, 1825, vol. 1, p. 42. For the influence of Creuzer on Quinet see W. P. Sohnle, *Georg Friedrich Creuzers 'Symbolik und Mythologie' in Frankreich*, Göppingen, A. Kümmerle, 1972.
- (50) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, pp. 411-2.
- (51) Ibid., p. 417.
- (52) Ibid., p. 417.
- (53) Ibid., p. 419.
- (54) Cf. Cousin: "[...] les lieux divers représentent des idées diverses [...]", *Cours de philosophie*, Vol. 1, lecture 8, p. 20.
- (55) Ibid., p. 401.
- (56) *De la Grèce moderne*, p. 180. Creuzer (op. cit., p. 34) places the emphasis differently: "Chaque contrée chercha, dans les races d'animaux, dans les familles de plantes qui lui étaient propres, les emblèmes naturels des actions, et de la conduite de l'homme".
- (57) J. Michelet, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 354.
- (58) *De la Grèce moderne*, p. 18.

- (59) "De l'Avenir des religions", *Revue des deux mondes*, 15th July, 1831, p. 121.
- (60) In *De la Nature et de l'histoire* (p. 405) Quinet declares: "Ce qui dans l'homme s'appelle sensation, spontanéité, réflexion, apparaît dans le sein de Dieu sous le nom de nature, de mythologie, d'histoire. Les trois termes forment entre eux les trois phases de la psychologie universelle."
- (61) "De l'Avenir des religions", p. 126. The use of personification in *Ahasvérus* reflects this relationship between man and nature. It can interestingly be compared with Leroux's article "Du style symbolique", *Le Globe*, 8 April 1829, pp. 220-4. Cf. B. Constant discussing the philosophy of Schelling: "Dieu n'existe pas encore, mais on s'aperçoit qu'il commence à exister; l'homme le fait [...] Il est possible de dire que [l'homme] crée Dieu relativement à lui, à mesure qu'il le découvre". Quoted by P. Deguise, *Benjamin Constant méconnu. Le livre 'De la Religion'*, Geneva, Droz, 1966, p. 118.
- (62) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, p. 412.
- (63) See R. Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale*, Paris, Payot, 1950.
- (64) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, p. 404. According to Creuzer (op. cit., p. 41): "La mythologie est comme un grand arbre dont la souche est unique mais dont les branches et les rameaux sans nombre croissent et s'entrelacent en tout sens".
- (65) *De la Grèce moderne*, p. 372. In *Ahasvérus* (pp. 359-61) the personified figure of Athens expresses these same ideas.
- (66) *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2 and *De la nature et de l'histoire*, p. 414.
- (67) "Du Génie des traditions épiques de l'Allemagne et du nord", *Revue de Paris*, July 1831, p. 156.
- (68) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, p. 408. Cf. *Etude*, p. 529.
- (69) "De l'Avenir des religions", pp. 118 and 125.
- (70) *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- (71) *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- (72) *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- (73) *Ibid.*, pp. 124 and 125.
- (74) K. Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, New York, Anchor Books, 1967, pp. 29-40.
- (75) G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trad. Sibree, New York, Dover, 1956, pp. 86-7. Cf. *Napoléon*, p. 195: "L'occident me gêne et m'ennuie."
- (76) V. Hugo, "Fragment", *Revue de Paris*, June 1829, pp. 201-9.
- (77) *Ibid.*, p. 209.

- (78) Ch. Duguet, *Salut au nouveau monde*, and *Adieux à l'ancien monde*, Paris, Duverger, 1833. See M. Emerit, *Les Saint-Simoniens en Algérie*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1941, p. 48.
- (79) *Adieux à l'ancien monde*, p. 2.
- (80) *Salut au nouveau monde*, p. 2.
- (81) E. Barrault, *Occident et Orient*, Paris, Desessart, 1835, p. 456.
- (82) *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60. Cf. G. d'Eichtal, *Les Deux mondes*, Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1837, p. 276.
- (83) V. Considérant, *Au Texas*, Paris, Librairie Phalanstérienne, 1854, p. 22.
- (84) For example: E. Pelletan, *Profession de foi du dix-neuvième siècle*, Paris, Pagnerre, 1852.
- (85) *Ahasvérus*, p. 228.
- (86) *Ibid.*, p. 264. Cf. the opinion of an anonymous contemporary reviewer: "[...] cette épopée rétrécie dans le cerveau d'un homme sans croyance, se résume en ces mots: *Doute, Néant*", *Revue Européenne*, January 1834, p. 610.
- (87) *Ahasvérus*, p. 268. These lines made a deep impression on Leroux who quotes them in *De l'Humanité*. Leroux refers to "cette plainte [...] magnifique autant que douloureuse" but tempers his enthusiasm by remarking: "Mais hélas! quand le poète théologique de notre époque viendra-t-il? Nous sommes encore à la plainte". *De l'Humanité*, Paris, Perrotin, 1840, vol. 1, pp. 82-87. Cf. Leroux on the subject of doubt: *Revue encyclopédique*, December 1831, p. 645 and the conclusion of Lerminier's *Philosophie du droit*, Paris, Paulin, 1831.
- (88) *Ahasvérus*, p. 125.
- (89) Baron d'Eckstein, "Critique Littéraire, Ahasvérus", *La France Catholique*, 1834, vol. 1, p. 210. Cf. Eckstein's remarks in *Sur les rapports entre l'Inde et l'Europe*, Paris, Baudoin, 1835, p. 21.
- (90) *Ahasvérus*, p. 382. Cf. Vigny writing in his *Journal* (15th September, 1862) on the Last Judgment: "En ce moment, ce sera le genre humain ressuscité qui sera le juge, et l'Eternel, le Créateur, sera jugé par les générations rendues à la vie". Quoted by P. Viallaneix, *Vigny*, Paris, Seuil, 1964, p. 71.
- (91) A. Vinet, *Etudes sur la littérature française*, Paris, Fischbacher, 1923, vol. 3, pp. 123 ff. According to Vinet *Ahasvérus* implies the negation of progress.
- (92) Quinet in a letter to the editor of the *Revue du Progrès Social*, June 1834, p. 618. Cf. Lamartine: "Le christianisme lui-même, obscurci et mêlé d'erreurs comme toute doctrine devenue populaire, par les crédulités des siècles qu'il a traversés, paraît destiné à se transformer lui-même, à ressortir plus rationnel et plus pur

- des mystères surabondants dont on l'a enveloppé, et à confondre ses divines clartés avec celle de la religieuse raison qu'il a fait éclore le premier, et élevée si haut sur l'horizon de l'humanité". *Voyage en Orient*, Paris, Gosselin, 1835, vol. 2, p. 254.
- (93) Ch. Magnin, "Ahasvérus et la nature du génie poétique" included in the Pagnerre edition of Quinet's works, vol. 7, pp. 5-59.
- (94) "Ahasvérus", p. 10.
- (95) A. de Saint-Chéron, "Ahasvérus", *Revue de Paris*, March 1834, vol. 3, p. 310.
- (96) Letter to the *Revue du Progrès Social*, p. 618.
- (97) *Ahasvérus*, p. 401. B. Juden comments: "[...] c'est au panthéisme que Quinet emprunte l'entité agissante qui met fin au drame cosmique. Capricieuse, coquette, l'Eternité n'est plus Kronos. Tour à tour créatrice et destructrice, amante et vengeresse, arrêtant les destinées des dieux et des mortels, elle est la Parque suprême à la fois Maïa, Isis, Anankh, Artémis et leurs soeurs, même le Siva indien". (op. cit., p. 459.) Cf. Cl. Pichois, *L'Image de Jean-Paul Richter dans les lettres françaises*, Paris, Corti, 1963, p. 273.
- (98) Vinet, op. cit., pp. 123-4. According to Vinet Quinet's God is really history and consequently the individual is deprived of value.
- (99) "Ahasvérus", p.7.
- (100) Ibid., p.7.
- (101) "De l'Avenir des religions", pp. 118 and 119. In *Ahasvérus* (p. 305 and 306) we read: "non, non, il n'est point de Dieu [...] Que nous servirait, à nous, d'attendre [...] notre maître [...] Reposons-nous sans plus rien faire, puisque notre maître ne viendra pas inspecter notre ouvrage"; See also *Etude*, p. 554 for an example of the theme of the universe deprived of God.
- (102) *Ahasvérus*, p. 374. Cf. *Le Génie des religions* (p. 21) where Quinet suggests that "l'archipel indien" may produce, not a new Christ, but "sa Vénus spirituelle". Cf. Chateaubriand (Chapter V, *Otaïti*): "Ces îles, environnées d'un cercle de coraux, semblaient se balancer comme des vaisseaux à l'ancre dans un port, au milieu des eaux les plus tranquilles: l'ingénieuse antiquité aurait cru que Vénus avait noué sa ceinture autour de ces nouvelles Cythères pour les défendre des orages". *Génie du christianisme*, vol. 2, p. 93.
- (103) "Ahasvérus", p. 7.
- (104) *Ahasvérus*, p. 387. In 1834 there appeared a shortlived review entitled *Le Juif errant*, evidently inspired by Quinet's use of the legend: "Selon nous, [le Juif errant] c'est l'humanité qui voyage, c'est le progrès qui marche, et voilà pourquoi nous avons pris pour bannière de ralliement ce titre à la fois populaire et symbolique de l'avenir." (Vol. 1, p.2.)

- (105) *Ahasvérus*, p. 388-9.
- (106) "Ahasvérus, p. 6.
- (107) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, p. 399.
- (108) Schelling quoted by P.C. Hayner in op. cit., p. 87.
- (109) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, pp. 405-6.
- (110) M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, London, O.U.P., 1971, pp. 224 and 225. See Fr. Strich, *Die Mythologie in der deutschen Literatur*, Halle, Niemeyer, 1910, vol. 2, pp. 114 ff.
- (111) *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, pp. 441-2.
- (112) Schelling quoted by Hayner in op. cit., p. 70.
- (113) Ibid., p. 87.
- (114) Ibid., p. 70.
- (115) *Introduction*, p. 37.
- (116) *Etude*, pp. 538-9.
- (117) *Allemagne et Italie*, p. 175. These comparisons attracted the interest of Herzen. See *Textes philosophiques choisis*, Moscow, Editions en langues étrangères, n.d., p. 132. Herzen refers to Quinet in a letter of 1833 written to his friend Ogarev. In an article of the same year he compared history with nature in a manner very reminiscent of Quinet's *Introduction*. M. Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the birth of Russian socialism. 1812-1855*, Harvard U.P., 1961, pp. 94 and 96.
- (118) See A. Westphal, *Lettres inédites d'Edgar Quinet*, Paris, Stock, n.d., p. 36.
- (119) M. H. Abrams, op. cit., p. 352.
- (120) "De l'Avenir des Religions", p. 118. Cf. Abrams, op. cit., p. 350.
- (121) Schelling quoted by J. H. Randall, in *The Career of Philosophy*, New York, Columbia U.P., 1965, vol. 2, p. 259.



## CHAPTER TWO

In the 1830s Quinet took up the stance which he was to maintain in later life as the defender of the value of the individual and the enemy of historical fatalism. From this point on he will resist all attempts which, in his opinion, sacrifice the individual either to an impersonal Absolute or to the greater glory of an equally impersonal deified humanity. During these years we witness, with certain qualifications, a reassertion of a vision of history, rooted in the affirmation of the exercise of individual freedom. Quinet's publications of this period raise important questions concerning the value of the individual, his role and responsibility in determining the course of history and his relationship to God. These problems have already been encountered in relation to *Ahasvérus*. However, whereas *Ahasvérus* is above all a presentation of mankind as a collective being journeying through history, *Napoléon* (1836), *Prométhée* (1838), the *Examen de la vie de Jésus* (1838) and Quinet's discussion of the Homeric question are more directly concerned with the individual. Did the historical Jesus exist? Did Homer exist? Was Napoleon his own master or a tool of Providence?

Before turning to the texts themselves we must draw attention to the change which took place in Quinet's attitude towards Germany and German philosophical thought during the early years of the July Monarchy. In contrast to his earlier enthusiasm he now believes the people of Germany to be characterised by doubt, anger and materialism. What is more, he perceptively interprets the spectre of Germany united under Prussia as a threat to France. He is now convinced that in Germany religious faith has been transformed by the systems of post-Kantian Idealism but that these systems have themselves crumbled to dust leaving behind them only doubt, scepticism and the debris of both religion and philosophy. German philosophy is accused of carrying abstraction to excess and of ignoring contemporary problems. Quinet's most serious charge, however, is that German Idealism is guilty of an amoral attitude. This is particularly so in the field of history:

Le premier reproche qu'il faut lui [l'idéalisme allemand] adresser est le manque complet de sympathie, de charité, ou plutôt d'humanité; [...] L'indifférence entre le bien et le mal, entre le juste et l'injuste, entre la liberté et la tyrannie, est une marque de faiblesse autant qu'une marque de force. (1)

The full weight of Quinet's criticism falls upon Hegel and his disciples. He does not hesitate to attack the "pantheism" of Hegel with

a considerable degree of sarcasm. What is more, he speaks harshly of "la doctrine de l'absolu" which was not without its affinities with his own theories in *De la Nature et de l'histoire*.<sup>(2)</sup> It is in the light of this reappraisal of contemporary German philosophical thought that we must approach the renewed emphasis which Quinet places upon the value of the individual.<sup>(3)</sup>

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The Romantic period, as is well known, showed a marked enthusiasm for all forms of "poésie populaire". Herder, whose theories Quinet naturally knew well, had been instrumental in arousing interest in folk poetry throughout Europe. He believed that such poetry was an anonymous creation, the spontaneous expression of the spirit of the Volk. These theories received widespread approval and exerted a great influence. Thus we find Fauriel in 1824 defining Greek popular poetry as:

[l']expression directe et vraie du caractère et de l'esprit national [...] une poésie [...] qui vit, non dans les livres, d'une vie factice [...] mais dans le peuple lui-même, et de toute la vie du peuple.<sup>(4)</sup>

The terms "poésie populaire" and "poésie primitive" nevertheless lacked precise definition. Many different types of poetry from the epic to the Volkslied could be described as "poésie populaire". W. Schlegel pointed to the need for clarification:

Il est important en 1<sup>er</sup> lieu de délimiter convenablement la notion de *poésie populaire* [...] On a beaucoup trop souvent confondu la *poésie naturelle* en général avec la *poésie populaire* proprement dite. Même Herder [...] avance les noms d'Homère, d'Hésiode, d'Orphée et d'Ossian. Cela est tout à fait inexact: une poésie dans laquelle s'exprime la plus haute culture d'un siècle, ne peut être appelée poésie populaire, si ce dernier doit signifier quelque chose.<sup>(5)</sup>

Quinet, for his part, does not call into question the theory that the epic gives expression to a collective personality. At the same time, however, he seeks to differentiate between "poésie populaire" and genuine epic poetry. The true epic poet is an individual, an artist who creates an enduring work of beauty. "Poésie populaire" cannot on its own attain this artistic perfection. But if no dividing line separates the epic from folk poetry then the danger exists that the epic, too, will be understood to be simply the anonymous expression of the collectivity. This Quinet cannot accept.

The long and fascinating history of the Homeric question which itself reaches back into classical antiquity has been investigated by

J. L. Myres in his study *Homer and his Critics*.<sup>(6)</sup> As far as Quinet is concerned, however, attention must be paid above all to the reception which the theories of Vico and Wolf received in France.

The Neapolitan philosopher had denied the historical reality of an individual poet named Homer. He had come to this conclusion since he argued that the Homeric epic poems should be interpreted as expressions of Heroic Greek civilisation. Homer was not an individual, wrote Michelet in his *Discours sur le système et la vie de Vico*; the name indicated: "[...] l'ensemble des chants improvisés par tout le peuple et recueillis par les rhapsodes".<sup>(7)</sup>

The most celebrated influential contribution to this debate was provided at the close of the eighteenth century by Wolf who had called into doubt the existence of Homer in his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795). Briefly the main points of Wolf's theory were as follows: the Homeric epics were not the creation of an individual poet but contained songs or short poems composed by a number of different authors. These poems had been transmitted orally by recitation and only received their fixed form at the hand of Pisistratus in the sixth century B.C. The unity of the poems was not the result of the plan of an individual Homer but was to a large degree ascribed to Pisistratus. This theory thus accounted for any discrepancies and inconsistencies within the poems. Wolf emphasised his belief that the absence of alphabetical writing at the time of the first composition of the poems rendered impossible the transmission to posterity of a long heroic poem.

Wolf's theories found much favour within Germany and the question was pursued further by scholars such as Gottfried Hermann and Karl Lachmann. The sphere of influence of Wolfian ideas was wide, affecting such figures as Niebuhr, Friedrich Schlegel and W. von Humbolt. Hegel in his *Aesthetic* turns his attention to the question but his interpretation resists the excessive claims of the collectivity:

[...] le poème épique, en tant qu'oeuvre d'art réelle, ne peut être que l'oeuvre d'un seul individu. Tout en exprimant l'esprit de tout un peuple, il n'est pas l'oeuvre collective de celui-ci, mais celle de quelques-uns seulement [...] même le chant populaire a besoin d'une bouche pour exprimer par la voix et la parole l'intériorité participant d'un contenu national; une oeuvre d'art unie a besoin à plus forte raison d'un seul esprit appartenant à un seul individu.<sup>(8)</sup>

Hegel describes as "une opinion barbare, anti-artistique" the theory that the Homeric poems lack unity and consist merely in the simple juxtaposition

of "diverses rhapsodies ayant le même ton".

In Italy Leopardi was influenced by the Wolfian current of ideas and in England, Coleridge, who Quinet claims rejected Wolf's views, remarked in 1830:

I have no doubt whatever that *Homer* is a mere concrete name for the rhapsodies of the 'Iliad'.  
Of course there was a Homer, and twenty besides. (9)

In France, we also find doubt cast upon the historical reality of Homer among the writings of Quinet's contemporaries. Ballanche, for example, speaks of the Homeric epic as: "Ces chants qui prennent un nom, qui revêtent une figure, qui deviennent un poète [...]". (10) And Jean-Jacques Ampère states that the mere names, Ossian, Homer:

[...] ne nous apprennent rien d'authentique sur ceux à qui on les prête, mais désignent pour nous une certaine ère de la poésie, comme Hippocrate une certaine école médicale. (11)

A number of books and articles bear witness to the curiosity which the Homeric problem aroused in France during the Romantic period. Benjamin Constant discussed the question of the historical reality of Homer in *De la Religion considérée dans sa source, ses formes et ses développements*. (12) In 1830, Charles Magnin examined at length the different interpretations of the Homeric poems in an important article entitled "Examen des systèmes de Vico et de Wolf sur la formation des poèmes Homériques". (13) Moreover, the illustrious Fauriel, who knew and influenced Quinet, examined the whole Homeric question in a series of lectures which survive today only in the form of the detailed summaries provided by the young Egger for the *Revue générale de l'instruction publique* from April 1836 to January 1837. In his lectures Fauriel makes extensive use of his knowledge of the epic traditions of different nations. He investigates the hypotheses of critics such as Thiersch, Nitzsch and Hermann. He gives his opinion on the question of inconsistencies within the poems, examines the problem of the use of writing and puts forward his own views on the manner of the epic's transmission to later generations. Fauriel argues that the poems first existed "comme fragments détachés", that only in the sixth century B.C. did they receive a certain fixed order and were committed to writing, and that between their composition and that date the poems were altered in a great many respects. As for Homer himself, Fauriel remarks:

[...] le nom seul d'Homère peut prendre place dans l'histoire, mais [...] sa biographie et l'époque où il a vécu offrent des difficultés à peu près insolubles. (14)

Fauriel clearly desires to steer a middle course between the extreme points of view on this subject:

[...] entre l'opinion qui fait d'Homère un poète de cabinet, combinant, comme au seizième et au dix-huitième siècle, le tissu, les épisodes et les ornements d'un poème épique d'après certaines règles instinctives ou formulées; et l'autre opinion aussi peu soutenable qui voit dans [...] Homère la symbolique personnification d'un vaste et multiple travail auquel auraient pris part tous les *homérides*, les cent poètes du *cycle épique* de l'ancienne Grèce. (15)

A similar desire for a compromise solution emerges from the article "Homère" which Guigniaut contributed to the *Encyclopédie des gens du monde*. Here Homer is described as "tout ensemble une personne et un symbole, un individu et un être collectif". (16) Guigniaut, however, is quite definite in his rejection of the excesses of the Wolfian school whose influence he considers now to be on the wane. (17) He believes that those who remark no significant difference between "poésie populaire" and the Homeric epic reveal a lack of aesthetic sensibility and historical understanding.

Our final illustration of reaction in France to the theories of Vico and Wolf is provided by Fr. Ozanam. In an article entitled "Des Niebelungen et de la poésie épique" (1841) Ozanam discusses the Homeric question and adopts a position similar in many respects to that of Quinet. Of particular interest is the manner in which Ozanam examines Wolf's arguments in relation to other aspects of intellectual life in Germany. His analysis closely parallels that of Quinet and deserves to be quoted at some length:

Le scepticisme introduit dans les études littéraires ne s'y contient pas. Les existences historiques s'évanouissent à leur tour dans la nébuleuse clarté du mythe et du symbole. Les annales des peuples s'effacent sous la main d'un inflexible exégèse; et qui sait si les paradoxes de Niebuhr n'ont pas préparé le scandale de Strauss? Peut-être aussi, au milieu du découragement général des intelligences, y a-t-il quelque danger dans un système qui méconnaît la puissance de l'art. L'art, c'est le travail, c'est la liberté. Quand on nie la personnalité du poète dans la poésie, on est bien près de nier la personnalité humaine dans l'histoire et d'aboutir à ce fatalisme qui, ne voyant que des nécessités pour le passé, ne peut donner que la servitude pour l'avenir. Et ces déductions, remontant plus haut, conduisent jusqu'à la négation de la personnalité divine en métaphysique, c'est-à-dire jusqu'au panthéisme [...]. (18)

Quinet for his part undoubtedly wished to be remembered as the thinker who had defended the historical Homer and as the critic who had refused to confuse epic poetry with "poésie populaire". In the *Avertissement* to the 1858 edition of *De l'histoire de la poésie* he expresses his evident satisfaction at having combatted the pernicious influence of the theories of Vico and Wolf:

J'ai résisté à la fascination excessive qu'exercent sur l'imagination les formes incultes et spontanées des peuples, dans leur berceaux [...] Les grands poèmes n'ont-ils point d'auteur, les peuples n'ont-ils point de grands hommes? faut-il absorber dans le grand Tout anonyme non seulement l'histoire, mais la poésie?<sup>(19)</sup>

Quinet's views on this subject, however, are not as consistent as he might like us to believe. His defense of Homer, the individual creative artist, dates from 1836. In *De la Grèce Moderne* (1830), on the other hand, there is present a tendency to consider art as an impersonal creation of the collectivity at large.<sup>(20)</sup> And Quinet's own theory of the epic developed in *De la Nature et de l'histoire* is significantly at variance with the views which he subsequently professed. For this reason we shall begin our analysis with an examination of the essay of 1830 before passing on to refer to the series of articles devoted to epic poetry which was published during the 1830's. These are articles of intelligent vulgarisation and they resemble many others which appeared in the periodical press of the time. Quinet's enthusiasm is evident but the accuracy of his facts is not to be taken for granted.<sup>(21)</sup>

The theory of epic poetry found in *De la Nature et de l'Histoire* is in many ways a direct continuation of Quinet's treatment of myth.<sup>(22)</sup> The more abstract philosophical considerations of the first part of the essay underlie the discussion of epic poetry which follows. Epic poetry is a stage in the development of what Quinet calls the "epic idea" which had previously found expression in nature and in architecture. The epic is "spontanément émané de l'âme du peuple, son expression la plus intime". It is the product of "la conscience générale" over a long period and only when the collective consciousness ceases to impart further developments to the poem does the epic receive a fixed form at the hands of an individual poet. Quinet gives his reader the impression that the poem is endowed with a life of its own, independent of the poet. Moreover, he likens the epic poem to architecture which he does not hesitate to consider as the impersonal creation of "le génie de tous".<sup>(23)</sup> Does this imply that the epic should be envisaged along similar lines? The manner in which Quinet speaks of art in general and architecture in particular would seem to substantiate this view:

[...] ce sont presque toujours comme des familles de Rhapsodes, qui se transmettent et achèvent l'un après l'autre une tradition de génie. [...] Les constructeurs du temple de Delphes, de Mantinée, Agamèdes, Trophonius, sont évidemment des générations personnifiées aussi bien qu'Orphée et Linus. (24)

But Orpheus, not Homer, is mentioned here and we cannot, therefore, conclude that the use of the analogy between epic poetry and architecture leads to the calling into question of the existence of Homer. At the same time, however, the general mood of *De la Nature et de l'histoire* is very far removed indeed from the position which Quinet will adopt in 1836.

The extent to which this essay diverges from Quinet's subsequent defence of the historical Homer is highlighted if we examine some important modifications which Quinet made to the text when it was revised for publication in the Pagnerre edition (1857). The essay itself now receives the succinct title *De l'Origine des dieux*.

One of the most important passages in the essay reads as follows in the original version:

Lui-même [le poème épique], formé de la substance d'une race, plus vrai, plus profond que l'histoire, *il n'est donné à aucune puissance personnelle de le circonscrire à sa mesure.* Au lieu de ramper avec le discours écrit, enchaîné à la pierre ou au bronze, il vole avec le chant d'îles en îles, de forêts en forêts, de montagnes en montagnes. Ce n'est que lorsque l'esprit générateur commence à lui manquer; lorsque, *immobile et borné dans son progrès, il s'occupe à se recueillir,* qu'il se laisse enchaîner à la lettre et qu'il termine son aventureuse carrière dans une forme fixe et stable. (25)

But in *De l'Origine des dieux* we read:

Ce poème formé de la substance d'une race est plus vrai, plus profond que l'histoire. Au lieu de ramper avec le discours écrit, enchaîné à la pierre ou au bronze, il vole avec le chant d'îles en îles, de forêts en forêts, de montagnes en montagnes. Quand le souffle générateur commence à manquer, c'est alors seulement qu'il se laisse enchaîner à la lettre et fixer par l'écriture. (26)

The words italicized are omitted from the later version. They clearly are those which lend support to the theory of the collective origin of the epic. But more revealing still of Quinet's change of attitude is the manner in which in the 1857 version he treats the lines immediately following the extract which we have just quoted in the first edition of *De la Nature et de l'histoire*:

Le temps venu où la conscience générale, épuisée de génie, ne peut plus ni le [le poème] supporter, ni l'étendre, est celui où elle le confie à un autre instrument qu'à elle-même; soit que nous entendions par là la simple réunion de parties isolées comme fit Pisistrate dans Athènes, ou les inspirations des siècles, recueillies une fois dans l'âme d'un poète tel que Ferdoussi ou l'Arioste: dès qu'il a cessé de se mouvoir, il laisse voir en lui-même le travail des âges lointains. (27)

In the 1857 version, in place of this lengthy passage, Quinet substitutes the following short sentence: "Le poète apparaît pour recueillir le testament poétique d'un monde qui s'efface". (28)

In *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, therefore, Quinet does not deny the existence of Homer but his argument undoubtedly gives priority to the collectivity over the individual poet. (29) It is perhaps significant that the phrase "dans le poème de l'Ionie" in the version of 1830 becomes "dans les poèmes d'Homère" in the Pagnerre edition. (30)

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We may now turn to the exposition of our author's considered judgments on Greek epic poetry to be found in the article "Des Poètes épiques I. Homère" which appeared in the *Revue des deux mondes* in May 1836. The keynote of this article is the unambiguous defence of the historical reality of Homer and the affirmation of the role of the individual poet as opposed to the collectivity in the creation of epic poetry. The problem of the existence of Homer is immediately presented to the reader as the central matter to be discussed. Quinet begins by summarizing the ideas of Vico and Wolf and describing their influence. His conclusion is that the time for such theorizing has now passed:

[...] le temps approche où disparaîtront, sans doute, ces triomphantes hypothèses qui, partout mettant des forces abstraites à la place de l'homme [des personnalités humaines - 1836] abolissaient partout la vie dans l'histoire et dans l'art. (31)

A refutation of Wolf's main arguments now follows. Wolf had been mistaken as to the date when writing began in Greece and he had failed to understand the role played by poetry in Greek society. Above all the lack of organisation and unity which the German critic had discerned in the Homeric poems does not exist in Quinet's eyes. On the contrary he is amazed that the poems have retained such a high degree of unity considering that they were transmitted to posterity by the Rhapsods, the Homerids, the scholiasts and the grammarians of Alexandria. This leads Quinet to conclude that the unity of the poems must in the first place have been the work of one individual: "[...] cette unité a dû être, au commencement, l'oeuvre d'une main souveraine". (32)



Since Quinet now attributes the greatest importance to the personality of the individual Homer he naturally disagrees with Wolf over the question of the Pisistratan recession, the belief that Pisistratus had been responsible for the order and unity of the poems:

Si l'on disait que cette ordonnance des parties est l'oeuvre de Pisistrate, j'ajouterais que Pisistrate fut le plus grand et le plus incompréhensible des poètes [...] C'est lui (Homère) [...] qui fit réellement la tâche que l'on voudrait ["veut" - the 1836 version] attribuer à Pisistrate. (33)

Quinet does not deny the close relationship between epic poetry and society but he interprets this relationship in such a way as to leave the initiative with the individual poet: "Le poète inventait, le peuple se ressouvenait". (34) Above all, the Homeric epic as a consciously created work of art transcends all "poésie populaire":

[...] il est difficile [...] d'admettre que l'Iliade l'Odyssée ne soient rien autre chose que des chants populaires. Ces poèmes sont nationaux; mais ils dépassent évidemment les forces de l'instinct abandonné à ses seules ressources [...] Le vers d'Homère est né de l'inspiration populaire; il en conserve les formes et quelques habitudes, mais il porte déjà la couronne et le sceau d'un art cultivé. Il est sorti de la foule; on reconnaît le roi à sa démarche royale. (35)

In the preface to *Napoléon*, 1836, Quinet likewise contrasts the "chant populaire" with genuine epic poetry. This distinction however in no way detracts from Quinet's enthusiasm for folk poetry. On the contrary, he considers it the duty of the modern epic poet to preserve in his work the orally transmitted folk songs which are daily being lost. But the epic poet, in the true meaning of the term, is no mere compiler of the products of the collectivity. His task is of a different order: "Il élève instinctivement aux formes de l'art réfléchi et de la poésie écrite cette poésie traditionnelle et orale [...]". (36)

Quinet's understanding of the relationship between epic poetry and "poésie populaire" within the context of the Homeric epic provides him with criteria which he can apply elsewhere. Thus, in his study of Latin epic poetry, Quinet remarks that the Romans lacked an "Enéide populaire" upon which a true national epic could have been based. Instead they had recourse to Greek models. Similarly in his discussion of the Old French epic in 1837 he relies heavily upon the distinction between the epic and the "chant populaire".. He writes that the poems under examination, cannot be said to attain the level of true art: "Leur place est celle des rhapsodes avant Homère [...]". (37) Although the ground was well

prepared no new Homer appeared to forge the Arthurian and Carolingian traditions into one great work of art: "Faute d'un homme, le travail des générations est demeuré stérile".(38)

It would be difficult to claim that Quinet's intervention in the Homeric debate was of great significance in the wider context of the state of Homeric studies in France. Guigniaut, Dugas-Montbel and Fauriel were to be mentioned by Magnin in a note when his article was republished in 1842. Quinet's name does not appear. E. Egger, on the other hand, whose university career had advanced considerably since his publication of Fauriel's lectures, would seem to have a higher opinion of Quinet since he includes his name in a note appended to the opening lecture of a course on Greek literature delivered in December 1845.(39)

A comparison between Fauriel's lectures and Quinet's article testifies to the evident superiority of the former. There is, however, another factor which should perhaps be borne in mind when we judge the significance of Quinet's articles on epic poetry. This is his own assessment of their importance. Writing to his mother in 1836 he remarks that he would much prefer to be writing poetry of his own. He adds the following comment: "[...] Partant ces morceaux réussissent et je continue".(40) We should not, however, belittle either Quinet's erudition - the footnotes to *De la Grèce Moderne* are proof of his knowledge of recent German scholarship - or his sensitivity to the wider implications involved in the choice of a particular critical method. Above all his defence of Homer is a defence of freedom and individuality, the values which lie at the centre of his own philosophy of history.(41)

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*Napoléon* and *Prométhée* throw considerable light upon the problem of individuality and at the same time reveal its complexity. *Napoléon* is deliberately contrasted with *Ahasvérus*. The subject of the latter had been mankind in general; *Napoléon* on the other hand is concerned with "l'homme individuel, le héros, Napoléon".(42) At first sight the following view of the Emperor's role seems to betoken a return to the man-centred conception of history:

Son caractère est de représenter le développement de l'individualité dans les temps modernes [...] Dans son épopée ne se rencontrent véritablement que trois personnages, - lui, - le peuple, - le monde.(43)

We soon discover, however, that history in this poem is far from being envisaged in exclusively human terms. *Napoléon* is an epic and as

such corresponds to Quinet's definition of epic poetry as "la poésie de la Providence ou le jugement divin de l'histoire".<sup>(44)</sup> Napoleon is much more than an isolated individual. He is the symbol of an entire generation of Frenchmen. What is more, the individual as epic hero performs actions in accordance with a providential plan.

In the introduction to his *Philosophy of History* Hegel takes Napoleon as an example of a World-Historical-Individual who is an instrument of the Absolute. World-Historical-Individuals are not aware of the real role which they are playing. They pursue their own personal aims and have "no consciousness of the general Idea [which] they [are] unfolding".<sup>(45)</sup> Quinet shares with Hegel this desire to envisage Napoleon not only as an individual influenced by subjective motives but also as a figure participating in the realisation of a divine purpose. He enjoins the epic poet to concern himself with those events which are "marqués du caractère de la nécessité et de la volonté céleste".<sup>(46)</sup> The task of the epic poet is defined as follows:

[...] il faut qu'il [le poète] fasse parler en lui [le héros] la providence et l'intelligence universelle, bien plus que la voix d'une personnalité solitaire et capricieuse.<sup>(47)</sup>

Some lines spoken by the Emperor in the course of the poem bear this out:

Je me croyais le maître, et j'étais l'instrument,  
Vers un autre que moi s'inclinait ma puissance,  
Et j'étais le hasard qu'on nomme Providence.  
.....  
Voilà ce que j'ai fait; je ne m'en repens pas;  
Et je le referais dans les même combats.  
C'était l'oeuvre de Dieu; qu'il l'achève à sa guise!  
C'est lui qui me poussait, et c'est lui qui me brise.<sup>(48)</sup>

In *Napoléon* Quinet is once again searching for a middle road between two conceptions of history. The poem, while marking a return to individuality, nevertheless seeks to understand the individual within the context of the unfolding of a greater purpose. To this extent Quinet's Napoleon resembles Hegel's description of a World-Historical-Individual. Moreover, Quinet like Hegel is fascinated by the Emperor's fall from power. The fate of World-Historical-Individuals is not an enviable one: they are murdered like Caesar or exiled to Saint-Helena like Napoleon. Quinet, however, does not identify might with right and neither does he accept that the judgment of history is final. His belief in France's mission and his resentment at the humiliating defeats of 1815 prevent him from following the road to a fatalistic vision of history.

The very fact that Quinet chose the myth of the Titan and the story of his revolt against the gods as the subject of his verse drama *Prométhée* is indicative of the persistence of the theme of individual freedom. Quinet's Prometheus, like Goethe's Titan, is a spirit of liberty who embodies the aspirations of his creator. The poem's message is an outright rejection of fatalism and materialism; *Prométhée* asserts the dignity and the nobility of man. The Titan refuses to submit blindly to received authority.

Man, because he is a self-conscious thinking being, is capable in Pascalian terms of despising the superior forces which crush him. But humanity's lot is far from being a happy one. Work, suffering, despair and death cannot be avoided since they are co-existent with freedom and consciousness of self.<sup>(49)</sup> Men may act incorrectly - in the poem they reject Prometheus's message in favour of a return to the old gods - but all responsibility is theirs. Prometheus explains this to Hésione:

Libre dans l'univers, esclave de toi-même,  
Entre le ciel et moi, l'autel et le blasphème,  
Tu choisiras tes dieux: tu le peux, tu le dois;  
Et de ta volonté tu porteras le poids.<sup>(50)</sup>

There is much more to this poem; however, than a retelling of the myths traditionally associated with Prometheus. *Prométhée*, like *Ahasvérus*, raises problems of fundamental importance concerning the meaning of the history of religion.<sup>(51)</sup> In the *Préface* we learn that no single religion possesses absolute truth. Every people has written a page of what Quinet calls the *Old Testament* of mankind. Pindar, Aeschylus and Sophocles are the brothers of Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel. All can be considered to be precursors of Christianity since they belong to "la tradition universelle du Dieu de l'humanité". "Ton père est Jéhovah", says the archangel Michael to Prometheus, "et nous sommes tes frères".<sup>(52)</sup> Christianity is no isolated phenomenon. The God whose coming was proclaimed in the East by the Hebrews found in the West its prophet in the figure of Prometheus. Only Christianity could end the ordeal of the Titan: "le Christ, en détruisant Jupiter, est le seul rédempteur possible de Prométhée".<sup>(53)</sup>

The interpretation of *Prométhée*, like that of *Ahasvérus*, is complicated by the fact that the myth of the Titan, like the legend of the Wandering Jew, is being used simultaneously upon different levels; Firstly, Prometheus represents a stage in the history of religions marking a preparation for the coming of Christianity. Secondly, he appears as the eternal prophet, symbolising man's religious aspirations and unending search for God:

Prométhée est la figure de l'humanité religieuse.  
Mais il n'a pas seulement ce caractère historique;  
il renferme le drame intérieur de Dieu et de l'homme,  
de la foi et du doute, du créateur et de la créature;  
et c'est par là que cette tradition s'applique à tous  
les temps, et que ce drame divin ne finira jamais. (54)

Quinet's Titan is both artist and prophet. He explains that the very name of Prometheus carries with it the notion of prophecy, an interpretation which accords with that proposed by Pierre Leroux:

Prométhée représente l'aspiration vers le ciel [...]  
Prométhée, comme son nom l'indique, est doué de  
*sentiment*, de *présentiment*, de *désir*, de  
*prophétie*. C'est l'artiste par excellence, l'artiste  
tourné vers la connaissance. (55)

But Prometheus, like Ahasvérus, is also a figure through which Quinet expresses his desire for a transformation of religion in the nineteenth century. The spiritual lodgings of the 1830's resemble those experienced in a world which awaited the birth of Christianity. Prometheus embodies the fundamental religious questionings of mankind: "Qui est-tu? Que crois-tu? Qu'attends-tu?" (56) Although these questions may remain ultimately unanswerable, the dignity of each generation lies in the attempt made to solve the riddle of human existence. Religion is no more static and immobile than humanity itself. Religion evolves and progresses as the human spirit advances. The reign of Jupiter is no more everlasting than that of Saturn. The passing of the Gods must be accepted as inevitable. But to accept this is to deprive man of security and stability. The doubt of Prometheus can become as acute as the despair of Ahasvérus: "Moi seul, moi, j'ai tout fait, tout puisé dans moi-même./ Et mes cieux n'étaient rien qu'un splendide blasphème". (57)

Yet *Prométhée* does differ significantly from *Ahasvérus* both from the point of view of form and content. *Prométhée* emerges from Quinet's correspondence as a work of peace and harmony in which the despair of *Ahasvérus* has been replaced by confidence in Providence. A letter of 1836 reveals a growing desire for clarity: "Tout mon travail aujourd'hui consiste à arriver à la simplicité et à la clarté". (58) In *Prométhée* the abundant imagery of the prose of *Ahasvérus* gives way to verse and the imitation of "les beaux modèles grecs". (59) "Après les monstres", remarks Quinet, "j'ai visité les dieux". (60) We would be wise not to underestimate the significance of this return to Classical antiquity which, incidentally, is also a return to the models of French Classicism. (61)

Should *Prométhée* be interpreted as a call for the replacement of Christianity by a new religion? This would not seem to be the case.

The mood of this work, despite moments of doubt and despair, represents an aspiration to a profound transformation of Christianity rather than a call for a new religion as such. In his preface Quinet clarifies his position somewhat and defends himself against the accusations of impiety and pantheism.

Si donc c'est être impie de penser que le christianisme du dix-neuvième siècle est différent du christianisme du douzième, alors, pour ma part, je mérite l'accusation dont mon obscurité ne m'a pas toujours défendu. Si, au contraire, c'est être religieux de reconnaître en chaque chose la présence de l'infini; si c'est être croyant de garder le culte des morts et la foi dans l'éternelle résurrection; si c'est être l'ami de Dieu, de le chercher, de l'appeler, de le reconnaître sous chaque forme du monde visible et invisible, c'est-à-dire dans chaque moment de l'histoire, et dans chaque lieu de la nature, sans toutefois le confondre ni avec l'une ni avec l'autre de ces choses, alors celui qui écrit ces lignes est tout le contraire de l'impie. (62)

Alexandre Vinet welcomed Quinet's repudiation of pantheism and declared that *Ahasvérus* and *Prométhée* were separated by "un intervalle immense, un réjouissant progrès". (63) But Vinet still maintained that Quinet failed to appreciate the real significance of the doctrine of redemption without which a true understanding of the message of the Gospels is impossible. Whereas in *Ahasvérus* Quinet has been guilty of pantheism, in *Prométhée* he stands accused of deism. Charles Magnin also had doubts concerning the orthodoxy of the message of *Prométhée*. According to his interpretation the poem represented an aspiration to a new religious dawn which could only be described as "le par delà le christianisme". (64)

*Prométhée* can, therefore, be seen as a continuation of the movement towards the anthropocentric conception of history which we discerned in *Napoléon*. This is all the more significant since *Prométhée* like *Ahasvérus* is directly concerned with the history of religions. As in *Ahasvérus*, the quest for God is shown to be the motive power of history. In *Prométhée*, however, it is evident that while humanity thirsts after the divine, the world of history is made by free men who are responsible for their actions.

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Quinet's critical examination of Strauss' *Life of Jesus* appeared in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1838. His main aim was to defend the historical Jesus against the interpretation put forward by Strauss which had in affect transformed Christianity into a mythology. He also criticised the influence of speculative philosophy upon Strauss' theology. These

two elements are not so closely related as they may at first appear. Strauss' mythical interpretation bears "a purely empirico-rational character" which is not strictly dependent upon his adherence to a system of speculative philosophy. (65) Thus to denounce Strauss' Hegelianism is not to dispose of his theory of myth. The strength of Quinet's analysis, however, derives from the fact that he discovers in both Strauss's Hegelianism and in his mythical interpretation an identical danger, a threat to the value and dignity of the individual.

The defence of the historical Jesus recalls that of Homer. Quinet believes that the same critical methods which had previously been employed in the study of epic poetry were now being applied in the interpretation of the Gospel narrative:

La méthode que Wolf et Niebuhr ont appliquée à Homère et à Tite-Live, l'auteur (Strauss) l'applique au christianisme; et, de la même manière que Homère et l'histoire romaine se sont évanouis comme une fumée entre les mains des deux premiers, le Christ à son tour disparaît dans le travail du dernier [...]. Les évangélistes deviennent des rhapsodes, l'Évangile un poème en prose, et le christianisme un rêve du genre humain faisant sa halte dans le jardin des Oliviers. (66)

The *Life of Jesus* is looked at within the context of developments in German theology since Kant. Quinet describes in some detail how the rationalistic and allegorical methods of interpretation had been applied to account for the supernatural phenomena recorded in the Bible. In his eyes the danger from the allegorical method is greater since it neglects the importance of the historical element. Strauss' study is an extreme example of this tendency:

La lettre tue, mais l'esprit vivifie, voilà le principe d'Origène. Mais qui ne voit qu'à son tour l'esprit en grandissant peut tuer et remplacer la lettre? Ceci est l'histoire de toute la philosophie idéaliste dans ses rapports avec la foi positive. (67)

Quinet's hostility to Hegelianism shows itself in his strong disapproval of what he terms Strauss' *a priori* approach. The German thinker is also guilty of an excessive use of erudition which stifles "le sentiment de tout réalité" producing "la négation absolue de toute vie". (68) Quinet rejects the possibility of a reconciliation between religion and philosophy on the Hegelian model. He prefers to point to their essential incompatibility while at the same time interpreting the conflict between faith and philosophy as a source of movement and progress. Above all, he is horrified by the seemingly calm and untroubled manner in which

Strauss proceeds to destroy the basis of the Christian religion. We must not, however, misinterpret Quinet's hostility to Strauss' understanding of the miraculous element in the New Testament narrative as a rejection of higher criticism in general. Quinet is no fundamentalist, no believer in the literal infallibility of the Bible. His criticism of Strauss centres upon the threat to the individual.(69)

Strauss, dissatisfied with orthodox Christology, had adopted the speculative Christology developed by Hegel, Marheinecke and Rosenkranz. God was not a transcendent creator but impersonal, infinite Spirit which manifested itself in man and in the world. In the *Life of Jesus* Strauss wrote:

When it is said of God that he is a Spirit, and of man that he also is a Spirit, it follows that the two are not essentially distinct. To speak more particularly, it is the essential property of a spirit, in the distribution of itself into distinct personalities, to remain identical with itself, to possess itself in another than itself. Hence the recognition of God as a spirit implies, that God does not remain as a fixed and immutable Infinite encompassing the Finite, but enters into it, produces the Finite, Nature, and the human mind, merely as a limited manifestation of himself, from which he eternally returns into unity. As man, considered as a finite spirit, limited to his finite nature, has not truth; so God, considered exclusively as an infinite spirit, shut up in his infinitude, has not reality. The infinite spirit is real only when it discloses itself in finite spirits; as the finite spirit is true only when it merges itself in the infinite. The true and real existence of spirit, therefore, is neither in God by himself, nor in man by himself, but in the God-man.(70)

Strauss, however, moves away from the speculative thinkers on one crucial point.(71) For Hegel and Marheinecke the essential unity of God and man lay in their identity as spirit and this unity was manifested in the person of the one individual Jesus Christ. For Strauss on the other hand, it is not an individual but mankind as a whole which is the incarnation of the Idea:

In an individual, a God-man, the properties and functions which the church ascribes to Christ contradict themselves; in the idea of the race, they perfectly agree. Humanity is the union of the two natures - God becomes man, the infinite manifesting itself in the finite, and the finite spirit remembering its infinitude [...] it is the worker of miracles, in so far as in the course of human history the spirit more and more completely subjugates nature [...] It is Humanity that dies, rises, and ascends to heaven, for from the negation



of its phenomenal life there ever proceeds a higher spiritual life; [...] By faith in this Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, man is justified before God; that is, by the kindling within him of the idea of Humanity, the individual man participates in the divinely human life of the species [...] if we know the incarnation, death and resurrection, the *duplex negatio affirmat* as the eternal circulation, the infinitely repeated pulsation to the divine life; what special importance can attach to a single fact, which is but a mere sensible image of this unending process? Our age demands to be led in Christology to the idea in the fact, to the race in the individual: a theology which, in its doctrines on the Christ, stops short at him as an individual, is not properly a theology, but a homily. (72)

Quinet finds these views unacceptable. They are an example of the modern tendency to revere humanity as a substitute divinity at the expense of the individual: "Dépouiller l'individu pour enrichir l'espèce, diminuer l'homme pour accroître l'humanité, voilà la pente". (73) Humanity is in his eyes merely a quantitative conception, the sum total of a number of individuals. The individual is the centre: "toute vie, toute grandeur, comme toute misère, relèvent de l'individu". (74)

But Quinet's rejection of the impersonal Christ of pantheism and his refusal to admit that Jesus was the product of the myth-making faculty of society are not simply a restatement of the attitude which he had adopted over the Homeric question. In the course of his examination of Strauss' theories he is led to define the religious dimension of the human personality itself.

We have seen how in his earlier work Quinet associated the coming of Christianity with the birth of true individuality. This belief is now reaffirmed:

Si quelque chose distingue le christianisme des religions qui l'ont précédé, c'est qu'il est l'apothéose, non plus de la nature en général, mais de la personnalité même [...] Le règne intérieur d'une âme qui se trouve plus grande que l'univers visible, voilà le miracle permanent de l'Évangile. [...] qu'est-ce que l'Évangile sinon la révélation du monde intérieur? (75)

But Jesus is not presented as the Word made flesh who dwelt among us, was crucified and by his death atoned for sin. Sin and redemption, atonement and salvation, as traditionally conceived have no place in Quinet's religion. God did not manifest Himself in Christ alone. Quinet's Jesus is not redeemer or mediator but rather man as understood by Christianity. He is a human figure but paradoxically within his very humanity seems to lie the secret of his divine nature.

In Jesus we recognise that the divine is not something which is set over and against the human but also something present within man. But by man Quinet means man as an individual personality. That is the meaning of the incarnation and the two natures of Christ:

[.] si la vie du Dieu fait homme a un sens compréhensible pour tous, irrécusable pour tous, c'est qu'elle montre que dans l'intérieur de chaque conscience habite l'infini, aussi bien que dans l'âme du genre humain, et que la pensée de chaque homme peut se répandre et se dilater jusqu'à embrasser et pénétrer tout l'univers moral. (76)

Quinet's argument could be said to make Jesus' divine nature dependent upon his human nature. Jesus must really have existed as a person, Quinet seems to imply, since it is through personality that the individual participates in the life of God:

Si l'individu ne peut lui-même être le juste, le saint par excellence, s'il n'est pas *un même esprit avec Dieu*, s'il est incapable de s'élever au suprême idéal de la vertu, de la beauté, de la liberté, de l'amour, qu'est-ce à dire? Et comment ces attributs deviendront-ils ceux de l'espèce? (77)

Existentially Jesus is a real person in the world; ontologically he remains a revelation of Being. (78) The experience of personality by the historical Jesus is the manifestation of the presence of God. Quinet's Jesus is, indeed, a living symbol of modern man. Selfhood and Christhood become one. But as the lines quoted above suggest, the individual personality only participates in the divine life through effort and inner struggle. The incarnation, in the widest sense, thus becomes the work of the individual rather than of God.

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The true significance of the works which we have examined in this chapter evidently lies in the value which Quinet now places upon freedom and individuality. He has repudiated some aspects of German thought to which he had previously been sympathetic but which he has subsequently recognised as diminishing the individual. Above all, in the *Examen de la Vie de Jésus*, he has sought to describe the religious dimension of the human personality. Quinet's correspondence reveals that he experienced a new feeling of serenity when composing *Prométhée*. This, to a great extent, reflects his faith in the individual.

NOTES

- (1) *Allemagne et Italie*, p. 238.
- (2) *Ibid.*, p. 241. Although he does not deny the fruitful aspects of German philosophy, by 1831 Quinet identifies Hegel in particular with the consecration of authority, with the defence of might as opposed to right. This is a theme which is often taken up in his subsequent writings.
- (3) See P. Viallaneix, *op. cit.*, p. 146 and D. G. Charlton "The Personal and the General in French Romantic Literary Theory", in *Balzac and the Nineteenth Century*, ed. D. G. Charlton, J. Gaudon, A. R. Pugh, Leicester U.P., 1972, pp. 269-81.
- (4) Cl. Fauriel, *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne*, Paris, Dondey-Dupré, 1824, Vol. 1, p. XXV. Cf. *De la Grèce moderne*, p. 45.
- (5) W. Schlegel quoted by Paul Van Tieghm in *Le Mouvement romantique*, Paris, Vuibert, 1923, pp. 84-5. See E. Neff, *The Poetry of History*, New York, Columbia U.P., 1947, pp. 79 ff.
- (6) J. L. Myres, *Homer and his Critics*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958. See also N. Hepp, *Homère en France au XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968.
- (7) Michelet, *Oeuvre complètes*, Vol. 1, p. 293.
- (8) G. W. F. Hegel, *Esthétique. La Poésie*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1965, vol. 1, pp. 146-7.
- (9) S. T. Coleridge, *Table Talk*, London, Bell, 1896, pp. 74-5.
- (10) P.-S. Ballanche, *La Vision d'Hébal*, ed. Busst, Geneva, Droz, 1969, p. 157.
- (11) J.-J. Ampère, *Littérature et Voyages*, Paris, Paulin, 1833, pp. 33-4.
- (12) B. Constant, *De la Religion*, Paris, Béchet, 1827, vol. 3, bk. 8, Ch. 3.
- (13) Ch. Magnin, *Causeries et méditations historiques et littéraires*, Paris, Duprat, 1843, vol. 2, pp. 11-49. Cf. among many possible examples: Chateaubriand, *Essai sur la littérature anglaise*, Paris Gosselin, 1836, vol. 1, p. 240 and Villemain, *Tableau de la littérature du moyen âge*, Brussels, Société belge de librairie, 1840, vol. VI, pp. 295 ff.
- (14) *Journal général de l'instruction publique*, 27 November 1836, p. 28.
- (15) *Ibid.*, 9 October, 1836, p. 783. See also J.-B. Galley, *Claude Fauriel*, Saint-Etienne, Imprimerie de la 'Loire Républicaine', 1909, pp. 470-1.
- (16) J. D. Guigniaut, *Homère et Hésiode*, Paris, Duverger, n.d., p.3.
- (17) *Ibid.*, p. 8. Cf. J.-J. Ampère, *La Grèce, Rome et Dante*, 6th ed., Paris, Didier, 1870, p. 22.

- (18) Fr. Ozanam, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Lecoffre, 1859, vol. 8, p. 191.
- (19) *De l'Histoire de la poésie*, p. 269. Romanticism in France, writes Léon Cellier, was "trop individualiste pour ne pas s'opposer à cette conception collectiviste", *L'Épopée humanitaire et les grands mythes romantiques*, Paris, S.E.D.E.S., 1971, p. 84.
- (20) B. Reizov (op. cit., p. 612) writes as follows of *De la Grèce moderne*: "Dans ce livre se manifeste une tendance à considérer l'art comme un témoignage impersonnel d'une civilisation ou d'un peuple. Certes, Quinet ne dit pas que la poésie populaire est impersonnelle ou qu'elle est l'oeuvre collective, mais le cours général de ses raisonnements le rapproche de ce point de vue."
- (21) M. Ibrovac comments as follows on Quinet's article "De l'Épopée des Bohèmes": "Les informations de Quinet sont bien arbitraires: il parle des sorcières, des 'enchanteurs', des 'villes des morts'(?), de l'origine équivoque des Tchèques". *Claude Fauriel et la fortune européenne des poésies populaires grecque et serbe*, Paris, Didier, 1960, p. 328.
- (22) Quinet points to the common origin of the different epic traditions which "s'unissent à l'origine dans les fables de la terre sacerdotale du Phéa et l'Araxe". (*De l'Histoire de la poésie*, p. 379) Upon a number of occasions the Holy Grail becomes a symbol of unity and continuity: "[...] toute la partie du Saint-Graal ramène incessamment à l'histoire des religions Indoues, Persanes et Pélasgiques". (*Des Épopées françaises inédites*, p. 415.)
- (23) *De la Nature et de l'Histoire*, pp. 430-1 and 424. Each epic poem is "un fragment d'un poème universel". (*Ibid.*, p. 432). Cf. Ballanche, *Vision d'Hébal*, p. 157; and *Essai sur les institutions sociales*, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Barbezat, 1830, vol. 2, pp. 290-1.
- (24) *De la Nature et de l'Histoire*, p. 424.
- (25) *Ibid.*, pp. 429-30. Our emphasis.
- (26) *De l'Origine des dieux*, p. 431.
- (27) *De la Nature et de l'Histoire*, p. 430.
- (28) *De l'Origine des dieux*, p. 431.
- (29) But compare the conclusion to the essay: "Et maintenant, qu'un homme dispose des annales de l'humanité comme Homère de celles du peuple grec [...]", *De la Nature et de l'Histoire*, p. 441.
- (30) *Ibid.*, p. 435 and *De l'Origine des dieux*, p. 433.
- (31) *De l'Histoire de la poésie*, p. 277. In a letter of 1828 however Quinet had written: "Je lis l'ouvrage de Niebuhr sur l'*Histoire Romaine*, il est impossible de dire des choses plus neuves sur un sujet plus vieux". *Correspondance*, vol. 2, p. 67.
- (32) *De l'Histoire de la poésie*, p. 278. The 1836 version reads "d'une volonté souveraine".

- (33) Ibid., p. 278 and 285. In 1830 Quinet had written of "la simple réunion de parties isolées, comme fit Pisistrate dans Athènes". *De la Nature et de l'Histoire*, p. 430. Again in 1831 he emphasises the role played by Pisistratus in the course of his discussion of the German epic: "S'il (Charlemagne) ne fut pas pour eux (les poèmes barbares des anciens âges) ce que Pisistrate et Lycurgue avaient été pour Homère [...] ", "Du Génie des traditions épiques [...] du nord", p. 157. Quinet is far less definite however when he republished his article in 1839. Here the passage reads: "S'il ne fut pas pour eux ce que l'on croit que Pisistrate et Lycurgue ont été pour Homère [...]" (our emphasis). *Allemagne et Italie*, Paris & Leipzig, Desforges, 1839, p. 252.
- (34) *De l'Histoire de la poésie*, p. 281. Cf. the manner in which Quinet describes his own teaching in *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 10.
- (35) *De l'Histoire de la poésie*, p. 284. See also the discussion of Dante in *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, pp. 91-127.
- (36) *Napoléon*, preface pp. 158-9. Cf. *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, p. 69: "La littérature espagnole est un annoblissement perpétuel des inventions de la foule par l'autorité d'un poète cultivé".
- (37) *De l'Histoire de la poésie*, p. 344.
- (38) Ibid., p. 354.
- (39) E. Egger, *Aperçu sur les origines de la littérature grecque*, Paris, Paul Dupont, 1846, p. 29.
- (40) *Correspondance*, vol. 2, p. 260. In a letter to Ampère (15 July 1835) Sainte-Beuve raises the possibility of Quinet becoming Fauriel's "suppléant". He comments as follows: "il faudrait que Quinet consentît à descendre d'Ahasvérus ou de Bonaparte à un essai de critique, d'histoire littéraire [...]", *Correspondance Générale*, ed. Jean Bonnerot, Paris, Stock, 1935, p. 531. See also pp. 538-9 and Sainte-Beuve's article on *Napoléon* collected in *Portraits contemporains*, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1882, vol. 10, pp. 307-26.
- (41) This was not the end of Quinet's interest in the Homeric question. He returns to the subject in *L'Esprit nouveau* (1875), the last work to appear during his lifetime. The influence of natural history and physiology, the impact of the archeological discoveries of Schliemann are now strongly felt. Yet despite this reinterpretation Quinet in no way modifies his earlier conclusions with regard to the existence of Homer.
- (42) *Napoléon*, preface, p. 141.
- (43) Ibid., p. 157.
- (44) Ibid., p. 148. This preface also served as the entry "Epopée" in the *Encyclopédie Nouvelle*. See D. A. Griffiths, *Jean Reynaud. Encyclopédiste de l'époque romantique*, Paris, Marcel Rivière, 1965, p. 226.

- (45) Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 30 and 31. Despite Quinet's break with Cousin after 1830 his treatment of Napoleon coincides in many respects with the views put forward by Cousin in his *Cours de philosophie*, vol. 1, Lecture 10.
- (46) *Napoléon*, preface, p. 151.
- (47) *Ibid.*, preface, p. 150.
- (48) *Ibid.*, pp. 247 and 314. See pp. 216-7 where Quinet's hero chooses the destiny of Caesar.
- (49) Near the beginning of the poem Prometheus endows Hésione, the spirit of humanity with these qualities: "Tous mes biens sont à toi: liberté, conscience, obstinés souvenirs, pleurs, aveugle espérance, / Et désirs insoumis qu'enchaîne l'univers". (*Prométhée*, p. 28). Leon Cellier likens Hésione to Vigny's Eva: "Hésione, comme Eva, représente l'esprit pur qui ressuscite, alors que les religions disparaissent". *op. cit.*, p. 168.
- (50) *Prométhée*, pp. 31-2.
- (51) Laprade makes this point. See *Revue du Lyonnais*, 1839, p. 396. Quinet offers a further interpretation of the myth of Prometheus in *Le Génie des religions*, pp. 351-64.
- (52) *Prométhée*, preface, p. XII and p. 118.
- (53) *Ibid.*, p. IX. For the importance of the Christian element in Quinet's treatment of the Prometheus myth see R. Trousson, *Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne*, Geneva, Droz, 1964, vol. 2, pp. 351-64.
- (54) *Prométhée*, preface, p. XIII.
- (55) P. Leroux, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 656. An anonymous article in the *Revue Française* challenges Quinet's interpretation of Prometheus: "M. Quinet croit-il sérieusement que ce nom signifie prophète éternel? Cela ne se peut pas; Prométhée veut dire, en grec, le prudent, le prévoyant, l'homme habile par excellence; il n'est point synonyme du mot prophète, et ne renferme d'ailleurs en soi aucune idée d'éternité". *Revue Française*, 1838, vol. 5, p. 308. Cf. *Correspondance*, vol. 2, p. 310.
- (56) *Prométhée*, preface, p. XIII.
- (57) *Ibid.*, p. 87. Cf. the words spoken by Gregory VII in *Ahasvérus*.
- (58) *Correspondance*, vol. 2, p. 249.
- (59) *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 270.
- (60) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 277. In another letter (pp. 267-8) Quinet provides the following explanation: "C'est depuis mon voyage en Grèce que j'ai eu le goût de la lumière, mais je ne savais où la trouver". Cf. *Ahasvérus*, p. 290. On the question of the role played by the visit to Greece see H. Tronchon, "L'Italie dans les carnets d'Edgar Quinet", *Mélanges Hauvette*, Paris, Les Presses Françaises, 1934, pp. 713-24.

- (61) Is it not significant that the urge to clarity and the return to Classical models coincides in general terms with Quinet's defence of Homer and Jesus? In both cases Quinet is freeing himself to a certain degree from German influences. These changes in attitude are reflected in other ways. In 1831 he had enthusiastically proclaimed his "discovery" of Old French epics. In his article of 1837 on the French epic, however, he expressly states that these poems should not be taken as models - a request which differs considerably from his own practice in *Napoléon*. Similarly, Quinet who in *Ahasvérus* had made full use of Oriental source material, condemns such imitation in his article on the Indian epic (1840). Alfred Michiels interpreted Quinet's defence of French Classicism as an insincere act of self-interest: "Les idées progressives sont très-bonnes sans doute; mais l'argent ne leur cède en rien [...] M. Quinet ayant célébré nos classiques, on le nomma chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, on l'envoya professer à Lyon". *Histoire des idées littéraires en France au XIXe siècle*, fourth edition, Paris, Dentu, 1863, vol. 2, p. 490. Quinet's desire for a permanent secure post cannot be denied but Michiels' conclusions are unfair. Quinet is sincere in his admiration for Classical models. In this context his reactions to Ponsard's *Lucreèce* (1843) are interesting. In a letter to Laprade he declares: "C'est un art sage, prudent, un beau retour à la vraie langue [...] C'est une honorable retraite dans le classique de Corneille. Ce pays connaîtra peut-être, mais ne sentira jamais une autre poésie". Quinet's welcome is tempered - "je voudrais un peu plus de profondeur et d'audace" - but he can hardly be said to be hostile to the play. See Ed. Biré, *Victor de Laprade. Sa vie et ses oeuvres*, Paris, Didier, n.d., p. 92. For a discussion of Quinet's aesthetic theories see Crossley, "Les Idées esthétiques de Quinet", *Colloque du centenaire*, Clermont Ferrand, 1978. The question of insincerity is also raised with regard to Quinet's acceptance of the *Légion d'honneur* in 1838. Mme Quinet (op. cit., p. 250) rapidly dismisses the award by means of an anecdote. She describes Quinet's mother's pleasure at the honour bestowed upon her son but she emphasises Quinet's reported reply: "Quoi, un ruban?". His mother's wish to conform socially and shine in society is well documented. The fact remains that he nonetheless accepted the honour whereas others, including Sainte-Beuve, refused. A letter to Carnot of May 1838 reveals that Quinet had definite scruples about accepting the honour. See Griffiths, op. cit., p. 167. See also J. Gaulmier, "Sur une lettre inédite d'Edgar Quinet", *Revue de littérature comparée*, 1959, pp. 90-4.
- (62) *Prométhée*, preface, p. XXI. Cf. Lamartine who writes as follows in a letter of 1838: "Maintenant le christianisme à la lettre est-il le christianisme en esprit? Le christianisme qui a traversé, en s'en imprégnant, les âges les plus honteux de l'esprit humain est-il le christianisme de ses âges de développement et de lumière". Quoted by M.-F. Guyard in his edition of *La Chute d'un ange. Fragment du livre primitif*, Geneva, Droz, 1954, p. 122.
- (63) Vinet, op. cit., p. 139.
- (64) Ch. Magnin, "Prométhée", *Revue des deux mondes*, 1838, vol. 15, p. 473. See also the review by Fortoul which appeared in the *Revue de Paris*, 1838, vol. 51 pp. 218-46. Mme Quinet (op. cit., p. 249) records the following comments made by her husband during his exile: "Décidément, je crois que, de tous mes ouvrages, c'est

*Prométhée* que j'aime le mieux; il y a là une paix, un élan vers l'espérance, vers l'immortalité, un profond sentiment religieux, un christianisme platonicien, ou plutôt un platonisme chrétien".

- (65) C. Hartlich and W. Sachs quoted by H. Harris in *D. F. Strauss and his Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1975, p. 271.
- (66) *Allemagne et Italie*, pp. 231-2.
- (67) *Examen de la Vie de Jésus*, p. 297.
- (68) *Ibid.*, p. 336.
- (69) In the eyes of Henri de Lubac Quinet's criticisms of German philosophy remain relevant today. See *Athéisme et sens de l'homme*, Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 1968, p. 24.
- (70) D. F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, tr. G. Eliot, London, Sonnenschein, 1892, p. 777.
- (71) See Harris, *op. cit.*, Chapter 7.
- (72) Strauss, *op. cit.*, pp. 780-1.
- (73) *Examen de la Vie de Jésus*, p. 338. Cf. F. Edouard, "Le Docteur Strauss et ses adversaires", *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, 1845, pp. 245-56 and 405-22.
- (74) *Ibid.*, p. 338, Cf. Louis Ménard; "Quand on prouverait qu'il n'a jamais existé, le Dieu que l'Occident adore depuis 1,800 ans sous le nom du Christ n'en serait pas moins un Dieu, de même qu'en niant l'existence d'Homère, on n'a pas diminué l'oeuvre divine qui porte son nom". Quoted by H. Peyre, *Louis Ménard (1822-1901)*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1932, pp. 208-9.
- (75) *Examen de la Vie de Jésus*, p. 336.
- (76) *Ibid.*, p. 339.
- (77) *Ibid.*, p. 338. M. David comments as follows on Quinet's use of the word "saint"; "'Saint' est pris par lui en une acception forte à l'extrême, englobant expressément et l'homme et Dieu, c'est-à-dire le divinément humain et l'humainement divin, L'on ne saurait, certes, songer, en ce cas, à l'obscur puissance du 'sacré': c'est du *personnellement et intérieurement religieux* qu'il s'agit; le dernier mot d'Edgar Quinet est la recherche d'une harmonisation, ou bien d'une jonction entre les notions de personne, d'agent, d'esprit, chacune pouvant être tour à tour considérée, soit sur le plan de l'humain, soit sur celui du divin". "Edgar Quinet et l'histoire des religions", *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1953, pp. 160-1.



- (78) See J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, London, S.C.M. Press, 1966, pp. 246-79.

### CHAPTER THREE

At this point we propose to examine Quinet's major publications of the years 1842-1848. We must begin with *Le Génie des religions* which did not appear until 1842 although it was based upon the lectures which Quinet delivered at Lyons in 1839. The calm mood of this work was however soon replaced by the militancy of the years of combat, 1842-45, which Quinet spent as a Professor at the Collège de France. This was the moment when, together with his friends Michelet and Mickiewicz, he found himself at the forefront of the political and religious controversies of the period. The three professors achieved a wide popularity among those who were dissatisfied with the policies of the government of the day and were angered by the attacks of the clerical party upon the University. Those inclined towards anti-clericalism and the Republican tradition supported Quinet who proclaimed his faith in the principles of the French Revolution and denounced the danger which in his opinion was constituted by the presence of the Jesuits in France. In published form Quinet's lectures were given the following titles: *Les Jésuites* (1843), *L'Ultramontanisme ou l'église romaine et la société moderne* (1844), *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* (1845), and *Les Révolutions d'Italie* (3 vols. 1848, 1851, 1852).<sup>(1)</sup> The content of these lectures was an obvious embarrassment to the government which retaliated by insisting upon a modification to the title of Quinet's lecture course. In 1845 he ceased lecturing in protest and he resigned the following year. In 1846 he was tempted to play a more active political role and he stood unsuccessfully for election as a candidate of the Left.<sup>(2)</sup>

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"On ferait un beau livre de l'histoire de l'esprit divin dans les différentes phases de l'humanité", wrote Lamartine in his *Voyage en Orient*.<sup>(3)</sup> *Le Génie des religions* could be said to go a considerable way in fulfilling this wish. In the opening pages of his study Quinet exclaims:

Vie de l'Esprit divin à travers le monde, Annales  
l'Eternel incarné dans le temps, que suis-je pour  
tenter cette histoire?<sup>(4)</sup>

In reality much of *Le Génie des religions* is a development and a deepening of ideas which we have encountered in Quinet's earlier work. His intention is not simply to provide a history of the doctrines of pre-Christian religions. He wishes above all to relate changes in society to changes in religion. He opposes the view that religion should be understood as a reflection of society. Religion itself is the creative element.

Each society develops as the expression of a religious idea, of a certain idea of God. This is the guiding principle which forms the common element uniting *Le Génie des religions* and the lectures given at the Collège de France. (5)

It would be difficult, however, to claim that Quinet's general thesis was particularly original. It was a commonly held belief that religion determined the form of society. Jouffroy develops this point in his *De l'Etat actuel de l'humanité* (1826):

Toute véritable religion entraîne [...] nécessairement après soi, non-seulement un certain culte, mais une certaine organisation politique, un certain ordre civil, une certaine politique et de certaines mœurs. En un mot, toute religion enfante une civilisation toute entière, qui est à elle comme l'effet à la cause, et qui tôt ou tard doit nécessairement et inévitablement se réaliser. (6)

And Lamennais in *Du Passé et de l'avenir du peuple* (1841) adopts a similar position:

L'histoire [...] nous montre l'humanité se développant à mesure que le dogme se développe, ou à mesure qu'elle avance dans la conception de Dieu et de l'Univers distinct de lui et uni à lui; de manière qu'à chacune des phases de ce développement dogmatique correspond une notion du droit et du devoir sur laquelle se modèle la société, qui n'en est que l'expression, la réalisation extérieure. (7)

The belief that religion determines society and the conviction that without the idea of God no real society could exist lead us to enquire into the origin of the idea of God. As was the case in his early essays Quinet will have no truck with the theory of a primordial revelation, in the sense of a direct divine intervention into history. It was the contemplation of nature which produced the idea of God in the mind of man. He refers to "l'idée de Dieu révélée par l'organe de l'univers". (8) The first divine revelation was provided by nature, the "Evangile cosmogonique", wherein ancient seers, poets and prophets read the word of God. (9) The history of the religious consciousness began with man's reaction to "l'infini visible", that is to the rich vegetation of the Orient. (10)

These remarks lead us to examine what is probably the most important issue raised by *Le Génie des religions*. This is the extent of the role played by nature in the development of the religious consciousness. Before we can look at this question, however, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of the general plan which is followed in this ambitious work. (11)

According to Quinet the *Vedas* provide evidence of the earliest form of religion, that of a patriarchal, tribal society of nomadic herdsmen living on the slopes of the Himalayas.(12) At this stage the idea of God is revealed by the light of dawn which disperses darkness to lay bare the spectacle of nature: "la première révélation de l'Orient, terre du soleil, se résume dans l'idée de lumière".(13) "L'aube visible", produces in man "l'aube de la pensée".(14) The character of this revelation is expressed in the figure of Indra who closely resembles Jehovah.(15) This form of religion is replaced as the tribes leave the mountains and make their way to the coast. Now a fixed society with a king and a priesthood develops. A new revelation is provided by nature: "la révélation de l'infini par l'océan".(16) This "figure nouvelle de l'infini" is Brahma. Unlike Indra who had been characterised by activity Brahma possesses "le naturel indolent de l'océan de Golconde".(17) Quinet pursues further his analysis of Indian religion but these two illustrations suffice to indicate the role played by nature.(18)

The other religions included in *Le Génie des religions* are approached from a similar point of view. Thus Persian religion is said to resemble the original identification of Indra with light while adding a new element: "la révélation par la parole".(19) Egyptian religion, on the other hand, represents "la révélation par la vie organique".(20) Egypt is closely associated with Africa and is considered as a land of servitude where man sought the presence of the divine no higher than in the animal kingdom. The construction of the monuments of Egypt is explained by reference to the influence of a priesthood of Asiatic origin. A new important element is however present in Egyptian religion: "le sentiment naissant de la personnalité".(21) Quinet interprets the Egyptians' desire to preserve the physical body after death as "(le) commencement de la foi dans la personne humaine".(22) Babylonian and Phoenician religion, on the other hand, correspond to societies in which man is "épris d'un amour délirant pour l'infini sous la forme de la nature".(23)

The Hebrew idea of God both reflects and transcends the spirit of Oriental pantheism. Before Renan, Quinet emphasises the fact that Jehovah, unlike the gods of India, Persia and Egypt, was not identified with an aspect of nature but revealed Himself to the Jews in the desert from which nature was, so to speak, absent. In Renan's terms the desert is monotheistic. Quinet, for his part, describes the desert as:

[.] la patrie naturelle du dieu jaloux [.] partout la face de Jéhovah, seule brillante dans le vide de l'immensité, l'Esprit seul debout au milieu de son temple invisible.(24)

In Oriental pantheism time was simply an eternal present and God was identified with the physical universe. The Hebrew idea of God, on the other hand, conceives of the divinity as separate from nature, as a free personality. At this moment man becomes conscious of his own freedom and aware of the future as being other than the present. Quinet points out, however, that only the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul could really provide an answer to those questions which the *Old Testament* left unresolved.

Henri Peyre does not hesitate to describe the final section of the first edition of *Le Génie des religions* as "une cinquantaine de pages inspirées".(25) Here Quinet's subject is Greek religion which in his mind corresponds to mankind's unique moment of serenity in history. This was the moment when "la croyance devint art" when faith became poetry.(26) Man became the measure of all things; he no longer sought infinity in external nature but found it within himself. The divine reason and the human reason were one. The same spirit of freedom and intellectual curiosity marked Greek art, drama, history and philosophy. Greece brought about the ruin of Oriental pantheism:

L'épopée, la statuaire, la poésie lyrique, le drame, métamorphosent l'un après l'autre l'ancien culte de la nature, lequel, privé de l'autorité du sacerdoce, se trouve livré à toutes les fantaisies de l'art.(27)

The Greek idea of God remains nevertheless to a certain extent dependent upon nature since in Quinet's opinion Greece herself can be envisaged as "l'immensité orientale, l'infini circonscrits dans une forme exquise".(28) Human freedom develops where man is no longer dominated by the external world.

To what extent does man passively receive the idea of God revealed by nature and to what extent does he actively contribute to its development? What is the range of individual freedom and responsibility once it is accepted that not only art, philosophy, institutions but "jusqu'à un certain point, la suite même des événements" follow from a given religion?(29) To what degree was man condemned to accept the religions which denied him true freedom? Having seen Quinet speak of freedom as "une activité qui ne relève que de soi" we wonder whether it is possible to make the development of the religious consciousness so dependent upon the influence of environment even if we accept that nature has been so arranged according to a providential plan.

It may be fair comment that Quinet cannot be faulted for not having emphasised the role of the individual in those societies when it is precisely his thesis that freedom and individuality have not yet developed. It

is, nevertheless, the presence of freedom which Quinet is seeking in history. The inertia, the "sommeil éternel" of the religions of the East cannot satisfy him: "[...] individualité, morale, conscience, activité, liberté où les trouverons-nous?"(30) We must, therefore, enquire whether, in the light of his conception of freedom, his theory of the influence of nature is sufficient to explain to such a large degree the origins of religion.

With regard to Greece, it is significant that Quinet does not merely state that nature revealed the idea of God. He remarks that the Greeks chose from the land about them the elements which corresponded to their national genius. In the case of Semitic monotheism, however, the influence of the desert is the truly decisive factor. In the desert which is devoid of the luxuriant vegetation of the East: "[...] l'homme s'élèvera presque nécessairement à l'idée pure du Dieu-Esprit".(31) This statement tends to remove the initiative from man who receives impressions from the external world which then produce in him the idea of God as spirit.(32)

In *Le Sentiment de la nature avant le christianisme* (1866) Quinet's friend and admirer Victor de Laprade is critical of the argument of *Le Génie des religions*. The author of *Psyché* agrees that nature revealed the idea of God to man in the Orient but he states categorically that Jehovah was not revealed "par une voix de la nature, pas même par la sublime et terrifiante immensité du désert".(33) Quinet's theory of the influence of environment is "profondément juste si on la contient dans certaines limites" but when carried too far it constitutes a threat to human free will and misrepresents the power of God:

Si dans l'ordre du développement moral et religieux de la création, le peuple choisi pour conserver l'idée du Dieu un et pur esprit, du Dieu libre, personnel, indépendant de ses oeuvres, a été placé longtemps sous la sauvegarde du désert, afin que la sainte idée fût mieux préservée de tout alliage avec les images impures du polythéisme et du panthéisme, est-ce à dire que le désert lui-même ait été le révélateur? Faut-il, par une hérésie inconcevable chez de grands esprits, retirer à l'âme humaine son activité propre, à l'âme divine sa toute-puissance, son initiative éternelle, sa liberté, pour investir l'univers et la matière du don de produire la pensée et d'engendrer l'idéal sans le secours d'un idéal antérieur et d'une pensée créatrice!(34)

According to Laprade - whose general argument recalls Ballnache - as each individual receives a physical body and a certain temperament so each race is given by God a certain environment. God, however, respects man's free will.

Quinet's argument, in the opinion of Laprade, would appear to deprive men of this vital power of choice.

Laprade, however, lays bare only one side of the picture since Quinet does in fact draw attention to the activity of mind by which man changes the course of history. Through his art, his philosophy, his reinterpretation of traditional texts, man inevitably alters the character of the idea of God originally revealed by nature. Thus religions are altered and transformed. This human element often takes the form of doubt. Quinet dwells at some length upon the figures of Prometheus, Hamlet, Faust and Job. Doubt is not an inherently negative activity destined to produce black despair. Job may seem impious but "cette incrédulité apparente est pleine du Dieu de l'avenir".(35) In this sense doubt becomes an instrument for the discovery of truth. For Quinet, as for Hugo, doubt is not of necessity sterile: "[...] il est un doute fécond, comme il est une douleur féconde".(36)

*Le Génie des religions* does not, therefore, remove responsibility from man to the extent suggested by Laprade. It remains a fact, however, that with regard to the origin of the religions examined in Quinet's study, the role played by nature is much greater than that attributed to an initial activity of mind. Laprade, moreover, was not alone in expressing reservations. Albert Réville, for example, while welcoming *Le Génie des religions* also had doubts on this score: "[...] nous aimerions que, dans sa genèse des religions, M. Quinet fût une part un peu mieux définie à l'esprit des individus et des races".(37) Michelet also, to judge from certain remarks in his *Journal*, was not in full agreement with Quinet's thesis. In his entry for 28th March 1842 Michelet notes: "Je lisais surtout les *Religions* de Quinet: trop d'extérieurs, trop de nature; pas assez la vie dont j'avais besoin".(38)

In reality, Quinet in *Le Génie des religions* is still trying to transcend the opposition between man and nature and to reconcile freedom with necessity. He writes that although the "puissance de transformation" responsible for the production of new forms of life in nature has ceased to be active in the natural universe, this same power is at work "dans le coeur et la conscience de l'homme".(39) Religion, art, laws and institutions are now its manifestations. History, like nature, is in this sense a revelation of the divine. Once again the history of religions takes the form of a westward movement in which:

[...] chaque lieu de la nature, chaque moment de la durée ayant son génie propre, représente la Divinité sous une face particulière; de chaque forme du monde

s'élève une révélation, de chaque révélation une société, de chaque société une voix dans le chœur universel; il n'est pas un point égaré dans l'espace ou le temps, qui ne figure pour quelque chose dans la révélation toujours croissante de l'Eternel. La création, d'abord séparée de son auteur, tend de plus en plus à se rattacher à lui par le lien de l'esprit, et la terre enfante véritablement son Dieu dans le travail des âges. A ce point de vue, l'histoire est un culte éternel auquel chaque civilisation ajoute un rite souvent baigné de sang. (40)

Is there not a danger that if all history is the revelation of God then everything that has taken place, including evil, suffering and "sang", will be justified so depriving the individual of responsibility? Furthermore, how does Quinet account for the separation of creation from Creator? What is the relationship between God the creator, the God who reveals himself in nature and history and the God created by mankind? Does God have any objective existence in contradistinction to the idea of God in the mind of man? Quinet unfortunately does not go into detail to elucidate these matters. In *Le Génie des religions* he is concerned with the history of the idea of God and not with his own conception of God. (41)

When in 1843 Eugène Pelletan tried to answer the question "Comment les dogmes se régénèrent?" he came to the conclusion that the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, the historical forms of Christianity, pointed to the necessity of "une troisième croyance [...] une croyance supérieure". (42) Quinet adopts a similar position in the lectures delivered at the Collège de France. Catholicism is rejected as the embodiment of reaction, inertia and sterility. Protestantism is welcomed but is deemed incapable of providing a satisfactory solution to the religious problems of the nineteenth century. The future, however, only remains meaningful so long as it is considered in a religious perspective.

In *Les Jésuites* Quinet envisages the future with a certain degree of confidence. He discerns in the controversies of the time a sign that a transformation of religion is imminent: "[...] une nouvelle aurore religieuse point dans le monde". (43) He urges his listeners to participate fully in this movement of spiritual rebirth:

[...] si la pensée religieuse souffle de nouveau sur le monde, si l'étoile nouvelle se lève, ne restons pas en arrière, et marchons le premier au-devant de ce Dieu qui se réveille dans les cœurs. Que d'autres (s'ils le veulent) s'enracinent dans la lettre, courons au-devant de l'Esprit. (44)

"L'Esprit" is a key word in Quinet's thought at this time. We may consider



that it corresponds to the idea of God which he proposes for the future. Both Quinet's nationalism and his conception of the personality rest upon his faith in "l'Esprit". This belief underlies his denunciation of Catholicism as the enemy of the true Christian spirit and legitimises his interpretation of the French Revolution in terms of the realisation of Christianity. In many respects the manner in which he conceives of "l'Esprit" recalls the "Duch" of Mickiewicz. The two men first met in 1837 and the Polish poet immediately made a deep impression upon Quinet.<sup>(45)</sup> There can be little doubt that in subsequent years Mickiewicz influenced the development of Quinet's thought. At the same time, however, it is easy to overestimate this influence and neglect the extent to which the thought of both writers already converged prior to their first meeting.<sup>(46)</sup>

With regard to the question of individuality Quinet's thought in the 1840's continues the argument which he had put forward in defence of the historical Jesus. The subjectivity of the individual is the centre for the realisation of spiritual energy which immediately takes the form of purposeful activity. This is the religion of conscience, "le dieu intérieur caché dans chacun de nous".<sup>(47)</sup> "L'Esprit", God as mind or spirit, reveals Himself in the life of the individual but this does not imply that the individual is merely an instrument. He is rather "the channel of the deity" to use an expression of Emerson's which Quinet noted down in his *Carnets*.<sup>(48)</sup>

But if as individuals we participate in the life of "l'Esprit" this is as the result of an unrelenting spiritual effort. Quinet underscored with evident sympathy Emerson's statement that "God will not make himself manifest to cowards".<sup>(49)</sup> In *L'Ultramontanisme* he makes the same point: "[...] Dieu se cache aux pusillanimes, mais il se révèle aux braves".<sup>(50)</sup> The individual must look to the future and resist "le sommeil de l'Esprit". Responsibility for progress rests upon the shoulders of heroic individuals:

Un homme, en grandissant intérieurement, en redoublant en soi, par un effort sublime, la vie morale, fait sans qu'il le sache, une révolution dans le genre humain qui, tôt ou tard est obligé de se mettre à son niveau. Je dirais volontiers que chacun porte, au dedans de soi, la chaîne de diamant qui soutient l'univers moral; à mesure qu'il s'élève, il oblige l'univers de monter avec lui.<sup>(51)</sup>

Quinet, like Mickiewicz, Carlyle and Emerson, champions the hero who is the embodiment of this spiritual energy. Heroism is akin to saintliness as an expression of this force. Quinet appeals to his audience

to develop the heroic spirit in their own lives: "Il y a encore de grandes choses à faire; restez donc où est le combat de l'esprit, le danger, la vie, la récompense".(52)

The Church, on the other hand, is branded as the enemy of the heroic spirit. It is antipathetic towards "tout ce qui naît du pur héroïsme".(53) Hostility towards spirit is carried furthest by the Jesuits who wish to "s'emparer de l'esprit pour le matérialiser".(54) The society of Jesus is built upon written rules and laws which represent a denial of the life of spirit. The *Spiritual Exercises* have as their real aim the crushing of spirit as manifested in the life of the individual personality.

It soon becomes clear that the individual's spiritual nature realises itself in freely determined practical activity in the moral sphere as opposed to the contemplation of infinity or the mystic's union with the Godhead. The adjectives "religieux" and "moral" have almost the same content. The freedom of individual conscience cannot be made subject to any external authority, neither to Church, nor Bible, nor priest nor state. *Nolite tangere christos meos*, writes Quinet, "nous l'appliquons à chaque personne morale".(55) In order to be religious it is not necessary to belong to a particular church. Religion, because it is so rooted in individual conscience, ceases to be limited to one aspect of human existence. It expands into all spheres of life, the intellectual, the moral, the social, the political, becoming identified with the cause of justice in society and the search for truth in science and philosophy.

Quinet uses the words "âme", "esprit", "pensée", "intelligence", "conscience", almost as synonyms to express that part of our being which relates to God. "Pensée" and "intelligence" naturally refer to the presence of Spirit in intellectual activity and enquiry, in science and in philosophy. "[...] toute la dignité de l'homme moderne", writes Quinet, "est dans sa pensée".(56) The pursuit of knowledge and truth is by nature a deeply religious activity. Ultimately science and religion are one: "impossibilité dans l'une et dans l'autre de se rassasier jamais, ni de vérité, ni de sainteté".(57) Bacon, Descartes and Leibniz "ont frayé la route au Verbe de l'avenir". Galileo, Kepler and Newton were seers, "les prophètes du monde moderne".(58) The philosophers of the Enlightenment had faith in "la puissance de l'invisible, de la pensée" and this, according to *L'Ultramontanisme*, is what is most valuable in the Christian heritage. In Quinet's eyes the Enlightenment did not fulfil an exclusively critical function. On the contrary the Enlightenment may be described as "le pontificat de l'Esprit".(59) In

the modern world the action of "l'Esprit" transcends the boundaries separating the Christian churches and expresses itself in philosophy as well as in religion. (60)

In *Les Jésuites* the new religious spirit abroad in the world is described as an "Evangile renouvelé". (61) In *L'Ultramontanisme* Quinet refers to "la vie de l'esprit créée par le christianisme lui-même". (62) In reality his faith in "l'Esprit" and his understanding of Christianity are one. For this reason he is eager to identify the transformation of religion which he is seeking with the essence of the Christian religion. Thus, in *Le Christianisme et la Révolution Française*, it is readily apparent that Jesus embodies the values which Quinet is defending: life, creativity, personality, movement. Christ is presented as the enemy of formal, organised religion. We are told that in the mind of Jesus the ideal of the Church was "le mouvement de la vie spirituelle". Action, the concrete realisation of Christianity is what is important; the spirit and not the letter: "il faut être soi-même [...] une bible agissante, une prophétie visible". (63) Quinet proceeds to describe the relationship between Jesus and his disciples in terms which suggest perhaps the manner in which he wished his listeners to react to his own words:

Dans l'esprit de l'Evangile, le maître se donne à tous, pleinement, sans réserve, sans réticences. Chaque disciple devient, à son tour, un foyer qui répand la vie, la développe autour de lui; et jamais le mouvement ne s'arrête dans la tradition. (64)

Once Christianity is understood in these terms it becomes easy to brand the Society of Jesus as a degeneration of Christianity and to cry: "[...] qu'y a-t-il de commun entre Jésus et Loyola?" (65)

Whereas at first Quinet limits his criticisms to the Jesuits a more general mood of hostility towards Catholicism soon becomes evident. The later lectures are dominated by the contrast between the Church on the one hand and the real Christian spirit on the other. Quinet argues that the conduct of the Church over the centuries rendered not only the Reformation but also the French Revolution inevitable. Upon too many occasions - he draws our attention in particular to the cases of Galileo and Joan of Arc - the Catholic Church acted in a manner which was profoundly unchristian. Quinet recognises the spiritual strength of a figure from the past such as Gregory VII but this does not influence his conviction that Catholicism has remained static and closed to all new ideas since the Council of Trent. (66) By the seventeenth century it was already a spent force, divided against itself as the Jansenist controversy illustrated. At the same time genuine Christianity found

expression outside Catholicism, in the Reformation and in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. France and the Revolution are heirs to this tradition.

What then is the meaning of Christianity for the men of the 1840's? Unlike the Saint-Simonians Quinet does not declare that Christianity belongs to the past. But, as he had made clear in the preface to *Prométhée*, the Christ of the nineteenth century is not the Christ of the Middle Ages. Religion is not static but progressive: "[...] Dieu [...] n'a pas fermé au moyen âge les portes de son Eglise".<sup>(67)</sup> History continues to realise the Christian idea of God: "le Christ s'incarne de siècle en siècle dans l'histoire". The Middle Ages were "le culte de la mort", "le temps de la passion du genre humain sur le Golgotha de l'histoire".<sup>(68)</sup> Since the Renaissance and the Reformation men have come to realise that the kingdom of justice can be brought into being now, on this earth. That is the Christian meaning of the French Revolution:

Le Christianisme reste [...] enfermé dans les tombeaux jusqu'à l'heure de la Révolution française, où l'on peut dire qu'il ressucite [...]. L'Eglise était devenue la pierre qui enfermait l'esprit dans le sépulcre. Il fallait que cette pierre fût ôtée un instant; l'ange de la France l'a soulevée; l'esprit s'est montré.<sup>(69)</sup>

Quinet's message is that there is not only the Christ of the Passion of the Middle Ages; there is also the figure of Christ in his glory and majesty.<sup>(70)</sup>

In the lectures delivered at the Collège de France the emphasis is placed upon action: if the principles of the Gospels have not yet been fully put into practice in society then this situation must be remedied by action in the present. Thus the realisation of Christianity becomes directly identified with political attempts to transform society. This is evident in the final lecture of *Les Jésuites* where it is made clear that the application of the spirit of the Christian religion "ne fait que commencer dans le monde civil et politique".<sup>(71)</sup> Christianity becomes a reality by advancing the causes of equality, freedom, fraternity and solidarity, by defending the values represented by "famille, patrie, humanité", by aiding the poor and by raising the status of women. The message is unambiguous and represents a call to action and a rejection of all forms of resignation to the status quo:

Les peuples ne se contentent plus d'entendre l'Évangile comme un murmure avant-coureur de la cité des morts; ils

veulent sciemment le réaliser dans la vie sociale  
[...] pourquoi [...] nous conseiller toujours  
d'attendre la réalisation du christianisme dans  
le tombeau?(72)

In order to understand France's role in the realisation of Christianity it is first necessary to examine Quinet's conception of nationhood. The French nation is a "personne morale", a collective personality.(73) Like an individual a nation is a manifestation of Spirit in the world. Its collective personality is as sacred as the personality of the individual. "Tout progrès du christianisme implique les progrès nationaux", wrote Mickiewicz,(74) Quinet would have agreed. He believes that in the modern world spiritual power and moral authority do not lie in the Vatican but in "la conscience des peuples".(75) Each nation has a mission, each Christian people is "un apôtre qui a sa mission particulière".(76) Nationhood is a manifestation of life: "Mépriser les nationalités, ce n'est rien autre chose que mépriser la vie, en sa source la plus profonde".(77)

In the *Examen de la Vie de Jésus* Quinet had refused to sacrifice the individual to Strauss' abstract god of humanity. In a similar manner the collective personality of the nation must not be suppressed. Quinet reveres humanity of which France is a part but he will not sacrifice the nation to an abstract cosmopolitan ideal. Patriotism need not of necessity produce an arrogant nationalism. He seeks "une unité d'esprit qui se concilie avec la spontanéité des peuples".(78) He does not wish national frontiers or languages to disappear. Each nation must realise its own mission and thus "agir pour tous en vivant de sa propre vie".(79) The same effort is required of the nation as of the individual:

Une nation quelconque qui se retire de la mêlée, des dangers de l'existence, qui n'occupe pas dans le monde moral et social la place que Dieu a confiée à sa garde, qui ne fait pas sa tâche entière, une telle nation pêche, non seulement envers elle-même, mais envers le genre humain, non seulement envers le passé, mais envers l'avenir; elle s'oblige d'avance à racheter ces moments d'inertie par des trésors futurs de courage et de vie.(80)

The tragedy of Italy, for example, was that a genuine spirit of national unity never really existed. Instead of becoming masters of their own destiny the Italian people alienated their spiritual authority as a nation to the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. National unity, the prerequisite for the establishment of political freedom, remained to be created.

"La France sent qu'elle est le monarque du monde", wrote Buchez.(81) Michelet and Leroux go further and declare "la France est une religion".(82) Quinet for his part believes that upon the survival of France, this "terre consacrée", depends the fate of other nations. Were France to give up

the struggle then he has no doubt that "l'esprit de mort s'abattraît sur l'Occident comme sur une proie assurée".(83) France alone can pronounce "[la] parole sociale" which can restore life to those nations suffering as a result of the influence of Catholicism.(84) In this respect the lectures of the 1840's reaffirm sentiments which Quinet had expressed in his earlier work. In *De l'Allemagne et de la Révolution* (1832) he stated that France was nothing less than "l'organe dominant de la civilisation". France had a "mission sociale" to fulfil and could be said to represent "l'instinct de la civilisation, le besoin d'initiative d'une manière générale dans les progrès de la société moderne".(85) The French tradition from Louis XIV to the Revolution testified to the nation's position as the leader of the western world.(86) The French people, like Christ, embody those qualities which Quinet associates with "l'Esprit": sincerity, spontaneity, life, movement. The genius of France is "tout ensemble mouvement, force, élan, loyauté" and these qualities are manifested in French history and literature.(87)

Quinet, however, has to come to terms with the fact that the disaster of Waterloo halted the progress of the Revolution and prevented the French people from fulfilling their mission. Since the Revolution is understood in Christian terms the defeat of 1815 naturally takes on a religious significance. It becomes "ce Golgotha des temps modernes".(88) Quinet believes that "[...] la France devait donner la Révolution au monde et payer son bienfait par un jour de mort".(89) Waterloo was an act of Providence the meaning of which the French people must try to understand:

J'ai parcouru ce champ de colère [...] Je n'ai rien vu sur le Golgotha de Mont-Saint-Jean, qu'un immense calice tout plein de larmes et du sang d'un grand peuple; buvons-y à loisir sans détourner les yeux, jusqu'à la lie [...] qui sait si cette mort, où nous nous agitons depuis trente ans, ne nous est pas donnée pour nous renouveler?(90)

The desire to identify France with Christ is not, however, a new element appearing in Quinet's writings in the 1840's. As early as 1832 we encounter a direct assimilation of France to the figure of Christ:

Qu'as-tu [la France] donc fait pour porter si haut à ton calvaire ta couronne d'épines, et pour boire si long-temps à ton verre ton fiel d'infamie? Depuis plus de trois jours tu es descendue dans ton sépulcre, toi l'hostie des nations.(91)

Napoleon, too, has a religious function to fulfil. In an article of 1836 Quinet develops an idea which is also to be found in Mickiewicz's work.

This is the analogy between Napoleon and Caesar:

César, l'homme du peuple, fut le précurseur guerrier de l'Évangile. Napoléon sera-t-il le précurseur d'un évangile nouveau?(92)

France has the task of bringing about a new alliance of peoples and faiths. The wars of the Revolution and Empire were the first stage in this process since they led to "l'unité des ennemis", "l'alliance des Eglises", "l'accomplissement du christianisme".(93) During the 1830's Quinet had raised the possibility of European federation and had suggested that an intellectual and spiritual alliance between France and Germany might come about:

Le panthéisme est partout le fonds de la philosophie allemande comme l'égalité est partout au fond de la révolution française. Si ces deux principes viennent jamais à s'entendre, ils construiront entre eux le monde nouveau.(94)

In 1840, despite the criticisms of Strauss and Hegelian philosophy, the hope persists that the Rhine may mark the alliance between France and Germany, between "la réformation religieuse et [...] la réformation politique".(95) By the time of *L'Ultramontanisme*, however, this hope would seem to belong irrevocably to the past.(96)

This theme of an alliance between the spirit of France and that of Germany reflects a desire to make France responsible for a wider reconciliation between Northern and Southern Europe. Quinet, like Michelet, Gobineau and others, considers the French people to be a mixture of elements from North and South, ideally placed to be the "médiatrice entre le Nord et le Midi", between the Germanic and Latin peoples, between the Reformation and Catholicism.(97)

A still more important task of reconciliation remains to be completed. This is the reconciliation between East and West which Quinet examines in *Le Génie des religions* in the chapter entitled *La Renaissance orientale*. Here he argues that in the nineteenth century the religions of East and West have ceased to exist in isolation and he hopes that from their fusion will result a new Reformation.(98) The initiative for the reconciliation between East and West lies with Europe. Russia and Britain, by turning their attention to the Orient are acting "dans les voies de la civilisation".(99) France, too, has her role to play in this process as Napoléon's expedition to Egypt had illustrated. It is through the conquest of Algeria, however, that contemporary France can fulfil her "tâche sacrée" of reconciling Europe with the East.(100)

Pierre Leroux considered that the Revolution, having overthrown Catholicism, contained the seeds of a new religion: "[...] la Révolution est un monde nouveau, une religion nouvelle [...]".<sup>(101)</sup> Quinet, for his part, speaks of the soldiers of the revolutionary armies as new crusaders, "soldats de l'Esprit" with not simply the defence of France but the salvation of the world upon their shoulders.<sup>(102)</sup> At first sight he would seem to have no doubts concerning this historical pedigree of the Revolution:

[...] toute l'histoire moderne, d'âge en âge, tend à la consommation de la Révolution française [...] La Révolution française [...] ne tombe pas seulement des mains du dix-huitième siècle; elle descend des hauteurs de tout le passé.<sup>(103)</sup>

At the same time, however, despite this seeming confidence in the Revolution a definite note of unease is present in *Le Christianisme et la Révolution Française*.

The cardinal principle of *Le Génie des Religions* was that every society is in the final analysis the expression of a religious idea. Each society requires a religion to give it meaning and life. Changes in society result directly from changes in religion and not vice versa.

The relationship between Christianity and society is not, however, always envisaged in the same manner. At times the Revolution appears directly as the realisation of the spirit of the Gospels; a gulf of eighteen centuries separates the ideal from its realisation. Upon other occasions Quinet stresses the role of the early councils in defining the Christian idea of God which in turn determined the course of history:

[...] ce qui a été décidé pour le dogme se réalise tôt ou tard dans les faits [...] le travail des quatre premiers siècles du christianisme est l'idéal, le plan sur lequel se développent tous les siècles qui ont suivi.<sup>(104)</sup>

Elsewhere the emphasis is placed upon the inner evolution within the spirit of Christianity which is not something fixed but a living, developing tradition. The Gospels are transformed, reinterpreted, but this process represents the life of Christianity which in turn renews human societies. On other occasions Quinet discerns a clear correspondence between changes within the Church's organisation and changes within society. At all events he is convinced that since the Council of Trent the harmony between Church and society has remained broken.<sup>(105)</sup>

The English and American revolutions could be said to arise directly from the Reformation but the French Revolution while going beyond its predecessors in its desire to realise Christianity in society found in



the French Church an enemy:

Seule des nations modernes, la France a fait une révolution politique et sociale avant d'avoir consommé sa révolution religieuse. Suivez un moment cette idée; vous en verrez sortir, tout ensemble, ce qu'il y a d'original et de monstrueux, de gigantesque et d'inplacable dans cette histoire.(106)

The absence of a genuine religious revolution means that neither shall the course of the Revolution be smooth nor shall its gains be secure. It lacked the firm foundations of a Protestant, national Church which had formed the basis of the success of the English Revolution. All attempts to bring democracy into the Church resulted in failure. The temperament which Catholicism had imposed on the French people over the centuries could not be eradicated in such a short period. Quinet admires the enthusiasm of those men of the Convention who thought it possible to create "un verbe, un dieu nouveau", but he considers that they too could not free themselves from the past:

Le malheur est qu'au moment où l'on pensait être le plus révolutionnaire on retombait dans l'ombre de l'Eglise que l'on venait de répudier. Ces abstractions mises à la place des saints, ces saisons, ces vertus, à la place des fêtes ecclésiastiques, n'était-ce pas une imitation constante du catholicisme? Même désir de frapper les sens, même foi aux images, aux surfaces.(107)

The achievements of the Convention in the defence of France are not to be denied. Quinet is certain, however, that the survival of the Catholic temperament, unchecked by a true religious revolution, led to violence and the rejection of all claims for the freedom of individual conscience:

On lira demain au fond de l'âme; l'Etat fouillera dans les coeurs [...] le Comité de Salut Public demande [...] l'abandon du sentiment intime, du secret entre l'homme et Dieu, du ciel intérieur. Cette portion de l'individu qui échappe à tous les yeux est, depuis trois siècles, affranchie du pape; la rendra-t-on à Robespierre? Non.(108)

In France any attempt to reconcile the individual with society is exceedingly difficult:

Entre les deux principes contradictoires que la Révolution française doit finir par concilier, l'association et le droit de l'individu, nous sommes naturellement disposés à ajourner le second. [...] Chaque parti se promet intérieurement une heure de despotisme, un 18 brumaire, pour assurer l'indépendance des autres [...] Notre premier mouvement est de fortifier l'Etat, l'association; nous ne pensons que par réflexion à l'individu, à la personne.(109)

Not everything, however, is to be rejected in the Catholic heritage. Quinet believes that it bequeathed to the Revolution an aspiration to unity and universality.

If, however, we ask what the society of the future will be like we discover that Quinet gives no precise answer and expounds no detailed political doctrine. The word democracy is often on his lips and in his mind it is associated with popular sovereignty and the Republican form of government. Quinet's model democracy is that of the United States of America but he is well aware that American democracy rests upon Protestant foundations and cannot thus be applied directly in France. Above all, however, democracy as advocated by Quinet should be understood in terms of a continuation of the revolutionary tradition.

It is, nevertheless, certain that democracy is the form of government best suited to allow the individual to express his will freely. Perhaps for this very reason no attempt is made to provide a detailed definition. Democracy can only be created by an inner struggle:

Quelqu'un espère-t-il arriver à l'âge d'or de la fraternité universelle sans passer par le dévouement, par le sacrifice, par le travail intérieur, par la mort peut-être? (110)

Democracy, moreover, should not be interpreted as signalling the extension to all members of society of the material privileges enjoyed at present by the middle class. Quinet is at pains to argue that improvements in mankind's material wellbeing are of no value unless they are accompanied by a corresponding spiritual, moral development:

L'avènement de la démocratie ne peut être qu'un nouveau progrès de l'esprit, de la civilisation, de l'ordre universel. Ou elle sera tout cela, ou elle ne sera jamais rien; ce qu'il est impie de supposer. (111)

At the same time we must never forget that democracy should not be considered in isolation from "la patrie". The experience of belonging to a national community is of vital importance. Indeed a rather belligerent nationalism is at times in evidence, notably over the Rhine question. (112) This serves to distinguish Quinet from the socialists as does the fact that economic considerations play a relatively minor role in his writings. He is well aware of the reality of class antagonism and conflict but in contrast to those who proclaimed international working class solidarity he believes that the members of the proletariat in France are first and foremost Frenchmen. (113)

Quinet in no way denies the social dimension of man but he implies that association between individuals must be based upon a recognition of

the sanctity of the personality. He forcefully defends the rights of the individual's religious conscience against those who seek to sacrifice the individual to the state:

Il y aura toujours un sanctuaire dans lequel l'Etat avec ses armées ne pourra pénétrer; et ce sanctuaire idéal [...] c'est la conscience religieuse de l'homme en commerce avec l'infini. (114)

This prompts him to reject the Saint-Simonian model of society since in his opinion it, too, neglects the individual. Such theories reflect the continuing influence of patterns of thought which have their origins in Catholicism. (115) On the other hand Quinet will not go so far as to call into question the very existence of the state and its institutions on the grounds that they place restrictions upon the individual. As *L'Enseignement du Peuple* will make clear, he is convinced that, given the power of the Church in France, the state must remain as a necessary counterweight.

It is useful to consider Quinet's thought in relation to the wider intellectual climate of the 1830's and 1840's which was marked by the break-up of orthodox Hegelianism. These years witnessed the publication of Kierkegaard's *Either-Or*, the split into Young and Old Hegelians, Feuerbach's transformation of theology into anthropology and Marx's substitution of a theory of social practice for Hegel's concept of active spirit. (116) Hegel came under attack from two main directions. In the first place there were those thinkers, including Kierkegaard, who recognised in the philosophy of Hegel a threat to the free individual. Secondly there were those who rejected the conservative conclusions of their master and favoured instead revolutionary change. Points of contact exist between Quinet and both these groupings.

In the first instance Quinet has a place among those writers and thinkers who considered Hegel to be the enemy of the individual. J. Maritain puts the problem clearly when he writes that whilst Hegel glorified subjectivity, this was for him infinite subjectivity. This, in the words of Hegel, is not attained by the individual "in virtue of his particular idiosyncrasies but of his essential being [...]". (117) Because the Hegelian self is a universal self, remarks Maritain, "it is essential to Spirit to deliver itself from the dictatorship of the singular". (118) Consequently Hegel was unable to recognise the true subjectivity of the individual as understood by Christianity. Quinet's own defence of the human personality involves, as we have seen, a repudiation of Hegelian christology and a general hostility towards the tendency prevalent in contemporary German history, criticism, philosophy and theology to undervalue the personality. (119)

When discussing society and social relations Quinet is once again careful not to sacrifice the particular to the general. According to Hegel the individual only really existed as a member of the state since the state was the rational expression of the divine will. Quinet, on the other hand, distinguishes between individual and nation and between nation and mankind in general. Each entity is considered as a whole in its own right and not simply as a part of a greater whole. National identities are not submerged but each nation struggles to express "humanity", in the sense of Herder's "Humanität".

But if Quinet's faith in the individual suggest parallels with Kierkegaard the manner in which he advocates action and a rejection of the limiting power of the past likens him to those who interpreted Hegel along revolutionary lines and denied the identity of the rational and the real.<sup>(120)</sup> Quinet, we remember, calls for the realisation of the promises of heaven here and now in this world. His own lectures became political acts which appealed to the French revolutionary tradition and represented a challenge to the society of Louis-Philippe. History, according to Quinet, is not a deterministic process and not the work of an impersonal historical necessity.<sup>(121)</sup> Each individual nation is responsible for its own fate. Hegel had confined himself to the study of the past, remarks Quinet; he, in contrast, urges the philosopher of history to turn his eyes to the future:

La loi de l'humanité doit se composer du passé, du présent et de l'avenir que nous portons en nous [...] La vraie philosophie de l'histoire c'est Janus aux deux visages tournés l'un vers le passé, l'autre vers le futur.<sup>(122)</sup>

Upon a number of important points Quinet's analysis of religion recalls that of Feuerbach. In the *Essence of Religion* the German philosopher places the origin of religion in man's feeling of dependency with regard to nature. He argues that as the human will and intelligence developed man came to attribute these faculties to his God who ceased to be directly identified with nature. God is, therefore, a creation of the imagination with no objective reality. In the *Essence of Christianity* Feuerbach proposes his celebrated definition of religion as self-projection:

Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge. By his God thou knowest the man and by the man his God; the two are identical.<sup>(123)</sup>

In *Le Génie des religions* Quinet also makes the idea of God arise as a reflection of nature and points out how the evolution of the idea of

God corresponds to the development of consciousness, freedom and personality. What Quinet does not do, however, is to advocate an exclusive substitution of human reality for the divine. He does not conclude that the essence of religion lies in man's self-alienation. He is closest to Feuerbach in the study of pagan religions but he does not share the German thinker's harsh judgment of Christianity. Quinet considers that the inner division brought about by Christianity was necessary for the development of freedom and individuality. He repeatedly expresses his hostility to all forms of materialism. Nature and history remain "la révélation toujours croissante de l'Eternel" even if they are no longer expressly identified with the cosmic process in which the Absolute attains self-knowledge. Quinet refuses to sacrifice the human to the divine. The aspiration to synthesis and unity remains. In the final analysis he remains closer to Herder than to Feuerbach.

Quinet's God is not a personal, transcendent being whose relationship to creation is based upon love.<sup>(124)</sup> "L'Esprit" is a power which is present in the world and not set over and against the world. History is mankind's journey to God but God is already active in history. Man can never possess a full knowledge of God who defies all attempts made by man to define and limit Him. "[...] nous croyons à un Dieu éternellement insaisissable de grandeur, de vie et d'esprit", writes Quinet.<sup>(125)</sup> Man's "convoitise de l'infini" produces the dynamic movement of history but God remains a *Deus Ignotus* who cannot be identified with the God of any particular religion.<sup>(126)</sup> These sentiments are well expressed by Prometheus:

Soit que vous habitez, par delà l'univers,  
Des mondes créés les fertiles déserts,  
Soit que vous remplissez ma poitrine agitée,  
Dieux inconnus, soyez les dieux de Prométhée.<sup>(127)</sup>

In one sense Quinet's God could be described as the unknown, infinite possibilities of the future. Yet it is rather in terms of the continuous unfolding of a creative process that this God is best understood.

As the preceding analysis has shown, the lectures of the 1840's are characterised by an emphasis upon life, change, action and movement. Again and again Quinet returns to a series of opposites: vie/mort (silence, stérilité), action/sommeil (repos), mouvement/immobilité (inertie), réalité (vrai)/apparence (faux), sincérité/pharisaïsme, liberté/esclavage, invisible/visible, esprit/matière (lettre, force), avenir/passé. The first conclusion to be drawn is that the past must not be allowed to become a burden or a dead weight. Man must throw off the

yoke of history. Even that which is most admirable in the past must not hinder the movement to the future. Two examples must suffice to illustrate this very important point. In the first place we find Quinet, despite his enthusiasm for the thinkers of the Enlightenment, urging his contemporaries to surpass their achievements:

Ne rentrez pas dans ce siècle de vie pour vous y emprisonner, mais, au contraire, pour y chercher une vie nouvelle! Le caractère des grands hommes qui le représentent, est d'avoir été des précurseurs: ils veulent pour successeurs des intelligences libres, non des serfs. (128)

Even the French Revolution itself is not something absolute which should simply be imitated:

Toute grande qu'est la Révolution, je ne demande pas que vous en fassiez une idole [..] Elle a tendu, d'un effort sublime, à embrasser le divin; elle s'en est approché en des instants suprêmes; mais elle n'est pas la Justice, l'Évangile éternel, la Religion absolue [..] Hommes nouveaux, faisons-nous un monde nouveau. (129)

We would be very mistaken, however, were we to interpret these remarks as a clear-cut rejection of the past. In reality Quinet wishes to envisage past, present and future as a continuity - but as a continuity in a perpetual process of creative self-transformation. For this reason history, nature and art are all understood in terms of transformation and creativity. Mankind, like nature, is an organic unity which transforms itself in history. Nature, in the process of creation, is an artist. Art is the perfection of nature. The same life is present in art, nature and history. This is apparent when Quinet discusses epic poetry in the preface to *Napoléon*:

Plus qu'aucune autre forme de l'art, l'épopée concourt à la civilisation, parce qu'elle est elle-même la transformation continue du passé dans l'avenir, ou, pour mieux dire, le spectacle de la vie même, à son principe et dans son développement. (130)

"L'avenir est toujours sceptique à l'égard du passé puisqu'il s'en sépare", remarks Quinet. (131) But at the same time within the process of transformation "l'avenir" - which is almost a synonym for "l'Esprit" - is already active in the present. In Quinet's terms to speak of "l'avenir" in isolation from the present does not really make sense for then the future becomes merely:

[..] une abstraction sans corps, sans forme, et qui n'existe nulle part. Sitôt qu'il devient une réalité, il se convertit en un présent qui a lui-même un passé. (132)

The future in this sense is not divorced from the present. A number of passages could be chosen to illustrate this point. This, for example, is

how Quinet takes leave of his audience at the close of *L'Ultramontanisme*:

Vous cherchez, vous appelez un meilleur avenir!  
mais il est évident [...] que cet avenir est  
déjà en vous [...] je pense que l'esprit de  
l'avenir travaille notre pays dans les générations  
nouvelles, comme dans la source la plus pure de  
la vie. (133)

As the future can be made to exist in the present which it transforms,  
so immortality according to Quinet begins in this life as opposed to being  
granted by God after death:

Qu'est-ce que l'instinct de l'immortalité, sinon  
une vie morale, qui, accumulée dans le présent,  
déborde dans l'avenir? [...] c'est par un élan  
intérieur que l'immortalité se révèle. (134)

In the words of the preface to *Prométhée* "l'Eternel" is "passé,  
présent et avenir, tout ensemble". (135) The great men of history are  
those who participate fully in the on-going movement of creation which  
is the life of Spirit. Thus the artist is above all a creator who trans-  
forms the material presented by the past whilst at the same time prophesying  
the future. For this reason excessive imitation is condemned. True  
genius proceeds otherwise: "Il [Michel-Ange] fait, il accroît la  
tradition; il ne la reçoit pas". (136) Galileo approaches science in the  
same spirit as Raphaël his art: "Il [Galilée] agit; il accroît l'univers;  
il crée il ne disserte pas". (137) In philosophy the same criteria hold;  
Quinet refers to "l'esprit philosophique, qui est véritablement l'esprit  
de création". (138) The highest possible value is placed upon creativity in  
science and in art: "Tout homme qui travaille prie, a-t-on dit; à plus  
forte raison, tout homme qui découvre et qui crée". (139)

Creation is accompanied by enthusiasm, or perhaps more accurately,  
"l'enthousiasme qui seul crée" should be understood in its original  
meaning as expressing the creative power of spirit acting through man. (140)  
The source and principle of "l'esprit", "l'âme", and "l'enthousiasme" is  
"l'idée même de Dieu". (141) It would seem that man comes closest to  
knowing God in the moment of creative inspiration when the future, active  
in the present, transforms the past.

To seek the presence of God in history is the task of both the epic  
poet and the philosopher of history. The epic poet spontaneously and  
intuitively differentiates between what is transient and what is eternal. (142)  
The qualities required of the philosopher of history do not seem to be  
markedly different. In the pages of *L'Ultramontanisme* he readily becomes  
a prophet, a new priest:

Montrer le doigt de l'Eternel dans les affaires  
du temps, reconnaître le divin mêlé aux choses  
humaines, à qui cela appartient-il, si ce  
n'est au prêtre?(143)

History itself can become a substitute for traditional forms of faith:

Si elle était complète, la philosophie de l'histoire  
universelle serait la manifestation de l'action  
divine dans toutes les choses humaines, elle  
s'identifierait par là avec la religion  
universelle.(144)

Does the presence of this "action divine" imply a corresponding restriction of human freedom? The reader might well be forgiven if he came to this conclusion. Quinet's lectures abound in references to Providence which seemingly intervenes in history by making individuals its instruments. This, for example, is how Quinet introduces us to Galileo: "[...] la Providence va se servir d'un grand homme pour tendre à la papauté le piège le plus extraordinaire". In a similar vein Voltaire's actions are said to be those of a man "conduit par une force supérieure".(145) Why was Protestantism not completely crushed in France? Quinet replies that the hand of Providence may be detected in its survival. The Revolution itself can be explained as the punishment meted out by Providence to the Church which was responsible for the persecution of the Christian spirit in science:

Il fallait qu'un grand châtimeut vînt tout à coup  
l'avertir [l'Eglise] qu'elle se trompait de route.  
Ce châtimeut sacré, la Providence le lui a envoyé  
en déchaînant contre elle la Révolution française.(146)

France since the Revolution, remarks Quinet, has been "l'instrument de l'Esprit universel".(147) Napoléon, "l'homme du genre humain", once again appears as "l'instrument presque passif d'un plan qui vient d'en haut".(148) "Derrière lui", writes Quinet in 1845, "on commence à voir la Providence".(149) The defeat of Waterloo is not to be explained in human terms alone. It was not simply the work of the enemies of France: "[...] il est bien évident, ce jour-là, que nous avons reçu le coup d'en haut".(150)

We should not, however, be misled by Quinet's fondness for traditional religious language. Occasionally he points to the meaning behind the vocabulary and imagery:

Espérez-vous que les cieux s'ouvrent pour montrer  
la royauté du fils de l'homme? Non, puisque vous  
savez qu'ils ne s'ouvriront pas; vous avez rejeté  
cette espérance matérielle. Ce ne sont pas les  
cieux visibles qui se dilateront; c'est le ciel  
intérieur, l'âme, l'esprit.(151)



In a similar fashion Quinet is not really saying that a supernatural power intervenes in history. His Providence and his philosophy of history are one. It is for this reason that Quinet can claim that the Reformation was "dans les desseins de la Providence" and at the same time criticise the Church for not having recognised "la nécessité divine de la Réformation, de la Révolution française".(152)

Providence may be said to govern the world but we must remember that this is "l'Esprit" acting firstly through individual conscience and secondly through nations. This power must be developed by man and be exercised in the right direction. When understood in these terms Quinet's Providence stands opposed to fate and destiny. In *L'Ultramontanisme* he describes a genuinely Christian philosophy of history in the following terms:

[..] le Dieu n'habite plus seulement dans les hauteurs invisibles; il n'agit plus par secousses et par surprises. Il s'est incarné; il s'est fait homme; il vit dans le cœur des nations et des états. Dans ce sens, l'histoire est un Evangile éternel, tout rempli du Dieu intérieur; c'est lui qui parle et se remue dans le vaste sein des peuples; il agit du dedans au dehors, sans interruption; il habite au fond des choses, il façonne l'esprit intérieur des empires, et les événements ne sont plus que la conséquence qu'il abandonne à l'homme; tout vivant, il communique la vie. C'est, dans les choses humaines, l'esprit de développement et de progrès mis à la place de l'immutabilité ou de l'arbitraire. (153)

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The relationship between religion and "l'Esprit" in its different forms is central to a discussion of Quinet's religious ideas. He defends the power of mind and the reality of thought. All forms of materialism stand condemned. In *L'Ultramontanisme* reference is made to "Esprit pur" which naturally recalls Vigny. (154) In *Les Jésuites* our attention is drawn to "ce grand fonds de spiritualité qui est comme la substance de toute foi réelle". (155) Furthermore, as we have suggested, it is Quinet's belief in "l'Esprit" which underlies his hopes for an "Evangile renouvelé". He distrusts narrow Catholic orthodoxy and advocates a Christianity whose agent is revolutionary France, whose message is the dignity of the individual and whose traditions are those of the human spirit throughout history. Organised religion, as Quinet well knows, can become a way to retreat from the struggle which is inevitable in the world of spirit. Quinet's faith is an aspiration to truth and justice which requires heroism and sincerity. All substitution of appearance for reality is denounced since it is a betrayal of the cause of spirit.

Change and movement are of the essence of this faith which is characterised by hope, by an aspiration to the future. "Les dieux possèdent tout", declares l'Océan; "Excepté l'inconnu", replies Prometheus. (156)

Notwithstanding Quinet's opposition to orthodoxy we should be careful not to exaggerate his hostility to Catholicism in all its forms before the late 1840's. During the 1830's we find him on very friendly terms with writers, thinkers and poets such as Ballanche, Blanc Saint-Bonnet and Laprade. At the close of the 1830's, while living at Lyons, he spent some time in a house in the country put at his disposal by Saint-Bonnet. Indeed the latter was at that time much in sympathy with Quinet's ideas. (157) In 1841 Alexandre Guiraud sent Quinet a copy of his *Philosophie catholique de l'histoire*. In reply Quinet remarked that the subject of this work was "l'unique question du siècle". He elaborates upon this point in terms which significantly envisage the contemporary religious crisis in terms of the transformation - not the radical replacement - of the faith of the past:

[...] je suis d'autant plus impatient d'étudier votre ouvrage, que les solutions tentés nouvellement en Allemagne m'ont fort occupé et pas satisfait. Comment transformer le Catholicisme sans l'ébranler? Comme l'expliquer sans l'altérer? Voilà la difficulté qui arrête notre époque. (158)

Quinet consistently calls for a transformation of Catholicism which is a form of Christianity no longer suited to the needs of the nineteenth century. He often uses the images of the entombment and resurrection, in order to reconcile his desire for change with his wish for a wider continuity within the context of the Christian tradition. In the epilogue to *Ahasvérus* we have seen Quinet employ this image to describe how contemporary Christianity was moving towards pantheism. By 1838 Christ has become above all an individual, a person, but we note that the conclusion of the *Examen de la vie de Jésus* returns again to the same imagery in order to express the need for a transformation. During the 1840's Quinet's priority is the realisation of Christianity in society and here, yet again, he makes use of a similar language. In *Les Jésuites* he describes the "Evangile renouvelé" as "ce Christ agrandi, renouvelé, sorti comme une seconde fois du sépulcre". (159)

Christianity therefore continues to stand at the centre of Quinet's argument. It is the religion of spirit as opposed to the pagan religions of nature. Christianity marks man's realisation that God is present within individual conscience. *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, however, is the story of how difficult it is to make the Christian message

a reality. "[...] l'homme commence à déclarer que Dieu est descendu dans l'homme", remarks Quinet.<sup>(160)</sup> It has, however, taken eighteen centuries for this view to prevail. The Reformation freed individual conscience from subjection to priest, pope and council. The French Revolution - in its aspirations at least - consecrated the dignity of the individual. In Quinet's thought the meaning of history and the meaning of Christianity are one. It is perhaps this close relationship between Christianity and the cause of individuality which prevented Quinet from following Michelet who in the 1840's was already elaborating his celebrated opposition between Christianity and the Revolution, grace and justice.<sup>(161)</sup>

Quinet's understanding of religion at this period defies neat classification and easy definition. It is in the first place something intensely personal which is related to both "le coeur" and "la conscience". It could be argued that his concept of individuality is inherently religious since its ground is the relationship between conscience and infinity. Yet, at the same time, religion is also intimately associated with the life of a collectivity. Nations, as we have observed, become apostles; mankind is the new church. History and religion are one. Each nation has a role to fulfil in the realisation of a providential plan. The central element which underpins these beliefs is Quinet's faith in "l'Esprit". Sometimes "l'Esprit" appears to be immanent in the mind of man. Upon other occasions, it would seem to possess some degree of transcendence.

Religious ideas are the force which moves history but we must remember that Quinet does not just present the different religions as expressions of stages in the development of the human spirit. Religion cannot be satisfactorily understood as a phenomenon of consciousness alone. Neither can Quinet's God quite be identified with "la catégorie de l'idéal", as understood by Renan.<sup>(162)</sup> *Le Génie des religions* reveals Quinet's sympathy for a more speculative interpretation of the history of religions, according to which, nature reveals the idea of God to man who creates his gods in history. The ultimate purpose of the whole process is, however, understood in terms of the return of creation to God. Above all Quinet is horrified by indifference to religion, to the idea of God. Such indifference amounts to a denial of what is most noble in human existence. The search for truth is also the search for God. A world without the idea of God would be a world without an ideal, without spiritual and moral progress, without real freedom.

NOTES

- (1) *Les Jésuites* is a work containing the lectures of both Quinet and Michelet. *Les Révolutions d'Italie* is based upon material from the early part of Quinet's time at the Collège de France. The fact that this work was not published until considerably later, however, means that in its published version it does not correspond to the same mood as that which prevails in the earlier publication.
- (2) Quinet's election platform was that France must escape from decline by reviving the spirit of 1830 and increasing influence abroad. He does, however, steer a moderate course calling for peaceful action so as to avoid "les voies menaçantes des révolutions inconnues". *A Messieurs les électeurs du quatrième arrondissement de Paris*, July 1846, p.2.
- (3) A. de Lamartine, *Voyage en Orient*, Paris, Gosselin, 1835, vol. 2, p. 253.
- (4) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 14.
- (5) Both *Le Génie des religions* and *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* "[...] ont pour but de faire découler les révolutions politiques et sociales des révolutions accomplies dans la conception de l'idée de Dieu [...]". Avertissement to the second edition of *Le Génie des religions*, dated November 1850.
- (6) T. Jouffroy, op. cit., pp. 76-7.
- (7) F. de Lamennais, *Oeuvres*, Paris, Garnier, n.d., p. 291. See also *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, Paris, Pagnerre, 1844, vol. 1, p. 36. Lamennais in a letter of 1834 described Quinet as "une belle et bonne âme". See *Lettres inédites de Lamennais à Montalembert*, ed. Forgues, Paris, Perrin, 1898. Letter of 5 July, 1834.
- (8) *Le Génie des religions*, pp. 31 and 39.
- (9) *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- (10) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 16.
- (11) See the review article by Lèbre in the *Revue des deux mondes*, 1842, vol. 2, pp. 5-24.
- (12) Quinet's study is limited to those religions which he considers have played an important role in history. Magical practices for example are omitted.
- (13) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 121.
- (14) *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- (15) *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- (16) *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- (17) *Ibid.*, p. 127.

- (18) It should be noted that Quinet also discusses Buddhism and includes a chapter devoted to Chinese religion.
- (19) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 227.
- (20) *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- (21) *Ibid.*, p. 257.
- (22) *Ibid.*, p. 259. Cf. Michelet, *Introduction à l'histoire universelle*, p. 231.
- (23) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 268.
- (24) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 276. According to Renan "La nature [...] tient peu de place dans les religions sémitiques: le désert est monothéiste; sublime dans son immense uniformité, il révéla tout d'abord à l'homme l'idée de l'infini, mais non le sentiment de cette vie incessamment créatrice qu'une nature plus féconde a inspiré à d'autres races". *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, Paris, Michel Lévy, 1863, p. 6.
- (25) Peyre, op cit, p. 228, Ménard praises Quinet's intuitive understanding of Oriental religion in a review article, "*Etudes d'histoire religieuse par Ernest Renan*", *Revue philosophique et religieuse*, May 1857, pp. 178-86. For the second edition of *Le Génie des religions* (1851) Quinet added a section dealing with Roman religion. He argues that Roman society was not based upon a new religious principle or upon a truly national religion. For this reason Rome's domination of other peoples was exerted on a material and not a spiritual level. In Rome the essence of religion was fear. These pages are much closer in spirit to the works of Quinet's exile than to his earlier lectures. His message is clear: "[...] les révolutions qui changent l'ordre religieux sont les seules sur lesquelles il vous soit permis de compter", p. 370. Quinet's discussion centres upon the manner in which class inequalities were maintained in Rome. He explains how the Romans incorporated into their own religion the gods of the peoples which they conquered. This meant that the subjugated peoples, by now become Plebeians, could only enter into contact with their gods by means of the Roman priesthood. This religious sanction became the bastion of the Patrician class. The latter could without risk make many superficial concessions to the Plebeians but provided the religious organisation was not modified the power of the Patricians was undiminished. Only when the religious barrier finally broke down was it possible to institute greater equality in society. Quinet also discusses the Roman Empire and examines the influence of Stoicism in the light of the rise of Christianity.
- (26) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 324.
- (27) *Ibid.*, p. 338.
- (28) *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- (29) *Ibid.*, p. 12.

- (30) Ibid., p. 209.
- (31) Ibid., p. 16.
- (32) Cf. the discussion of Islam in *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*.
- (33) Laprade, *Le Sentiment de la nature avant le christianisme*, 2nd ed., Paris, Didier, 1866, p. 145.
- (34) Ibid., pp. 147-8.
- (35) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 295.
- (36) Ibid., p. 308.
- (37) A. Réville, op. cit., p. 1017.
- (38) Michelet, *Journal*, ed. P. Viallaneix, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, p. 385. Cf. *La Femme*, 2nd ed., Paris, Hachette, 1860, p. 315.
- (39) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 11.
- (40) Ibid., p. 15.
- (41) But why did Quinet not include Christianity in *Le Génie des religions*? Proudhon's analysis is perhaps helpful here. In 1842 Proudhon declares: "L'homme est destiné à vivre sans religion [...] aujourd'hui la religion est une impossibilité, une contradiction dans le progrès". He has no sympathy for those who see Christ in a revolutionary light and who believe that all men are to a greater or lesser degree full of the Holy Spirit: "Or, si tout est miracle, incarnation et révélation dans la société, il n'y a plus ni révélation, ni incarnation, ni miracle". What is significant for our purpose, however, is Proudhon's firm belief, that his thesis is the conclusion which follows logically from the premises set out in *Le Génie des religions*. See P. -J. Proudhon, *De la Création de l'ordre dans l'humanité ou principes d'organisation politique, Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris, Marcel Rivière 1927, pp. 63-70.
- (42) Quoted by J. -B. Duroselle, in *Les Débuts du catholicisme social en France (1822-1870)*, Paris, P.U.F., 1951, p. 143.
- (43) *Les Jésuites*, p. 25.
- (44) Ibid., pp. 51-2.
- (45) This is very apparent in a letter addressed to Mickiewicz where Quinet declares: "Au moment de quitter la jeunesse, les sentiments profonds que j'ai trouvé en vous m'ont séduit plus que je ne peux vous le dire. Il m'a semblé, qu'après les rêves de la moitié de ma vie, je rencontrais une de ces âmes viriles avec lesquelles je dois m'associer pour le reste de mes jours. Votre foi que je voudrais partager m'attire: elle m'enlève à cette triste terre. Vous avez par là un avantage décidé sur moi." A. Mickiewicz, *Korespondencya*, Paris, Ksiegarnia Luxemburgska, 1876, vol. 3, pp. 257-8.

- (46) See L. Kolodziev, *Adam Mickiewicz au carrefour des romantismes européens*, Publications de la faculté de lettres d'Aix, Aix, 1966 and the articles by Z. L. Zaleski listed in the bibliography. Zaleski is eager to stress the influence of Mickiewicz - and of Towianski - on Quinet.
- (47) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 209. Quinet refers to "le monde intérieur [...] le fond de la conscience [...] cet abîme de liberté, de vérité, qu'on appelle l'esprit!" (Ibid., p. 28)
- (48) M. Chazin, "Quinet an early Discoverer of Emerson", *P.M.L.A.*, 1933, p. 152. See also by the same author "Extracts from Emerson by Edgar Quinet", *Revue de littérature comparée*, 1935, pp. 136-49, 310-6.
- (49) Ibid., p. 159.
- (50) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 205.
- (51) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 267. See K. W. Swart, "'Individualism' in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1962, pp. 77-90.
- (52) *Les Jésuites*, p. 68.
- (53) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 231. Cf. Louis-Grimaud, *Histoire de la Liberté d'enseignement en France*, Paris, Apostolat de la Presse, 1954, vol. 6. For a particularly curious example of the clerical reaction to Quinet, Michelet, Cousin etc, see N. Deschamps, *Cathéchisme de l'université*, Paris, Martin, 1843.
- (54) *Les Jésuites*, p. 72.
- (55) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 100.
- (56) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 282.
- (57) Ibid., p. 204.
- (58) Ibid., p. 200. See the discussion of Giordano Bruno in *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, p. 439.
- (59) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 244. Cf. Michelet on the Enlightenment: "Glorieux siècle! qu'il mérite d'être appelé à jamais l'âge héroïque de l'esprit". *Histoire de la révolution française*, Paris, Le Vasseur, n.d., vol. 1, p. 59. Mention should also be made of the rehabilitation of eighteenth philosophy undertaken at this time by Francisque Bouillier, another enthusiastic reader of *Ahasvérus*. See C. Latreille, *Francisque Bouillier le dernier des cartésiens*, Paris, Hachette, 1907.
- (60) Ibid., p. 267.
- (61) *Les Jésuites*, p. 26.
- (62) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 144. The concluding lines of the first edition of *Le Génie des religions* describe the world of the

- Renaissance in relation to the Holy Spirit: "Macérée ou, pour tout dire, baptisée dans le tombeau, la Grâce fait sa paix avec le Christianisme; c'est le signe de cette ère nouvelle justement appelée la Renaissance, dans laquelle se consomme le règne du Fils par le règne de l'Esprit". (p. 358)
- (63) *Le Christianisme et la Révolution française*, p. 45.
- (64) *Les Jésuites*, p. 51. Similarly in *Le Christianisme et la Révolution française* (p. 48) we read: "Premier moment de l'Eglise dans l'esprit de son auteur: inspiration, élan, spontanéité, mouvement pour quitter l'ancien rivage". Cf. also *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 302.
- (65) *Les Jésuites*, p. 57.
- (66) In Quinet's eyes Gregory VII himself becomes a precursor of the French Revolution! He argues that by breaking the power of the "barons" of the Church and by using the weapon of excommunication against the princes of this world, the pope applied the spirit of Christianity in society. It is of interest to note that Chassin feels obliged, despite his admiration for Quinet, to describe his master's attitude to Hildebrand as "trop favorable peut-être". *Edgar Quinet. Sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris, Pagnerre 1859, p. 334. In *Les Révolutions d'Italie* (p. 127), however, Quinet refers to "l'Eglise immobile de Grégoire VII et du concile de Trente".
- (67) *Le Christianisme et la Révolution française*, pp. 12 and 79.
- (68) *Des Arts de la renaissance et de l'église de Brou*, in *Mélanges*, p. 363.
- (69) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, pp. 83-4.
- (70) Cf. the discussion of Campanella in *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, pp. 44 ff.
- (71) *Les Jésuites*, p. 121. See *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 258.
- (72) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, pp. 80-1. Cf. Lamartine, "Sur la politique rationnelle", p. 134.
- (73) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 152. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 272: "La nationalité d'un peuple est pour lui ce qu'est pour l'homme sa conscience".
- (74) Mickiewicz, *Les Slaves*, Paris, Comptoir des imprimeurs réunis, 1849, vol. 5, p. 131.
- (75) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 282. See C. J. Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, N. Y., Macmillan, 1949 and *Nationalism: a Religion*, N.Y., Macmillan, 1960.
- (76) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p; 16.
- (77) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 272.
- (78) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 52. Cf. *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, p. 73.



- (79) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 273. Cf. Bonnetty, "Les Verbes nouveaux, Michelet, Mickiewicz, Towianski, Quinet", *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, 1844, pp. 245-71.
- (80) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 273.
- (81) Quoted by R. Riebel in *Les Idées politiques et sociales de P. -J.-B. Buchez*, Paris, P.U.F., 1966, p. 22.
- (82) P. Leroux, "Aux politiques", *Revue Indépendante*, 1842, vol. 2, p. 332.
- (83) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 148.
- (84) *Ibid.*, p. 292.
- (85) *De l'Allemagne et de la révolution*, Paris, Paulin, 1832, pp. 3; 7 and 8.
- (86) Cf. Michelet: "Depuis deux siècles, moralement, on peut dire que la France est pape. L'autorité est ici, sous une forme ou sous une autre. Ici, par Louis XIV, par Montesquieu, Voltaire et Rousseau, par la Constituante, le Code et Napoléon, l'Europe a toujours son centre; tout autre peuple est excentrique". *Du Prêtre, de la femme, de la famille*, 2nd ed., Brussels, Meline, 1845, p. 263.
- (87) *Les Jésuites*, p. 121. Mickiewicz (op. cit., vol. 5, p. 106) remarks: "La France, dans la chrétienté, représente l'action, la réalisation. Sentir, concevoir et réaliser, ces trois opérations consécutives se font dans une âme française en un seul instant, et éclatent comme un seul acte de vie intérieur".
- (88) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 182. Mickiewicz (op. cit., vol. 5, p. 83) refers to "Waterloo, ce Golgotha de l'Europe moderne". In a letter of 1848 Michelet too speaks of "le Golgotha de Waterloo". Quoted by J. Cornuz, *Jules Michelet. Un aspect de la pensée religieuse au XIXe siècle*, Geneva, Droz, 1953, p. 90. For a detailed examination of this question see F. P. Bowman, op. cit.
- (89) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 252.
- (90) *Ibid.*, pp. 254-5.
- (91) "Le pont d'Arcole", *Revue des deux mondes*, 1832, vol. 7, p. 262. This passage is substantially modified in the Pagnerre edition (*Mélanges*, p. 369). Cf. Ganneau: "Waterloo est le golgotha-peuple. Waterloo est le vendredi-Saint du grand Christ peuple", *Waterloo*, Paris, Bureau des publications évadiennes, 1843, p. 12 and Esquiros: "La royauté du Christ était, comme celle de la France une royauté d'initiation [...]. Après la grande Passion de la nation crucifiée, trouée au flanc par la lance du cosaque, attachée aux pieds, il est resté écrit en caractères rouges sur la croix de Waterloo: *Peuple de France, roi des peuples!*". *L'Évangile du peuple*, Paris, Bry, 1849, p. 20.
- (92) "Le champ de Bataille de Waterloo", *Mélanges*, p. 380. See Kolodziev, op. cit., pp. 438-9. Quinet makes use of many of the elements which characterise the myth of Napoleon: the identification between Napoleon and Prometheus, the significance of the Egyptian expedition, Napoleon and the "pestiférés" etc.

- (93) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 138. Cf. Buchez and Roux: "La révolution française est la conséquence dernière et la plus avancée de la civilisation moderne, et la civilisation moderne est sortie tout entière de l'Évangile". P.-J. Buchez and P. Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la révolution française*, Paris, Paulin, 1834, vol. 1, p. 1.
- (94) *Allemagne et Italie*, p. 229. In 1831 Quinet wrote: "La France est à l'Allemagne ce que l'action est à la réflexion dans le génie de l'humanité; et ces deux mondes croissent ensemble, et forment l'un par l'autre l'unité de la société moderne". "De la révolution et de la philosophie", *Revue des deux mondes*, 1831, Vol. 4, pp. 473-4. This sentence is omitted from the Pagnerre edition (*Mélanges*, p. 182.) Leroux adopts a similar attitude: "C'est à la France et à l'Allemagne réunies à écrire et à signer la Nouvelle Alliance de l'Humanité. L'Allemagne et la France sont le corps central de l'Europe. L'Allemagne représente le nord, la France le midi. Si ces deux grands peuples parviennent à s'entendre, l'Europe est formée, et la marche progressive de la civilisation certaine". "De Dieu ou de la vie considérée dans les êtres particuliers et dans l'être universel", *Revue Indépendante*, 1842, vol. 3, p. 21.
- (95) *1815 et 1840*, p. 8.
- (96) *L'Ultramontanisme*, pp. 146-7. In 1867 Quinet nevertheless reaffirms similar views in his *Lettre sur l'Allemagne. A un démocrate allemand*: "[l'alliance de la France et d'Allemagne] m'a toujours paru le salut de notre temps; et je ne dis pas seulement l'alliance des cabinets, mais l'intime communication des esprits, qui, différents en tant de points, sont faits pour se compléter les uns par les autres. Le jour où cette union s'accomplira véritablement, sera une des grandes dates de la civilisation. Tous les hommes amis de l'humanité applaudiront à la fois. Pour ma part, je n'ai cessé de travailler à préparer ce jour; je n'irai pas me démentir en ce moment". *Le Livre de l'exilé*, Paris, Dentu, 1875, pp. 592-3.
- (97) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 177. See also *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 22 and *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, pp. 73-4. Gobineau, it is to be noted, published an article very hostile to Quinet in *L'Unité*. See J. Buzod, *La Formation de la pensée de Gobineau*, Paris, Nizet, 1967, pp. 207-8 and 414.
- (98) *Le Génie des religions*, p. 55. Leroux makes a very similar point in his article "Du Christianisme", *Revue Indépendante*, 1842, vol. 3, pp. 593 ff. See Schwab, op. cit.
- (99) *1815 et 1840*, p. 20.
- (100) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 141.
- (101) P. Leroux, "Aux Politiques", *Revue Indépendante*, 1842, Vol. 2, p. 327.
- (102) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 261.
- (103) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, pp. 236 and 260-1.
- (104) *Ibid.*, p. 76. Quinet stresses the democratic nature of the councils of the early Church and seeks to minimise the role of Rome at that time.

- (105) See *L'Ultramontanisme*, pp. 236 and 260.
- (106) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 221. Quinet's analysis resembles that of Hegel who wrote that the liberalism born of the French Revolution "traversed the Roman world; but religious slavery held that world in fetters of political servitude. For it is a false principle that the fetters which bind Right and Freedom can be broken without the emancipation of conscience - that there can be a Revolution without a Reformation". *Philosophy of History*, p. 453.
- (107) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 230.
- (108) *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- (109) *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- (110) *Ibid.*, p. 265.
- (111) *Ibid.*, p. 262. Cf. Renan's article "Réflexions sur l'état des esprits" (1849) in *Questions contemporaines*, Paris, Michel Lévy, 1868, pp. 297-335.
- (112) See H. J. Hunt, *Le Socialisme et le romantisme en France*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1935, pp. 227-30.
- (113) See J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism. The Romantic Phase*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1960, p. 278.
- (114) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 266.
- (115) A certain antagonism towards Saint-Simonism is present as early as "De l'Avenir des religions".
- (116) See K. Löwith, *op. cit.*, pp. 69 ff.
- (117) Hegel quoted by Maritain in *Moral Philosophy*, London, Bles, 1964, p. 150.
- (118) *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- (119) In many respects Quinet's position resembles that of Ad. Lèbre. Cf. "Critique religieuse et morale du panthéisme" (1838), in Ad. Lèbre, *Oeuvres*, Lausanne, Bridel, 1856, pp. 405-39.
- (120) Quinet felt considerable sympathy for the ideas of Cieskowski, the Polish neo-Hegelian philosopher who sought to re-interpret Hegelianism in terms of a philosophy of action which reconciled theory and practice centred upon the will and the activity of the individual self. See Z. L. Zaleski, "Edgar Quinet et August Cieskowski", *Mélanges Baldensperger*, Paris, Champion, 1930, vol. 2, pp. 361-71;
- (121) Cf. the words spoken by "l'Océan" to Prometheus: "Le droit est au vainqueur; la défaite est le crime", *Prométhée*, p. 67.
- (122) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 219.
- (123) L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, tr. G. Eliot, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1957, p. 12.

- (124) Cf. Quinet's presentation of Prometheus as a personal creator of mankind.
- (125) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 56.
- (126) See M. David, "Le Séjour de F. Ravaisson à Munich", *Revue philosophique*, 1952, pp. 454-6.
- (127) *Prométhée*, p. 36. A reading of *Prométhée* reveals that the sacred flame stolen by the Titan is a symbol of "l'Esprit".
- (128) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 264.
- (129) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, pp. 264 and 265.
- (130) *Napoléon*, preface, p. 150.
- (131) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 249.
- (132) *Prométhée*, preface, p. XIV.
- (133) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p; 301.
- (134) *Ibid.*, p. 288. Cf. Mme de Staël who had a great influence on the young Quinet: "L'infini agit sur l'âme pour l'élèver et la dégager du temps. L'oeuvre de la vie c'est sacrifier les intérêts de notre existence passagère à cette immortalité qui commence pour nous dès à présent, si nous en sommes déjà dignes; et non seulement la plupart des religions ont ce même but, mais les beaux-arts, la poésie, la gloire et l'amour sont des religions dans lesquelles il entre plus au moins d'alliage". *De l'Allemagne*, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1967, vol. 2, p. 240.
- (135) *Prométhée*, preface, p. XXII.
- (136) *Allemagne et Italie*, p. 325. Cf. *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 59.
- (137) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 186.
- (138) *Ibid.*, p. 250.
- (139) *Ibid.*, p. 205.
- (140) *Les Jésuites*, p. 52.
- (141) *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- (142) *Napoléon*, preface, p. 152.
- (143) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 219.
- (144) *Ibid.*, p; 221.
- (145) *Ibid.*, pp. 184 and 257.
- (146) *Ibid.*, p. 206. In his desire to understand the Revolution in terms of Providence Quinet is interpreting events in a manner reminiscent of Saint-Martin and de Maistre.

- (147) Ibid., p. 298.
- (148) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 251.
- (149) Ibid., p. 379 in the first edition, 1845. The Pagnerre text reads: "derrière lui on a cru voir la Providence". (p; 251.)
- (150) Ibid., p. 254.
- (151) Ibid., p. 49.
- (152) Ibid., p. 191, and *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 220.
- (153) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 215. Cf. F. Bouillier, "De l'Abus du mot providence dans la langue politique et religieuse", *La Liberté de penser*, 1848, pp. 553-66.
- (154) See G. Bonnejoy, *La Pensée religieuse et morale d'Alfred de Vigny*, Paris, Hachette, 1944, p. 304 and E. Jarno, "Une source possible de 'l'esprit pur'", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1951, pp. 86-8. It is perhaps more likely that both Quinet and Vigny derive the expression from Malebranche. In *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* Quinet at one point (p. 33) asks: "Malebranche a-t-il craint de remuer le christianisme dans ses Méditations? Leibnitz dans sa *Théodicée*? Spinoza, dans sa *Théologie*? Rousseau, dans son *Vicaire savoyard*? Kant dans son *Traité de la Religion*? Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher, tous enfin dans leur enseignement?"
- (155) *Les Jésuites*, p. 26.
- (156) *Prométhée*, p. 62.
- (157) Mme Quinet, op. cit., p. 281. According to J. Buche "la lecture de l'*Ahasvérus* de Quinet lui [Saint-Bonnet] révéla la doctrine de l'amour, et détermina l'orientation de ses pensées". *L'Ecole mystique de Lyon. 1776-47*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1935, p. 246. See also Ed. Biré, op. cit., pp. 54-5 and G. Maton, *Blanc de Saint-Bonnet*, Lyons, Vitte, 1961, p. 47.
- (158) Quoted by E. Girard in *Un Bourgeois dilettante à l'époque romantique*. *Emile Deschamps*, Paris, Champion, 1921, p. 403.
- (159) *Les Jésuites*, p. 26.
- (160) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 261.
- (161) See F. P. Bowman, "Michelet et le Christ", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1974, pp. 824-51.
- (162) E. Renan, "M. Feuerbach et la nouvelle école hégélienne", in *Etudes d'histoire religieuse*, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1897, p. 419.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Speaking in March 1848 upon his return to the Collège de France, Quinet welcomed a revolution "accomplie par la foi, par les faibles, par les pauvres, par les petits".<sup>(1)</sup> At that moment the Second Republic seemed to mark the regeneration of France, the beginning of a new era of justice, the triumph of spirit over matter. "Le pur évangile a vaincu", declares Quinet.<sup>(2)</sup> The fervour of the earlier lectures is undiminished: "La main de Dieu est visiblement étendue sur la France".<sup>(3)</sup> Confidence has been regained in France's capacity to fulfil her mission: "La France ressuscitée apportera la vertu au monde!"<sup>(4)</sup> The new Republic embodies the spirit of true Christian brotherhood:

Montrons au monde que les temps qu'il croyait  
relégués par delà les siècles sont arrivés, et  
que nous la possédons pour toujours la République  
des enfants du même père, la vraie cité de Dieu!<sup>(5)</sup>

Quinet evidently succumbed as much as anyone to the heady optimism which followed the Revolution of February 1848. Having participated directly in the revolutionary events of those days he proceeded to engage actively in politics and was successfully returned to both the Constituent and Legislative assemblies. He sat as a left-wing member of Parliament but his influence was slight. As was the case with many similarly minded Republican sympathisers the enthusiasm of the early days of the Republic gave way to a more sombre mood. The course taken by events - the election of Louis Napoleon as President, the French intervention to crush the Roman Republic, the passing of the Falloux law - made Quinet recognise the strength of the conservative forces which he had previously underestimated. It should be noted, however, that in the June days he served as a Colonel in the National Guard in defence of established order.<sup>(6)</sup>

In the days following Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* Quinet fled France. Like many other exiles he first sought refuge in Belgium. In 1858, however, he moved to Switzerland and settled at Veytaux.<sup>(7)</sup> His exile, which became voluntary upon his rejection of the general amnesty granted to political offenders in 1859, was to last until the collapse of the Second Empire. It should be remembered that throughout this period he received steadfast support from his second wife, Hermione Asaky, a Rumanian whom he married in 1852.

Quinet saw himself as the embodiment of the spirit of France, the living symbol of the legality which had been overthrown by the *coup d'état* of December 1851. In his eyes, no vote, no plebiscite could

legitimise the Second Empire. The overthrow of the Republic did not produce in him a revulsion against politics or a retreat into the past. His works of these years were weapons in the struggle against Bonapartism and for this reason they could easily fall foul of the censor.<sup>(8)</sup> In reality, however, no one reading *Marnix* (1854), *Merlin l'enchanteur* (1860) or *Histoire de la campagne de 1815* (1862) could be under any illusion concerning Quinet's political convictions. Nevertheless, as the years of exile passed he felt himself to be more and more alone. He was in poor health and grew depressed about the future as he saw the acceptance by Frenchmen of the régime which he reviled. He became bitter about the conduct of the opposition within France with regard to the exiles. Personal relationships suffered - even with Michelet.<sup>(9)</sup> France paid little heed to the advice and admonishments which came from Quinet's pen. His correspondence reveals how deep his pessimism became.<sup>(10)</sup> Hope did not return until 1869 and only after the proclamation of the Republic did Quinet and his wife cross the French frontier. They returned immediately to Paris and endured the siege by the Prussians. Quinet resumed his political activity firstly at Bordeaux and subsequently at Versailles where he died in 1875.

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In the majority of the publications which appeared between 1849 and 1870 Quinet is once again concerned with the relationship between religion and revolution. He sets out to illustrate why in the long term, some revolutions succeed whereas others fail. This is the fundamental issue which is debated in *L'Enseignement du peuple* (1850), *Les Esclaves* (1853), *Marnix de Sainte Aldegonde* (1854), *La Révolution religieuse au dix-neuvième siècle* (1857) and *La Révolution* (1865). These works mark a continuation and a deepening of earlier meditations. At the same time, however, students of Quinet's work rightly stress the new mood which is apparent after 1848. Quinet, the defender of individual conscience now seems to advocate intolerance. Quinet the democrat appears to spurn the decisions of the majority. Quinet the patriot now expresses great doubts as to the political capacities of the French people at large. Can these views be reconciled with his earlier pronouncements? R. H. Powers pointedly remarks that after 1852 Quinet jettisoned his earlier liberalism which "failed to explain the tragic course of recent history".<sup>(11)</sup> In reality we find both change and continuity in Quinet's thought. Some elements persist, others decline in importance, others receive a new interpretation.

The experiences of the years 1848-1851 led many to reflect upon the nature of freedom and the relationship between the freedom of the individual and the power of the state. Works such as Vacherot's *La Démocratie* (1860), Jules Simon's *La Liberté* (1859) and Proudhon's *De la Justice dans la révolution et dans l'église* (1858) could serve as examples. Quinet, for his part, was forced by the events of the Second Republic to come to terms with the fact that the majority of the French people, having been accorded universal suffrage chose to cast their votes in a manner which he judged incorrect.<sup>(12)</sup> He did not, however, attribute the defeat of the ideals of February 1848 to socio-economic causes but to the fact that many Republicans believed that Catholicism was compatible with the Republic. By behaving in this manner they in fact gave support to the very principle which aimed at the destruction of the Republic.

We have seen how in the lectures delivered at the Collège de France, Quinet had contrasted Catholicism with the spirit of France. He had highlighted the danger which Catholicism represented in those countries which resisted the Reformation but nonetheless sought freedom and democracy in the nineteenth century. Such had been the situation prevailing in Spain which he had described in *Mes Vacances en Espagne* (1846):

Tout a été bouleversé, hors le principe de l'ancienne religion. L'intolérance du moyen âge est restée au fond des garanties nouvelles. [...] Il me semble voir un grand peuple se précipiter dans l'avenir les fers aux pieds.<sup>(13)</sup>

As a consequence of the events of the period 1848-51 Quinet's anti-clericalism becomes more intense than ever before. Liberal Catholicism is a contradiction in terms. Freedom of thought and freedom of conscience "ne seront jamais que rêveries et vanités auprès des peuples serfs du grand prêtre romain".<sup>(14)</sup> Anti-clericalism was hardly a rare phenomenon among the exiles of the Second Empire but in Quinet's case it became the central issue. Nowhere are these points more eloquently made than in *Les Révolutions d'Italie*. Quinet's long cultural history of the Italian people grew out of his lectures at the Collège de France but its publication was spread over several years. The first volume was completed before February 1848 but the second did not follow until 1851. It bore the following dedication: "Aux Exilés Italiens. Cet ouvrage est dédié comme une expiation personnelle du meurtre de l'Italie par des mains françaises".<sup>(15)</sup> The final volume appeared in 1852 and its conclusion contains some of the most critical remarks Quinet



ever made in print about France and the Church. We are left in no doubt whatsoever as to the similarities between recent events in France and the tragic history of Italy. Both nations are trapped by their past, both are afraid to take sufficiently strong action against the Church, both suffer from class conflict which threatens the very life of the nation. Quinet considers that his direst predictions have been realised. France must be saved from the fate of Spain and Italy. For that reason it is imperative to solve the urgent problems of the moment rather than indulge in theoretical discussions concerning life in an ideal democracy. Those, like the Saint-Simonians, who await the coming of a "messie social" are in fact abandoning the present to the enemy. (16)

How best to escape from the pernicious influence of Catholicism? That is the problem which faces France. In 1849, having surveyed the series of revolutionary explosions which had marked French history since 1789, Quinet asks why each renewed aspiration to freedom should be followed by a return to servitude. He concludes that two warring principles exist within the French nation:

Si la France n'obéissait qu'au principe catholique, elle se réglerait sur le modèle de la politique sacrée de Bossuet, et se reposerait immuablement dans l'absolutisme. Si elle n'obéissait qu'à l'attraction des principes philosophiques qui la travaillent, elle suivrait en droite ligne la direction de la liberté moderne. [...] La France est emportée par un vif mouvement de liberté; mais une énorme puissance de servitude l'entraîne en même temps par sa masse; d'où il résulte que ses élans les plus fiers d'indépendance n'aboutissent souvent qu'à la faire graviter vers un violent servage. (17)

Here in a nutshell is the problem to which Quinet will address himself throughout his exile: How can the periodic return to servitude be avoided?

"Mais, sitôt que vous serez libres, quelle nouvelle servitude vous forgerez-vous?" (18) This question is addressed to the French people in *L'Enseignement du peuple*. It might equally well be taken as a summary of the plot of *Les Esclaves*. The latter is a verse drama, which has as its subject matter the revolt of Spartacus against Rome. Quinet sets out to show why the rebellion failed. We learn that only Spartacus, inspired by his wife the priestess Cinthie, was capable of envisaging a world of equality from which all slavery had been banished. The other gladiators and slaves were motivated by a desire for plunder and revenge. They were divided amongst themselves and jealous of their leader

to the point of treachery. Their aspirations went no further than the desire to ape their former masters. The failure of the revolt stemmed from their inability to transcend the mentality of the slave even when victorious: "L'esclave a réparé lui-même l'esclavage".(19)

Quinet's message is that a "révolution servile" cannot succeed. By this he means any revolution which takes place within a spiritual vacuum: "J'appelle révolution servile toute révolution qui se propose un but matériel, indépendamment de tout progrès moral, de toute émancipation spirituelle ou religieuse."(20) In such instances the apparent victors are responsible for their own ultimate defeat: "Toujours contre lui-même, il [l'esclave] tourne son poignard".(21) Quinet, moreover, leaves us in no doubt as regards the similarity between the revolt of the gladiators and recent events in his homeland.

In *Fondation de la république des provinces-unies. Marnix de Sainte Aldegonde* (1854), we are presented with the contrasting example of a successful revolution. Marnix's revolt against Spain in order to secure national independence and to defend the cause of the Reformation triumphs for the very reasons that the rebellion of Spartacus had failed. Once again the belief in the necessity of religious revolution determines Quinet's argument: "La révolution hollandaise a réussi, parce qu'elle s'est donné pour base une révolution religieuse [...]".(22) In this case the similarities with the problems faced by modern France are more obvious since Catholicism is the common enemy. Quinet makes no attempt to disguise his didactic purpose. The aim of the work, he writes, is to explain "ce qu'il faut pour ôter la liberté aux hommes ou pour la leur rendre".(23)

It is in *La Révolution* (1865) that all these issues come to a head. Quinet's study of the French Revolution attempts to understand the past but at the same time seeks to come to the aid of the France of the Second Empire. However, we must not forget that a number of the main themes of the work - the centrality of the religious question, the Terror envisaged as a return to the Ancien Régime, the failure to respect the individual - were already present in *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*. We cannot, therefore, divide the development of Quinet's thought neatly into two halves: before and after 1848.

Quinet now wonders whether the Revolution itself can legitimately be judged to have been successful.(24) His attitude is that of a friend of the Revolution who, having witnessed the course of French history during the nineteenth century, cannot avoid asking whether the reason

why lasting political freedom has not been established in France does not lie in the Revolution itself. He attempts to understand why a movement begun in support of the cause of freedom produced its opposite. He is convinced that the moment has come to look dispassionately and objectively at each revolutionary régime, to describe events in their correct sequence and to take note of the corresponding changes in the national mood. The bad as well as the good qualities of the leading actors must be revealed. Difficult questions can no longer be evaded. What purpose, asks Quinet, was served by the imprisonment and execution of Louis XVI since these actions served only to arouse sympathy for the monarchy? Still more significantly he calls into question the necessity of the Terror. He seeks to describe the contradictions of the Revolution, the reality which lay behind appearances, the forces which in fact determined the course of history. The historian's duty is to seek the truth and not to be the handmaiden of a particular political faction. (25)

Returning to the theme of *Les Esclaves* Quinet argues that the French people did not embark upon the revolutionary adventure simply in order to improve their material well-being or to secure civil equality. Progress of this kind, we are told, is irresistible, inevitable and has no need of revolutions. It is to be taken for granted that the trend towards a better standard of living will continue in the future:

Il est certain que, dans un siècle, les hommes seront mieux nourris, mieux couverts, mieux vêtus, plus facilement transportés. Ils posséderont, à n'en pas douter, ce qu'ils appellent une meilleure vie animale. A moins d'un cataclysme, rien n'empêchera ce progrès. Mais cette chose divine, la dignité, compagne de la liberté, il faut qu'ils la méritent pour la posséder. (26)

Quinet refuses to accept that human behaviour can be satisfactorily explained in terms of political economy. Man is far too complex a creature. "Le côté matériel" is not the *summum bonum* of life and we shall never adequately understand the Revolution if we approach it exclusively from this standpoint. (27) The real meaning of the Revolution is spiritual not material. It marked an aspiration to genuine political and religious freedom. Freedom intervenes in history as a moral value of a different order, quite distinct from the material. That which Quinet refers to as "la Révolution matérielle et sociale" would have taken place in the normal course of events. (28)

The message of the Revolution continues to be identified with the cause of freedom: "la liberté naquit dans la nudité du Jeu de Paume comme l'Enfant-Dieu sur la paille de l'étable".<sup>(29)</sup> This was the moment when the French people were fired by "une sorte de religion de la justice".<sup>(30)</sup> The true spirit of the Revolution - which Quinet largely identifies with the wishes expressed in the "cahiers" of the Third Estate - is the enemy of all forms of absolute authority. The Revolution sought to replace a régime which was morally, politically and religiously bankrupt and which had ceased to believe in itself. Its aim was not to overthrow legality but to establish, to create the rule of law.

We would be wrong, therefore, to conclude that Quinet's enthusiasm for the Revolution had evaporated during the years of exile. He continues to believe that the aim of the Revolution was nothing less than the regeneration of mankind. He speaks of "la grande expérience qu'allait tenter pour l'espèce humaine le peuple français".<sup>(31)</sup> The capture of the Bastille was "la délivrance de l'esprit humain".<sup>(32)</sup> Quinet retains his admiration for the revolutionary armies and his respect for the achievements of the Convention. The Revolution was also the real birth of French national consciousness. No other people experienced to the same degree:

[...] le désir [...] de s'unir étroitement; de se pénétrer, d'une frontière à l'autre, de n'avoir partout qu'un coeur et une âme; et ce fut là une des inspirations sacrées de la Révolution.<sup>(33)</sup>

Once all this is said, however, we discover that Quinet's enthusiasm is strongly tempered by a sober analysis of why the ideals of 1789 failed really to take root in France. The Revolution failed in its religious dimension. It sought to bring about a regeneration of man, a transformation of his spiritual essence, of what Quinet calls "l'homme intérieur". The extent of what might have been possible is suggested by the following lines:

Déplacer les choses n'est pas ce qu'il y a de plus difficile: mais déplacer les sentiments, en acquérir de nouveaux, s'enrichir dans les choses invisibles, là est le problème. Un sentiment non encore éprouvé, une manière nouvelle de considérer la vie, c'est pour cela qu'il a fallu franchir des torrents de sang.<sup>(34)</sup>

Logic required that the Revolution should consciously separate itself from Catholicism or create a new religion. It did neither.

*La Révolution* relates the failure of the leaders of the Revolution to appreciate the gravity of the danger represented by the continuing presence of Catholicism in France. It was only to be expected that the Revolution as the spiritual heir of the Reformation should carry further the liberation of the individual from external authority. Surely this indicated that firm action had to be taken against the institution which was the spiritual foundation of the Ancien Régime? But from the Constituent Assembly onwards there was in Quinet's opinion a clear reluctance to act in such a manner. There was much muddled thinking on this issue. Measures such as the Civil Constitution of the Clergy were insufficient to produce any radical change:

Quoi de plus illogique que de se dire prêtre d'une Eglise qui vous renie? C'était la situation de tout le clergé constitutionnel. Il se prétendait catholique, et le chef légitime du catholicisme lui jetait l'anathème dans chaque bref. Sur cette pente glissante, l'Eglise qui n'était nouvelle que de nom devait s'abîmer au premier souffle de l'ancienne.<sup>(35)</sup>

The more extreme of the revolutionaries lacked any real grasp of the religious issues which underlay events: "L'idée des Jacobins sur le point fondamental des choses humaines, la religion, est le vide".<sup>(36)</sup> Then - as in 1848 - an attempt was made to reconcile the ideal of freedom with an institution, the Church, which was synonymous with despotism. This was an illogical enterprise of the highest order. In reality, the men of the Revolution stand accused of a lack of daring in religious matters. Robespierre, for example, was blind to the real dangers facing France:

Relisez les discours de Robespierre; vous verrez qu'il n'a d'autres vues que celles du clergé sur la nécessité des vieux autels [...] Ce monstre d'audace ne peut se détacher du moyen âge. [...] Ce n'est pas lui qui eût osé toucher aux augures.<sup>(37)</sup>

The attempts at innovation in religious matters made during the Revolution were unsuccessful since they were at heart but pale imitations of the past:

Adorer la Raison éternelle, quoi de plus beau en soi? Mais par une chute incroyable, dès que Chaumette, Hébert voulurent réaliser cette idée, ils la détruisirent. Ils imaginèrent de la figurer par une personne vivante, une belle femme, qui devait jouer pendant une heure sur une estrade, le rôle de la Sagesse [...] Une pierre brute, un bois vermoulu aurait eu sur les imaginations cent fois plus de prise qu'une actrice qui se dépouillait, une heure après, de sa divinité.<sup>(38)</sup>

Confusion was the keynote of the revolutionaries' attitude to religion. They wanted change but were not prepared to accept the consequences of change. They even took it upon themselves to defend the Church against those new "iconoclasts" who were attacking ecclesiastical property. The men of the Terror failed to realise that the necessary precondition for the establishment of freedom was the suppression of Catholicism at least in the short term. They confused illusion and reality, means and ends, truth and falsehood.

Why did this confusion arise? Quinet stresses the particular difficulties which affected France. Among other nations freedom had as its base "le trépied de la réforme, de la renaissance et de la philosophie".(39) This, to be sure, is a restatement of what Quinet had written in the 1840's. His conclusions, however, are now somewhat different. Whereas in *L'Ultramontanisme* he had been thankful for the survival of Protestantism in France on the grounds that it contributed to the universality of the aspirations of the Revolution, in *La Révolution*, on the other hand, he laments the fact that France did not possess a really strong Protestant element in 1789.(40) This rendered the regeneration of the French nation much more hazardous. A further complication was added since the Revolution was driven to base itself not upon religion but upon the philosophy of the eighteenth century, and in particular upon Rousseau's *Profession de foi*. Quinet praises this famous work but he holds no brief for its conclusion where the Savoyard vicar tells us that despite his advanced religious ideas he will remain within the Church and continue to say Mass. In Quinet's opinion this insincerity and timidity spelt disaster for the cause of the revolution. This was a major source of the revolutionaries' greatest illusion - the hope that changes could be wrought within religion without overtly challenging the power of the dominant religion.

The explanation of the failure of the Revolution, however, lies within French history itself. We must remember that the Revolution was a noble attempt to "achever l'homme d'un seul coup, en un moment".(41) The spirit of 1789 was nothing less than an attempt to create "un idéal nouveau de la nature humaine".(42) Yet the movement which set out to free the individual, to create justice, to restore life to the declining provinces was to witness a return to centralisation, absolutism and "le mépris de l'individu, triste legs de l'ancienne oppression".(43) In the absence of a real religious revolution the habits of the past reasserted themselves with a new vigour, culminating in Napoleon's *coup*

*d'état*, the Empire and the signing of the Concordat. The latter marked the death of the Revolution:

Dans la politique, la Révolution revenait à César; dans la religion, elle revenait au pape. La France n'avait pu, parmi le chaos qu'elle venait de traverser, dégager sa personne morale au milieu des traditions antiques dont elle était investie. N'ayant pu trouver en elle-même, dans sa conscience, son centre de gravité morale, elle restait en partie, le satellite de Rome. C'est là ce qui se lit à chaque ligne de cette convention.<sup>(44)</sup>

In the years before 1848 both the Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire could, with some reservations, be situated within the greater continuity of the history of religion. The Revolution was presented in Christian terms, Napoleon was described as the possible precursor of a new religion and even Gregory VII could appear in the unlikely guise of an ancestor of the French Revolution. If we focus our attention upon the 1860's, however, we soon discover that events are viewed in a significantly different light. Quinet's admiration for Napoleon has evaporated, his critical reinterpretation of the Revolution has been fully developed and his anticlericalism has increased in virulence. During the 1830's and 1840's the past had largely been conceived in terms of resistance to change. After 1851, however, we find that the power of the past to halt progress and frustrate the desire for freedom has grown considerably.

Quinet now insists that prior to 1789 the history of France contained nothing but absolutism and despotic rule. Those individuals or groups who had sought to advance the cause of freedom had been crushed. France in 1789 was "une nation obligée de renier son histoire".<sup>(45)</sup> The theme of the past weighing down on the present and frustrating hope for change occurs often in the pages of *La Révolution*. In 1789 the supporters of the Revolution found themselves "sous le fardeau du passé de la France".<sup>(46)</sup> The heroic, the epic stature of the Revolution sprang from the enormity of the task which had to be faced. At the same time, however, if we follow Quinet as he looks at the events of the years in question we find that what we might call the mentality of the Ancien Régime reappeared among men who at first sight seem ardent revolutionaries. Here are three examples of this phenomenon: Robespierre is described as pursuing "un idéal de terreur monarchique, aristocratique", Marat is termed the product of "mille ans d'esclavage", the Terror itself becomes "le legs fatal de l'histoire de France".<sup>(47)</sup>

Quinet is not simply saying that in order to understand the Revolution we must remember what life was like under the Ancien Régime. His argument goes much deeper. It is that what was in essence the master/slave power relationship of the Ancien Régime proved to be so deeply embedded in men's characters that it soon returned to determine their actions and their half-conscious desires:

Le passé est un aimant caché qui attire perpétuellement le génie d'un peuple et influe sur chacun de ses mouvements. Voilà pourquoi il ne marche pas en ligne droite. C'est une vaste science que celle de ses mouvements composés. (48)

The strength of Quinet's argument lies in the multifarious ways in which he shows how the past acts on the present. As the slaves and gladiators remained mental prisoners of their masters despite their physical liberation, so the French people, leaders and the led, were to stay the captives of habits of mind produced by the preceding centuries of servitude:

Voilà le fond de l'homme dans toute la Révolution. Il veut la liberté, du moins il croit la vouloir. Mais l'idée qu'il s'en fait a été formée sous le despotisme de l'ancien régime. Elle est pleine encore du génie intraitable du passé. Chacun devenu roi dit royalement: "Tel est mon bon plaisir". Malheur à qui pense et sent autrement! Celui-là est un ennemi qu'il faut extirper comme rebelle. (49)

The Dix-huit Brumaire provides a further excellent illustration of the power of the past to act upon the present. Once Napoleon seized power he reimposed the centralised state, did away with freedom and required absolute obedience to his authority. By so doing he re-established order as traditionally understood in France:

[...] ce que nous appelons l'ordre, c'est-à-dire l'obéissance sous un maître et la paix dans l'arbitraire, est enraciné, chez nous dans le roc et renaît presque infailliblement de soi-même et de la tradition immémoriale. L'ordre ainsi compris est protégé par les siècles; son antiquité travaille pour lui et fait sa sûreté. (50)

Depressing as this picture may be Quinet goes further and remarks upon the absence of freedom throughout French history. In this context reference is made to a "racial" characteristic of great force:

Cette impuissance de Danton, de Camille Desmoulins, de Couthon, à se faire une idée quelconque d'un changement dans l'ordre religieux, ne tient pas à leurs personnes, elle semble appartenir à la race latine. Jamais les Romains ne purent sortir de leurs



anciennes formes religieuses; ils n'en conçoivent pas même l'idée. La même stérilité, plus lamentable, s'est retrouvée chez nous. (51)

Even this is not the complete picture, for Quinet believes that the origin of much that is tragic in French history can be traced to the defeat of the Celts by the Romans.

This point had in fact been made in *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* but not until the exile years does its real importance become clear. The defeat of the Gauls helps in the first place to explain why the Reformation did not take root in France. Secondly it casts new light upon the meaning of the Revolution.

Dans l'impossibilité de s'affranchir de Rome, je sens une nation rivée encore après seize siècles au dur anneau de Jules César; elle a pris goût à sa chaîne. L'obéissance, qui n'était d'abord que matérielle, est désormais volontaire; c'est maintenant le fond de l'homme qui est vaincu [...] La race indigène a été conquise deux fois, d'abord par les Romains, puis par les Francs. On a répété que la Révolution française, c'est le Gaulois émancipé des Francs. Tout le monde peut voir que la conquête romaine dure encore; la crainte de Rome est restée la religion du Gaulois. (52)

There is, however, another factor which needs to be taken into consideration. In March 1848 Quinet had spoken lyrically of "le génie divin des masses". He had referred to "la voix de Dieu, roulant dans la bouche de tout un peuple, durant la nuit et la journée du 24 février". (53) This enthusiasm was not destined to endure. Quinet in exile seems to have abandoned all hope in the people at large: "Je n'attends rien ou presque rien de l'élan des masses", he writes to Théophile Dufour in 1853. (54) The failings of the French people are revealed in the character of Jacques Bonhomme in *Merlin l'Enchanteur*. (55) Jacques is naive, unreliable, easily impressed by military glory. He almost causes his master Merlin's demise. Yet his heart is undoubtedly in the right place and his faults are really a consequence of his gullibility. Perhaps the desire for freedom, responsibility and dignity was not as great in all men as Quinet had once thought? "Faisons autrement", the injunction of Spartacus, is likely to fall upon deaf ears. (56) It is apparent that Quinet now suspects that the majority of men will without any reluctance renounce the spiritual struggle and avoid the risks inherent in the exercise of freedom if, in its stead, they are offered material improvements and a return to their former habits and prejudices. We would be wrong to conclude that such men will lament the absence of freedom. If France is

to be saved then it will be due to the efforts of individuals and not the masses. This attitude emerges with great force in *La Révolution*. Hope rests with a few far sighted individuals who remain true to their principles. It is the individual who in the end communicates his energies to the masses. Ordinary mortals have a great need for hero figures. "Rendez-moi les grands hommes sans lesquels nous périssons!", cries Quinet in the preface to *Les Esclaves*. (57)

In *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* Quinet had warned his audience that as France's influence waned so those systems of government which gathered spiritual and temporal power together in the hands of one man were growing in strength. By this he was referring to Russia and the Papacy. If this was to be the future then the road to decadence lay open. Yet Quinet still held out hope in France's mission and he argued that facile comparisons between the present and the decline of the ancient world should be resisted since such comparisons neglected the all-important fact that modern man was conscious of his condition and hence capable of changing it. By the 1850's and 1860's, however, the possibility of the decline and decadence of the West to which Quinet had alluded in *L'Ultramontanisme* has become a reality. The present is denounced as a time of corruption, hypocrisy and unthinking materialism when men habitually reduce all matters to "une question d'argent". (58) Only the United States resists the spirit of this new Byzantine age. The West has entered upon a period of decline. France has failed to keep alive the ideal which she represents:

Si la France ne se relevait pas, l'Europe  
marcherait à une servitude industrielle,  
commerciale, tempérée de loin en loin par  
le progrès des machines à vapeur [...] Il  
ne s'agit plus de la décadence de la France  
ou de telle autre nation; c'est l'esprit  
humain lui-même, qui est en danger de  
faiblir en Europe, et de s'y éteindre. (59)

These lines are important since they do more than restate Quinet's sceptical attitude towards material progress. They reaffirm the belief that France, in an ideal sense at least, is the incarnation of freedom without which progress is impossible. But how can the ideal France become a reality? How can freedom and a respect for the individual be introduced in a country whose inhabitants are the products of a tradition which finds such notions quite foreign? What chance of survival has liberty in these circumstances? These are the problems to which Quinet must address himself.

"Le peuple n'avait pas été préparé à faire un bon usage des libertés qu'il venait de conquérir".<sup>(60)</sup> This was how Michelet commented upon the events of 1848. He concluded that education must be brought to the masses. Quinet's attitude was similar and in *L'Enseignement du peuple* (1850) he put forward his own ideas on the subject of educational reform.<sup>(61)</sup> He champions the elementary school teacher as the incarnation of the lay spirit, "le précepteur du souverain [peuple]", "le représentant populaire de la science moderne".<sup>(62)</sup> At the heart of Quinet's argument lies his conviction that Church and State must be separated. The time has come for all forms of organized religion to be kept out of the schools. Religious instruction may continue outside school but within, school children must become conscious of their common identity as Frenchmen. "L'instituteur doit dire: vous êtes tous enfants d'un même Dieu et d'une même patrie".<sup>(63)</sup> These measures are clearly aimed at breaking the power of the Church over the minds of French youth.

The changes which affected the French educational system at this time were however hardly those advocated by Quinet. Is education in any case a complete answer? During his exile Quinet came to doubt whether educational reform could bring about real change. He remains true to the concrete proposals made in *L'Enseignement du peuple* but he wonders whether more radical measures need to be taken. Is not a nation's real education provided by its religion? In *La Révolution religieuse au dix-neuvième siècle* and in his *Lettre à Sue* he returns to the central problem of how best to deal with the threat posed by Catholicism. The Church may no longer be a living force but Quinet has no illusions concerning the danger which it still represents.

He contends that there exist three ways to end the power of a religion. In the first place it may be stamped out by force. Secondly it may be replaced by a new form of the same religion. Thirdly religion itself may give way to philosophy. The first solution is described as the only effective answer: Christianity's victory over paganism was only complete once pagan rites had been proscribed and temples demolished. Does this imply that Quinet is urging the use of force against the Church in the present? This is an important question to which we shall return. For the present it should be pointed out that whereas the analogy employed by Quinet suggests intolerance, he in fact makes the point that such violent methods are contrary to the spirit of the nineteenth century. With regard to the third possibility - the replacement of religion by philosophy - Quinet has no illusions. In the first place

he declares it to be a common failing of philosophers to believe that the power of a religion simply withers away. Secondly he has no doubt that the masses, dissatisfied with philosophy alone, will readily fall back into their habits of superstition. Only the second solution, the replacement of one form of a religion by another form of the same religion, offers any serious grounds for hope. In this context Quinet puts forward the Unitarianism of Channing as a possible answer to the needs of his contemporaries.

But although education may help and Protestantism may represent a step in the right direction, will either be adequate to halt the symptoms of decline which Quinet discovers all about him? This seems unlikely if we bear in mind the seriousness of the situation described in the *Lettre à Sue*:

Une génération s'avance tête basse, sans qu'aucune pensée se luit sur son front. Un vide étonnant, inconcevable, inconnu se fait dans l'esprit humain. Les idées les plus simples deviennent une fatigue. Le niveau de l'intelligence baisse à vue d'oeil; l'âme se retire, la voilà qui cède de toutes parts à la matière. (64)

To arrest this decline Quinet calls for a courageous act of national self-criticism. Only when Frenchmen have attained an accurate understanding of their nation's past will a degree of confidence return. What is required is an honest presentation of the facts, however unpalatable. For this reason the crucial role will be that played by the historian who alone can reveal the truth concerning the national past.

This attitude explains the stance which Quinet adopts in *La Révolution* and in his *Histoire de la campagne de 1815*. (65) The myth of the Terror is as dangerous as the myth of Napoleon to the future of France. Although neither of these works could be described as politically neutral, Quinet would have argued that each of them constituted a sincere attempt to replace falsehood by truth, myth and illusion by reality. A great act of national self-knowledge was required as a necessary precondition for the regeneration of France and a return to freedom.

The implications of these ideas are examined at greater length in an article entitled "Philosophie de l'histoire de France" (1855). This contains a critique of the spirit in which history had been written in France since the Restoration. G. Weill described the article as "cette

déclaration de guerre à l'histoire officielle".<sup>(66)</sup> In the Pagnerre text of the article Guizot, Augustin Thierry and Louis Blanc are mentioned by name. The most substantial criticisms are however directed at two works: the immense *Histoire parlementaire de la révolution française* (1834-1838) by Buchez and Roux and Théophile Lavallée's popular *Histoire des Français* (1838-1840). Quinet is not really so much concerned with individuals as with the assumptions which governed the production of their work. The only exceptions to which he refers are Henri Martin and Michelet.<sup>(67)</sup>

In the pages of this article Quinet condemns the willingness of historians to justify might not right and excuse the evils of the past as supposedly "necessary" steps along the road to freer institutions. Analyses of this sort can readily serve to caution the usurpation of power in the present.<sup>(68)</sup> Too often historians succumb to the same temptation as the Republicans of 1848 - they endeavour to rehabilitate the enemies of their own cause. If freedom has been defeated then it is the historian's duty to explain the reasons while expressing sincere regret. Quinet refers us to the Albigenians and the rise of the Communes under Etienne Marcel. The ultimate failure of these movements cannot be explained away by calling them "premature" attempts to seize freedom. To do so is to endanger the future. The complacent acquiescence shown by historians towards the conquest of Gaul provides a further illustration of this dangerous practice:

Une race d'hommes s'évanouit, elle perd la conscience de son existence; nous l'en félicitons, parce que son sol se couvre de routes militaires, de grands édifices, et même de chaires de rhétorique. Un monde entier disparaît, celui de nos ancêtres, qui pourtant nous manquera à chaque moment de notre histoire; nous applaudissons à cette chute parce qu'elle nous précipite aussitôt, et dès les langes, dans les liens d'une antiquité déjà dégénérée. [...] Ce que nous nommons civilisation, nous l'achetons par la perte de la liberté; nous rentrons dans l'humanité en rejetant nos aïeux.<sup>(69)</sup>

These lines throw an interesting light upon the relationship between history in the sense of the past and history understood as writing about the past. We have previously quoted statements from *La Révolution* to the effect that the defeat of the Gauls by the Romans was deeply to be regretted. In the passage here under discussion, however, Quinet makes the point that historians are responsible for concealing the true nature of the facts. Yet this should not simply be taken to

mean that historians are guilty, consciously or unconsciously, of distorting the reality of history since the latter, once "correctly" interpreted *à la Quinet*, reveals that the errors of the French historian - worship of success, lack of pity, indifference to freedom - correspond to the failings of the French people in general. Freedom consequently is under threat in the interpretation of French history in exactly the same manner as in the events themselves. The writing of history is an act which participates in the movement of history and may indeed influence the course of events. For this reason the exercise of the spirit of free enquiry on the part of the historian is not a neutral activity. It is itself a significant example of the presence of freedom within history.

One of the assumptions underlying *Philosophie de l'histoire de France* is the belief that the fatalistic interpretation of history was itself the result of definable historical and ideological conditions. The theories under attack were produced "sous la royauté consitutionnelle ou pendant les courtes années de la république" and were elaborated, so we are told, by men who considered that the form of parliamentary government then being practised was the culmination of the political evolution of France. For this reason those who adhered to such views had no qualms about interpreting the French past as a preparation for the present even if, as a consequence, they were paradoxically led to conclude that the absolute rulers of the past were the forerunners of the institutions of the present based upon a degree of freedom.<sup>(70)</sup> Quinet's implied comment is that in the light of the situation prevailing after the *Deux Décembre*s these theories have lost their only justification. The historian is in duty bound to rethink his position.

Quinet is now much less inclined to describe history in relation to God and divine Providence. Events are seen as examples of human error rather than as divine punishments. In *La Révolution religieuse* he takes the Saint-Simonians to task on account of their "abus de la langue théologique".<sup>(71)</sup> Could not a similar criticism be made of his own earlier work? There is a process at work here which we might perhaps describe as the secularisation of Quinet's conception of history. Quinet who, in the 1820's, had admired Bossuet's historical vision now shows that he is quite conscious of the dangers inherent in the adoption of a religious model:

De Saint Augustin à Grégoire de Tours, de Grégoire de Tours aux scholastiques, des scholastiques à Bossuet, la méthode est la même. [...] Imitant ce

ystème, nous avons traité l'histoire de France comme une histoire sacrée, qui trouve son interprétation finale dans l'ère politique inaugurée avec le régime constitutionnel du dix-neuvième siècle. Ce dénouement non-seulement explique, mais légitime tout le passé.(72)

Yet Quinet's argument is not intended to indicate that the search for an adequate explanation of historical phenomena is illusory. In fact, despite the pessimism of the moment he does not abandon his conviction that history in general terms is a progressive movement. We may witness a period of regression but this does not signify that history is absurd. On the contrary we learn from *La Révolution* that Quinet remains unshaken in his belief that the meaning of history is to be found in the development of the individual personality. "Le résultat de toute l'histoire", he writes, is "l'affranchissement de l'individu".(73) In a similar fashion "modern" remains a significant word in Quinet's vocabulary. It obviously does not correspond to the world as it is. It is value-charged and has meaning in relation to Quinet's understanding of history.

In the final analysis there can be no question of Quinet's accepting that the French people are destined to remain a nation of slaves. He believes in France's mission even if contemporary Frenchmen are not true to their destiny. This is a further illustration of the contrast between the real and the ideal France. Indeed we might well ask how the spirit of 1789 could be accounted for if the previous history of France were so complete a story of subservience. At this point the implied distinction between the French character in the abstract and its concrete historical manifestations intervenes. Quinet writes that the "cahiers" of 1789 did not reflect the past. Yet neither for that matter are they presented as a direct rejection of the past. In the "cahiers" we find "tout ce que la nature [and not God] avait mis originairement de beau et de vraiment noble dans l'âme des Français".(74) A past of despotism may be invoked to explain various phenomena - the violence of the Revolution, so-called French frivolity - but this does not tarnish the transcendent qualities of the French spirit: "justice, précision, sagacité, rapidité".(75) In 1789, at all events, "le long esclavage" had left no "vile empreinte". This is presented as a fact although no adequate explanation can be provided: "Les forces vives avaient été conservées, on ne sait comment, dans la léthargie séculaire de la France".(76)

We might legitimately infer from the above that if France could survive the Ancien Régime she might well survive the Second Empire.

Quinet, however, tends to draw differing conclusions. He prefers to stress the great divide which separates 1789 from the 1860's. Spontaneity, sincerity and hope characterised 1789. Even the enemies of the Revolution fought openly against it. In the 1860's, however, all is deceit, insincerity and hypocrisy. A qualitative difference separates the two periods: "Ce sont comme deux peuples absolument différents".<sup>(77)</sup> Is not the real France however still alive in the hearts of the exiles themselves?

But might it not be said that in *Merlin l'enchanteur* (1860) Quinet constructed a mythical history capable of sustaining him during the first half of his exile? There is much more to this ambitious work than a reworking of the legends traditionally associated with Arthur's magician. There is a strong confessional element - *Merlin* is in many respects a veiled autobiography. But it is also a philosophical work containing its author's meditations upon life, death and immortality. Many of the historical figures found in the pages of Quinet's other works reappear: Robespierre, Mirabeau, Louis XVI, Descartes, Etienne Marcel, Washington, Joan of Arc to name but a few. We are introduced to Michelet, Mickiewicz and even to Quinet himself! In *Merlin*, however, individuals drawn from history mingle with creations of the human imagination - with Prometheus, Psyche, Oberon and Titania, Macbeth and the witches. Quinet builds upon the framework of the stories associated with Merlin in order to reveal the underlying unity of myth and legend. He has another aim, however, and this is to mock and deride the decadent world of the Second Empire. The failings of the French people are faithfully recorded. Will Jacques Bonhomme ever mend his ways?

Yet *Merlin* is not just a restatement of ideas expressed elsewhere, in *La Révolution* for example. By blending history with autobiography and by transforming reality through art Quinet can travel further in the direction of optimism than was possible in his other works of this period. After the manner of his hero he too may become a prophet. He can describe how France - symbolised in the figure of King Arthur - finally reawakens from her slumbers. He can even allow himself the luxury of portraying the ultimate victory of good over evil.

These then were the ideas which strengthened Quinet's resolve during his exile.<sup>(78)</sup> They contained nothing, however, which pointed to the imminent collapse of the Second Empire. At Geneva in 1867 he delivered a darkly pessimistic speech: *Mort de la conscience humaine*.<sup>(79)</sup> He told his audience that hope lay in a return to justice and freedom but



nothing in what he said suggested that such a change was at hand. Yet by 1869 hope had returned and *Renaissance de la conscience humaine* was the title which Quinet chose for the speech which he gave that year at Lausanne. He had recovered his faith in France. In the elections of May 1869 the masses had awakened from their slumbers: "La vie s'est retrouvée dans le peuple".<sup>(80)</sup> Quinet saw this as a vote for the Republic. Gambetta had been elected and the results from Paris pointed the way to the future: "[...] Paris a retrouvé le génie de la nation, Paris a sauvé la France".<sup>(81)</sup> Even the discrepancy in results between urban and country areas was not dispiriting.

At this point we must turn to a consideration of those works which appeared in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war. Two in particular will engage our attention: *La République. Conditions de la régénération de la France* (1872) and *L'Esprit Nouveau* (1875). Will a successful break at last be made with the past? How will Quinet's interpretation of French history be modified?

In his letters of July and August 1870 Quinet attacks the war on the grounds that it is a device by which the Bonapartists are seeking to maintain their hold over the people. Napoleon III is the real enemy and for this reason Quinet deplors the enthusiasm for war which came from the Left. Had the time now come for him to return to France? The proclamation of the Republic removed all obstacles and he hastened to Paris: "La France s'est retrouvée. Jamais Paris ne m'a semblé si beau".<sup>(82)</sup> Napoleon - not the French people - was responsible for Sedan. The Republic marked the beginning of a new era - even if the circumstances of its birth were hardly propitious.<sup>(83)</sup> During the siege of the capital Quinet, despite his years, was active in keeping alive the spirit of resistance. Between September 1870 and January 1871 he published in the press a series of *Appels au gouvernement*.<sup>(84)</sup> In these he urged the continuation of the war, opposed immediate elections and called for the raising, in the provinces, of a properly organized army of conscripts to relieve Paris. When elections did take place in February 1871 he was successfully returned and took his seat at Bordeaux in an assembly for the most part composed of royalists. He spoke in favour of the continuation of hostilities and against the terms negotiated by Thiers which included the sacrifice of Alsace and Lorraine.

As a radical republican Quinet criticised the assembly's move to Versailles instead of Paris. He sat on the far left as a member of the group called *L'Union Républicaine*. Other members of this group included

Louis Blanc, Peyrat, Brisson and Edmond Adam. At Bordeaux he found himself in what he calls "cette Assemblée ennemie".(85) He feared a return to the monarchy and lamented the fact that the Republic was still of a provisional nature. His state of mind is revealed in a letter of March 1871:

Si j'avais eu besoin d'apprendre ce que vingt ans de bonapartisme ont fait de la France, l'Assemblée me l'aurait appris en une séance. C'est une nation à refaire. Mais Paris a été sublime. L'espérance est là. Et ils voudraient le détruire [...](86)

Little published material exists concerning Quinet's attitude to the Commune. It would appear that he disapproved of it since it weakened the cause of Republican unity. Nonetheless it was obviously a most distressing period of his life. After the destruction of the Commune he sought to heal the wounds as best he could. On a personal level we find him writing to the Communard sympathiser Floquet who was then in prison.(87) In Parliament he proposes legislation aimed at strengthening the representation of large towns over the countryside. This measure he believes would advance the cause of justice: "On a toujours dit que le meilleur moyen de terminer les guerres civiles, c'est de faire un pas dans la justice".(88)

*La République. Conditions de la régénération de la France* aims to restore a spirit of national unity and purpose after the war and the Commune. Quinet describes a defeated nation divided by class-warfare. A new plutocracy has gained ascendancy. The Church retains its influence. Recent events have provided further proof of France's chronic inability to stay free:

J'ai vu pendant vingt ans des hommes ployés jusqu'à terre sous le plus vil des jougs. Ils s'y échappent. Vous croiriez qu'ils sont impatients de se donner carrière; vous craignez que cette furie ne les emporte trop loin. Rassurez vous. Ils reparaissent plus insatiables que jamais d'esclavage.(89)

It is as if all the evils of the past have risen up to thwart the victory of the Republican cause. In the first place 1870 naturally recalls the defeats of 1814 and 1815 which Quinet had always so profoundly resented. Soon he will wonder if a new Terreur Blanche will not follow as well. But there are other historical parallels and none propitious; with, for example, 1830. Quinet refers caustically to the "new doctrinaires" of 1871 who like their predecessors swiftly abandon their principles and ally themselves with the Church once they have achieved power. Furthermore

the reaction of 1871 is a reincarnation of that of 1795. It represents "le résidu et les cendres de tout ce qui est mort dans l'esprit humain".<sup>(90)</sup> Quinet proceeds to inform us that the spirit of reaction has dominated French history during the preceding 1,500 years!

Will the return to the past be complete? Will power again be handed to one man, be he king, emperor or president? Surely the enemies of the Republic will use the threat of a new Commune to caution a new *coup d'état*. There are moments when the reader senses Quinet's emotion as he sees France once again repeating her past: "Ne suis-je revenu de l'exil que pour y rentrer?"<sup>(91)</sup> More often, however, Quinet addresses himself to the difficult task of finding a solution: "[...] la tradition chez nous c'est l'esclavage; il s'agit, non de la perpétuer, mais d'en sortir".<sup>(92)</sup> It is imperative to make the Republic a reality in fact as well as in name. This requires the development of republican institutions and the drafting of a republican constitution. Quinet favours a number of reforms which were widely discussed at the time. Most important undoubtedly is the reform of the army. The latter must become "la nation armée", an expression of the republican spirit.<sup>(93)</sup> The divorce between soldier and citizen which had already been condemned in *La Révolution* must now cease. Martial law is an abomination, a denial of the fundamental rights of individual citizens - a point which Quinet had made forcibly in *L'Etat de siège* in 1850. Military service should be of three years' duration and not five as some conservatives wished. The longer period is excellent in producing the praetorian mentality requisite for the seizure of power by *coup d'état* but it is not so effective in defending the frontiers of France. Quinet's real adversary of course is still "une Eglise intransformable".<sup>(94)</sup> He remarks pointedly that the Prussians would never have allowed themselves to be dominated by priests: "[...] depuis trois siècles ils ont vomis le saint-siège et sont par là des hommes nouveaux".<sup>(95)</sup> As a solution he puts forward educational reform along the lines suggested in *L'Enseignement du peuple*. He also favours changes in taxation and the operation of the elective principle in the judiciary. On the other hand he opposes a bicameral form of government and is hostile to the notion of an Assembly from which a number of members retire at regular intervals. Sincerity, the quest for knowledge, the willingness to accept change, in a word the Republican spirit, must be made manifest in every aspect of the life of society from personal relationships to diplomacy. Artists, writers, scientists, philosophers, and perhaps above all the women of France must play their part in this process of regeneration.

So despite the great obstacles which must be overcome Quinet's mood is not as gloomy as during the Empire.<sup>(96)</sup> There are some grounds for hope and he urges us to reject strongly the temptation of pessimism. To this end he condemns facile comparisons with Byzantium:

Ne parlez plus des ressemblances de la France actuelle avec le monde byzantin. Oubliez-vous qu'avant Byzance il y a eu une longue époque de libertés républicaines qui ont composé l'âge mûr des peuples grecs? Cette époque pour nous, où est-elle? Nous ne faisons que l'entrevoir.<sup>(97)</sup>

Faith in France has returned. The people have become the guardians of the Republican spirit which the reaction seeks in vain to betray. Even the peasantry no longer obeys unquestioningly the orders of parish priests. "Un immense avenir" has again become possible for France.<sup>(98)</sup> Quinet can return to the spirit of the 1830's and 1840's and forget the pessimism of the Empire. France has her mission to fulfil in the service of mankind, of civilisation. The sufferings of the present moment are a prelude to the rebirth not the demise of France:

La souffrance est la condition de tout être qui se transforme. [...] Ne vous alarmez donc pas outre mesure si la France aussi souffre à en mourir. Signe de transformation, non de ruine. Elle change d'âge, elle ne meurt pas.<sup>(99)</sup>

In the interval between the publication of *La République* and that of *L'Esprit nouveau* Quinet continued his political activities in the service of the Republican opposition. The threat from the past was ever present. In the Summer and Autumn of 1873 the possibility of a restoration of the monarchy grew as Orléanists and Legitimists discussed "fusion". Subsequently the danger of "un césarisme nouveau" reared its head in the shape of the proposal to give Macmahon a ten year period of office. Here was France yet again repeating the errors of the past, curbing essential freedoms while reinforcing the power of the executive.

*L'Esprit nouveau* contains Quinet's last attempt to come to terms with French history. In this instance the emphasis is placed upon the role played by characteristics transmitted by heredity. Does heredity condemn France to an endless repetition of the cycle, reaction - revolution - reaction? Quinet refuses to draw unduly pessimistic conclusions. He argues that the fact that the French mind had been formed by Catholicism during the Middle Ages did not prevent the coming into being of the Renaissance or the Enlightenment. He tries to differentiate between the influence of heredity on the one hand and the role played by imitation on the other. Prospects for the future become much brighter

if it can be shown that the seemingly inevitable return to reaction is due to the imitation of the past rather than to heredity.

Quinet does not cast doubt upon the action of heredity but in his hands it becomes a weapon directed against the ruling class. Making use of the researches of A. de Candolle he concludes that in France by 1789 "l'organisation physique était devenue la même pour toutes les classes".(100) No family of pure Germanic blood survived the eighth century. Inter-marriage between social classes had destroyed any right to rule which the aristocracy might claim on behalf of inherited characteristics. The same is true for the middle classes: "La bourgeoisie et la noblesse moderne sont peuple et ne peuvent être que peuple".(101) The contemporary ruling class can be denounced as so many parvenus disguised behind aristocratic names. The reaction of the 1870's is not a consequence of heredity it is the work of these parvenus, an imitation of the past which as such is far from being inevitable.

In *L'Esprit nouveau* the Byzantine spirit returns in a new guise. Those Orléanists, Legitimists and Bonapartists who disguise their true beliefs behind the slogans of order and moderation are the real men of the new Byzantium. Quinet is convinced that "la décadence de l'esprit" can become so engrained as to produce "une décadence d'organe".(102) Sophistry and lying can actually produce a shrinking of the cranium! But Quinet has rediscovered his faith in the people and can without difficulty condemn "les classes dites supérieures".(103) He believes that a reform of the national character is possible. No individual or society is condemned to remain shackled by the past. Hope lies in emulating the Greek spirit.(104)

Quinet even manages to interpret French history since the Revolution in a more optimistic light. If we look at the series of revolutions - 1789, 1830, 1848, 1870 - one thing becomes obvious. In each case the time taken to overcome the enemy was drastically reduced. Is this not a hopeful sign? Quinet now revises an analogy which we have seen him use in *La Révolution*:

A mesure que le passé s'éloigne, sa force magnétique décline en raison de la distance. Il viendra un moment où cet aimant du passé ne se fera plus sentir. La réaction est destinée à s'user; l'action seule demeurera continue et patiente, parce qu'elle ne sera plus combattue.(105)

Perhaps a day will come in the future when men of differing political convictions will recognise that despite their differences they belong to

the same nation:

Concluez-en que, si de nouvelles révolutions se produisent, elles trouveront, pour s'accomplir, moins de résistance que les précédentes, jusqu'à ce que le mouvement de révolution, de moins en moins contrarié, se résolve en un équilibre social, un battement intérieur des artères, régulier, presque inconscient, qui marque les pulsations de la vie, dans un organisme achevé. (106)

Between the years 1850 and 1875, therefore, Quinet's attitude towards French history changes as it reflects his concern for the predicament of the French nation in the present. During the Empire he struggles to retain hope. After 1870 it seems as if the Republican ideal may yet be made a reality. Quinet, however, is far from being sanguine about France's future. Although neither *La République* nor *L'Esprit nouveau* is as darkly pessimistic as Michelet's *Histoire du XIXe siècle* the correspondence of Quinet's last days reveals anything but confidence in France. Quinet voted for the Wallon amendment but he considered that in reality this marked a victory for the Reaction: "On semble avoir gagné le mot de République, mais je crains qu'on n'ait perdu la chose". The future appears bleak indeed:

J'aurais voulu que la France fît enfin un pas vers la liberté, dont elle n'a jamais connu que l'ombre, et c'est la liberté qui a été sacrifiée. Ce qui s'ouvre devant nous, c'est ce même cercle stérile où la France tourne depuis le commencement de ce siècle. (107)

NOTES

- (1) *Discours prononcé au Collège de France le 8 mars 1848, Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Pagnerre, 1870, vol. 11, p. 248.
- (2) *Ibid.*, p. 249.
- (3) *Ibid.*, p. 246.
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- (5) *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- (6) See R. H. Powers, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
- (7) See M. du Pasquier, *Edgar Quinet en Suisse*, Neuchâtel, la Baconnière 1959.
- (8) The text of Marnix was modified for publication in France. *L'Expédition du Mexique* (1862) was printed in London and copies were seized at the French frontier. Cf. H. Monin, "Sous l'Empire: Buloz et Quinet d'après leur correspondance", *Le Censeur*, 1907, pp. 65-73.
- (9) See below chapter 6. See also I. Tchernoff, *Le Parti républicain au coup d'état et sous le second empire*, Paris, Pedone, 1906, pp. 147-8.
- (10) See the *Lettres d'exil* published posthumously which unfortunately contain numerous alterations and omissions for which Mme Quinet was responsible.
- (11) R. H. Powers, *op. cit.*, p. 150. Cf. A. Réville, *op. cit.*, p. 1140.
- (12) See the conclusion of the final volume of *Les Révolutions d'Italie* (1852), p. 529. Cf. Jean Reynaud writing in 1852: "N'avoir pensé qu'au bien du peuple, lui avoir sacrifié ses méditations et ses veilles, et s'en trouver si étrangement récompensé!" Quoted by D. A. Griffiths in *op. cit.*, p. 333.
- (13) *Mes Vacances en Espagne*, pp. 80-1.
- (14) *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, p. 390. Quinet's mood is close to that of Renan in his article of May 1848 entitled "Du Libéralisme cléricale" collected in *Questions contemporaines*, 2nd ed., Paris, Michel Lévy, 1868, pp. 253-97.
- (15) See also *La Croisade autrichienne, française, napolitaine, espagnole contre la République romaine* (1849), *Oeuvres complètes*, Pagnerre, 1870, vol. 11, pp. 253-97.
- (16) This point is made with great force in *La Révolution religieuse au dix-neuvième siècle*, *Oeuvres complètes*, Pagnerre, vol. 11, pp. 163-238.
- (17) *L'Enseignement du peuple*, *Oeuvres complètes*, Pagnerre, vol. 11, p. 26.
- (18) *Ibid.*, p. 27.

- (19) *Les Esclaves*, p. 442.
- (20) *Ibid.*, preface, p. 331.
- (21) *Ibid.*, p. 368.
- (22) *Marnix*, p. 84.
- (23) *Ibid.*, p. 8. After reading part of *Marnix* Daniel Stern commented: "C'est un violent défi jeté au catholicisme; un appel à la guerre d'extermination. C'est singulier, audacieux, pas très *pratique*, comment exterminer un plus fort que soi?" Quoted by Jacques Vier in *La Comtesse d'Agoult et son temps*, Paris, Colin, 1961, vol. 4, p. 64. Cf. L. Veillot, *Mélanges religieux, politiques et littéraires*, Paris, Gaume et Duprey, 1860, 2nd series, vol. 3, pp. 166-77.
- (24) Quinet's reflexions on the Revolution need to be seen within the context of a more general desire to come to terms with the revolutionary tradition in the light of events after February 1848. This mood is well caught by E. Montégut in "Véritable cause de la crise sociale", *Revue des deux mondes*, Oct. 1851, pp. 197-218.
- (25) Quinet's refusal to mince his words made *La Révolution* an important intellectual event. It stirred up controversy on all sides and ran into a number of editions. Among the numerous reactions and replies we find: A. Peyrat, *La Révolution et le livre de M. Quinet*, Paris, Michel Lévy, 1866; H. Baudrillart, "Les Idées économiques et sociales de la révolution", *Journal des économistes*, 1866, vol. 4, pp. 366-354; Ch. Dollfus, "La Révolution", *Revue moderne*, 1866, pp. 176-87; E. Littré, "La Révolution", *La philosophie positive*, 1868, pp. 373-96; Ed. de Pressensé, "Les Leçons de la révolution française", *Revue Chrétienne*, 1865-66, pp. 513-38; Saint-René Taillandier, "L'Histoire et l'idéal de la révolution française", *Revue des deux mondes*, 1866, vol. 63, pp. 451-2. See also the reactions of Burckhardt contained in *Judgments on History and Historians*, tr. Zohn, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1958, pp. 235-6 and Vacherot in *La Religion*, Paris, Chamerot, 1869, pp. 458-60.
- (26) *La Révolution*, Paris, Librairie internationale, 1865, vol. 1, pp. 108-9.
- (27) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 119.
- (28) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 98.
- (29) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 58.
- (30) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p; 232.
- (31) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 128.
- (32) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 67.
- (33) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 111-2. Here Quinet is very close to the spirit of the early chapters of Michelet's history of the Revolution.
- (34) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 120.



- (35) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 171.
- (36) Ibid., vol. é, p. 139.
- (37) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 138-9.
- (38) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 144.
- (39) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 248.
- (40) See *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 177.
- (41) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 118-9.
- (42) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 28.
- (43) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 184.
- (44) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 525
- (45) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 27.
- (46) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 11.
- (47) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 205, vol. 1, p. 457 and vol. 2, p. 195. On the question of the Terror envisaged as a return to the Ancien Régime Quinet's argument recalls that of Proudhon in his *Confessions d'un révolutionnaire pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de février*, Paris, Garnier, 1850, pp. 29-30. See also A. de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien régime et la révolution*, Paris, Michel Lévy, 1856.
- (48) *La Révolution*, vol. 2, p. 480.
- (49) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 348.
- (50) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 9.
- (51) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 145-6.
- (52) *Philosophie de l'histoire de France*, pp. 404-5. Cf. J. Barzun, *Race. A Study in Modern Superstition*, London, Methuen, 1938 and M. A. Clarke, *Rimbaud and Quinet*, Sydney, 1945.
- (53) *Discours ...*, pp. 242 and 249.
- (54) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 1, p. 97.
- (55) The use of the name Jacques Bonhomme recalls Augustin Thierry, Michelet and others.
- (56) *Les Esclaves*, p. 379.
- (57) *Les Esclaves*, preface, p. 342.
- (58) *La Révolution religieuse*, p. 187.
- (59) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 2, pp. 138-9.

- (60) Quoted by J. Cornuz, *op. cit.*, p. 266.
- (61) In *La Révolution*, (Vol. 1, p. 6) Quinet tells us that he abandoned the idea of composing "une histoire de l'ancienne France pour le peuple" since such a work could only produce hatred and resentment, emotions "utiles en 89, stériles aujourd'hui".
- (62) *L'Enseignement du peuple*, pp. 78 and 79. See G. Cogniot, *La Question scolaire en 1848 et la loi Falloux*, Paris, Editions Hier et Aujourd'hui, 1948, pp. 114-5 and J. Seebacher, "L'Education ou la fin de Michelet", *Europe*, Nov-Dec 1973, pp. 132-45.
- (63) *L'Enseignement du peuple*, p. 89.
- (64) *Lettre sur la situation religieuse et morale de l'Europe*. A Eugene Sue, p. 146.
- (65) Quinet's *Histoire de la campagne de 1815*, needs to be looked at in relation to other works on the same subject which appeared at this time; notable among these was the study by Quinet's fellow exile Charras. Quinet's correspondence leaves no doubt that his own study was principally an answer to the interpretation placed upon events by Thiers. Hugo refers to Quinet's work in *Les Misérables*.
- (66) G. Weill, *Histoire du parti républicain en France de 1844 à 1870*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1900, p. 458. Weill suggests that Quinet was in fact developing a theory defended by Frédéric Morin in 1854. Cf. the reaction of Barrès in *Mes Cahiers*, Paris, Plon, 1949, vol. XII (jan. 1919-june 1920), p. 54.
- (67) Cf. J. Michelet "Note. De la méthode" in *Histoire de France*, Paris, A. Le Vasseur, n.d., vol. 10, pp. 9-10.
- (68) See *La Révolution*, vol. 2, p. 13 and *Les Roumains*, p. 87.
- (69) *Philosophie de l'histoire de France*, p. 370.
- (70) *Philosophie de l'histoire de France*, p. 361.
- (71) *La Révolution religieuse*, p. 208. Cf. *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 248.
- (72) *Philosophie de l'histoire de France*, pp. 363-4.
- (73) *La Révolution*, vol. 2, p. 604.
- (74) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 28.
- (75) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 31.
- (76) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 29 and 26.
- (77) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 74-5.
- (78) See the concluding pages of *La Révolution* in which Quinet describes why despite everything he still believes in France and in the French people.

- (79) Speech collected in *Oeuvres complètes*, Pagnerre, vol. 11, pp. 379-88. An eyewitness present at the conference remarked: "J'avais peine à le reconnaître [Quinet], dans ce vieillard à la voix grave et caverneuse, à l'accent lugubre, au geste tragique [...]". James Guillaume quoted by J. Drouilly in *La Pensée politique et religieuse de Dostoïevski*, Paris, Librairie des cinq continents, 1971. Cf. the Russian novelist's own reactions to the conference in *Correspondance de Dostoïevski*, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1960, vol. 3, p. 136.
- (80) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 4, p. 155.
- (81) *Le Réveil d'un grand peuple* (1869), in *Oeuvres complètes*, Pagnerre, vol. 11, p. 399.
- (82) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 4, p. 314.
- (83) See Mme Quinet, *Paris. Journal du siège*, Paris, Dentu, 1873, pp. 28-9.
- (84) See *Le Siège de Paris et la défense nationale*, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris, Hachette, n.d., vol. 25.
- (85) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 4, p. 338.
- (86) *Ibid.*, pp. 335-6.
- (87) *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 350-2.
- (88) *La République*, Paris, Dentu, 1872, p. 308.
- (89) *Ibid.*, p. XV.
- (90) *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- (91) *Ibid.*, p. 211.
- (92) *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- (93) *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- (94) *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- (95) *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- (96) Cf. Cl. Digeon, *La Crise allemande de la pensée française (1870-1914)*, Paris, P.U.F., 1959.
- (97) *La République*, p. 258. Cf. Quinet's preface to his wife's *Paris. Journal du siège*, p. III.
- (98) *La République*, p. 257.
- (99) *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- (100) *L'Esprit Nouveau*, Paris, Dentu, 4th ed., 1875, p. 87. Cf. M. Rouché, *Herder. Précurseur de Darwin? Histoire d'un mythe*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1940, pp. 9 ff.

- (101) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 86.
- (102) *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- (103) *La République*, p. 238.
- (104) See *Vie et mort du génie grec*, 3rd edition, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Hachette, vol. 28. This was the work which Quinet was composing when he died. He tells us that whereas his contemporaries point to an opposition between "l'héroïsme" and "la sagesse" the strength of the Greeks lay in the fact that they united the two concepts (p. 19). They fell into decline when they ceased so to do. (p. 22).
- (105) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 139.
- (106) *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- (107) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 4, p. 491.

## CHAPTER FIVE

At this point we would like to pause in our wider analysis of Quinet's work in order to examine in greater detail three particular issues each of which concerns the meaning of freedom. In the first two instances we shall be concerned with the tensions which arise in Quinet's works after 1848 between his belief in freedom and democracy on the one hand and his faith in history on the other. In the third section we shall turn our attention to the difficulties which he encountered in trying to reconcile Darwinian evolutionary theory with a form of metaphysical idealism.

### 1. Universal Suffrage.

Although there was evidence enough by 1852 that universal manhood suffrage was in no way certain to aid the cause of reform this fact did not lead Quinet to abandon his democratic convictions during the Second Empire. Once this is said, however, it should be made clear that he was by no means a believer in the infallibility of the majority. "La faiblesse des démocrates", he writes in *La Révolution*, "c'est qu'ils n'osent désobéir au peuple, même pour le sauver".<sup>(1)</sup> Democracy, France, the Republic - each term denotes the embodiment of freedom. But freedom is also the meaning of history. At this point the question arises whether the legality of a régime such as the Third Republic derives from history or from the will of the sovereign people. Ideally no conflict should exist between the two, but Quinet has to try to reconcile his theories with a reality in which this conflict is only too apparent.

In fact this problem had already arisen in 1851 in relation to the status of the Second Republic. In the pages of *Révision* (1851) Quinet denounces Bonapartists and Monarchists alike. He is appalled that there should be any doubt whatsoever concerning the need for a Republic. The choice of régime is not a matter for discussion. When such changes take place: "Elles éclatent dans le monde avec la puissance de la nécessité, elles s'enracinent avec l'autorité d'un événement". The Republic cannot be put in doubt since its basis is "non pas une boule, un hasard de suffrage, mais une journée de la Providence".<sup>(2)</sup> Monarchy, like aristocracy, belongs irrevocably to the past.

After 1870 Quinet found himself in a remarkably similar situation. Here was an assembly, republican in name, but which to say the very least neglected to give wholehearted support to the Republic. Could the defenders of the Monarchy not understand that an assembly elected in the

wake of a revolutionary upheaval drew its authority from the event? In these circumstances the restoration of the Monarchy was an impossibility: "J'ai toujours soutenu que le pouvoir constituant est le pouvoir d'organiser ce qui existe, et non de créer ce qui n'existe pas".(3)

September 1870, like February 1848, was a step towards freedom and justice and since Quinet has no doubt that this is the real direction of history then the legality of the régimes produced by these events is beyond question. In both cases it might be said that we are dealing with explosions of popular discontent which were expressions of the popular will. Yet the real authority of both the Second and Third Republics derives from Quinet's understanding of history. History teaches that the Republic is the necessary form of government for modern France. During the 1840's Quinet accused the Church of failing to recognise the divine necessity of the Reformation and the French Revolution. After 1870 the opponents of the Republic are criticised on similar grounds. How can they hope to resist "la force des choses, l'esprit de notre temps la nécessité de notre époque?" How can these men, who claim to be religious, hope to oppose "ce qu'ils devraient appeler [...] la volonté d'en haut"?(4)

The operation of plebiscitary dictatorship under Napoleon III was proof enough that universal suffrage should not be worshipped as infallible. In *Le Plébiscite et le concile* (1870) Quinet explains how the Roman emperors exploited the right of *provocatio ad populum*. Under the Republic this had meant that the authority of the people might, in extreme circumstances, be vested in the person of a tribune. Subsequently, however, it was claimed by the Emperors that the Emperor alone was the expression of the popular will. A similar method had been applied by Napoleon III. Nothing could be further from true democratic principles than this system even if it were based upon the exercise of universal suffrage. No plebiscite could change history; none could prevent the *Deux Décembre* from remaining a crime. Votes cannot alter that which has been decided by history:

Ce qui est au-dessus de la nation, c'est la force des choses. La nation, réunie en plébiscite, ne peut pas faire que la monarchie n'ait été renversée sept fois depuis le commencement de ce siècle.(5)

While rejecting "un plébiscite aveugle" Quinet calls for new elections.(6) He believes that a strong Republican majority would be returned if fresh elections were held. Now if this were the case the situation would correspond to that described in *Aux Paysans* (1870):

"Les peuples libres font eux-mêmes ou par leurs mandataires la Constitution qui les régit".(7) The new assembly would be in accord with both the will of the people and the meaning of history. However, the problem remains that the appeal to the sovereign people may only be confidently undertaken if the people are free and conscious of the value of their freedom. Otherwise we return to the dilemma of *Les Esclaves*. What if the majority yet again chooses to return to subservience by electing a reactionary assembly? We are left in no doubt that such a decision must be resisted:

Que le suffrage universel proclame le syllabus, l'encyclique, l'infaillibilité du pape, le devoir pour chacun de nous de se conformer au catholicisme: en quoi ce vote de millions d'hommes pourrait-il me lier? Comment changerait-il, un seul moment, mon esprit, ma conscience? Evidemment tout ce qu'il ferait dans ce sens serait nul, de toute nullité.(8)

By appealing to conscience Quinet is being consistent with his earlier thought. However, we should not forget that the appeal to conscience is itself an appeal to history since history is the story of the progressive liberation of individual conscience.

The sincerity of Quinet's belief in universal suffrage is not in question. He refers to it as "le fondement de notre existence politique, notre raison d'être".(9) Yet he also believes that like all things universal suffrage may be improved. As a move in this direction he suggests a stronger representation for urban areas as opposed to the countryside. "Ce n'est pas de l'égalité, cela!" was the indignant comment of a political opponent when Quinet argued his case in Parliament.(10) What is interesting however is the way in which he defends his point of view. He argues that it is necessary to respect "la personnalité politique des villes" and once again we find that he explains his proposed legislation in relation to French history:

[..] la société française n'est pas seulement une masse informe, une agglomération confuse, une multitude. Cette multitude, pour devenir un peuple, est arrivée, par le travail du temps, à sortir de la confusion. Elle a reçu de la main du temps certaines formes, des traits, une physionomie, un caractère, qui font la société française. Et parmi ces traits, il en est un qu'il est impossible de méconnaître: c'est la distinction des villes et des campagnes.(11)

What will happen if Quinet's words go unheeded and the Republic remains provisional? An even greater revolutionary explosion may take place. Will the forces of reaction never understand the meaning of French

history? The nation must respect "des jugements et des arrêts prononcés par les événements".<sup>(12)</sup> Is history after all the final arbiter? And if so should not those who fail to obey its decisions be punished? What should we make of the following statement made by Quinet near the end of his life: "La Réaction en France, est impunie depuis quatre-vingts ans et elle a été pervertie par l'impunité"?<sup>(13)</sup> Here we encounter the subject to be discussed in the next section of this chapter. Is intolerance necessary to defend freedom?

## 2. Intolerance

Before 1848 the words liberty and conscience were often on Quinet's lips. They were implicitly identified with the moral good. Their origin lay in the deeply religious dimension of human subjectivity: "le dieu intérieur caché dans chacun de nous".<sup>(14)</sup> The inner being of the individual was sacrosanct and inviolable. The religious conscience was "cette Eglise que ne peut régler aucun pouvoir temporel".<sup>(15)</sup> This clearly meant that the private realm of religious experience - "le droit sacré de l'individu, l'autorité désormais inviolable de la conscience privée" - should not be made subject to the authority of the state:

Nous voulons que [...] toute créature humaine, et la femme aussi bien que l'homme, soient entourés d'un cercle sacré que ne puisse franchir la violence des princes et des rois, dans le temporel, ni dans le spirituel [...] et nous nommons cela les garanties de la liberté individuelle.<sup>(16)</sup>

Political freedom was thus founded upon the rock of religious freedom. The dignity of the individual was the source of law and right since the individual was the highest expression of "l'Esprit", of the divine in history. In the modern world "l'autorité politique repose sur la conscience".<sup>(17)</sup> How then could it come about that Quinet was charged with advocating intolerance?

The debate concerning the use of intolerance arose as a consequence of the publication of *La Révolution*. Its importance was such that when in 1867 Quinet published his *Critique de la Révolution* this was largely in the hope of rebutting the charge. Was Quinet really saying that the Terror had been insufficiently intolerant towards the Church? Even critics who were sympathetic towards his general thesis expressed serious misgivings. Here is Ed. de Pressensé, an otherwise friendly critic:

Malgré quelques restrictions et quelques atténuations, la pensée de l'illustre écrivain n'est que trop claire. Il regrette que la Révolution française, au lieu de se livrer à



des violences stériles, n'ait pas abattu de sa puissante hache l'arbre de la superstition qui étendait encore ses ombres mortelles sur la génération nouvelle.(18)

Anyone reading *La Révolution* will rapidly discover the kind of passage to which a de Pressensé - not to speak of a Veuillot - might take exception. One such example reads as follows:

Sous les empereurs chrétiens, quand il s'agit d'arracher le peuple d'Egypte aux cultes des pharaons, toute la nation restait incertaine autour des temples. Un centurion sortit de la foule, il donna le premier coup de marteau au temple d'Isis. La foule suivit, et acheva ce que le centurion avait commencé. De ce moment, l'Egypte appartint au monde nouveau. Ce centurion manqua à la Révolution française.(19)

Yet if we read Quinet's *Critique de la Révolution* we have to admit that he was successful in defending himself. Was not the very spirit in which his book had been written an illustration of the power of freedom of thought to criticise dogmas? With just cause he draws his reader's attention to statements contained in *La Révolution* which leave no doubt that the author is advocating the separation of Church and State rather than the violent extirpation of the Roman Church. His readers had not grasped his method: they had not realised that in order to reveal the contradictions of the Terror it had been necessary to show that logic required that the weapon of violence should have been used against the Church and not against the supporters of the Revolution. The Terror was a system which had to be understood. Quinet had entered into the spirit of the Terror but in order to lay bare its weaknesses. In reply to those who believed that he was calling for the forcible conversion of the French nation to Protestantism Quinet quite correctly requested that they should reflect upon the page where he declared that by 1789 it was already too late for France to become Protestant. *La Révolution* contains a number of categorical statements. "La terreur", we are told, "ne réussit pas à la démocratie parce que la démocratie a besoin de justice [...]".(20)

In the Revolution the means and ends were incompatible:

C'est une des grandes difficultés, d'autres diront infirmités, de la liberté qu'elle est obligée d'être humaine. Elle ne peut se servir de tous les moyens, comme les tyrannies et même les religions.(21)

Quinet put forward a similar point of view in his private correspondence. He wrote that his study of the Terror was "tout le contraire d'une apologie de l'intolérance".(22) This may be a defensible position to adopt with reference to *La Révolution* but we cannot ignore the fact that

the subject of intolerance arises in a number of other works of this period and Quinet's attitude at times appears much more equivocal.

Although it is impossible to keep politics and religion apart let us begin by focusing our attention upon intolerance in the political sphere. The problem may be summarised as follows: is a revolution which has overthrown a repressive régime duty bound to accord freedom to its enemies even if the result is that the latter work to bring about the destruction of the new government? *La Révolution* described the impossibility in modern times of producing freedom by coercion. It seemed that a modern democracy was tied to a respect for the individual. Feelings of humanity and pity could not be denied. In the years which immediately followed 1848, on the other hand, Quinet unhesitatingly called for tougher measures.

Once again it is a question of the dominion which Catholicism, in one way or another, exerts over the minds of Frenchmen. The dilemma is nicely put in *L'Enseignement du peuple*. How should the new rulers of France have behaved towards their enemies? There seems no easy answer:

L'ordre nouveau renonce-t-il à inspirer le sentiment de crainte à ses adversaires? Accoutumés à ne respecter que ce qu'ils craignent, le pouvoir nouvellement établi tombe infailliblement dans leur mépris. Si au contraire, il reste armé, pour sa défense, on l'accuse de n'avoir rien changé au régime de l'ancienne société; en sorte qu'il rencontre le double danger de périr sous le mépris de ses ennemis s'il leur pardonne, ou sous la contradiction s'il les châtie. (23)

Is toleration of dissent an obligation? Quinet's pamphlet *Révision* (1851) reveals his bitterness:

La bonne République [...] est celle qui nous donne le droit imprescriptible de nous proclamer officiellement monarchistes absolutistes, impérialistes, tout hors républicains; celle que peuvent attaquer, cerner tous les systèmes, sans qu'elle use jamais de représailles [...] celle que, lorsqu'on la frappe sur une joue, tend aussitôt l'autre joue [...]. (24)

A similar point is made in *Marnix*. We learn that the most dangerous moment in the life of a revolution is not when it is openly fighting its enemies. Paradoxically, it is when the revolution is victorious, for that is the signal for its former adversaries to feign loyalty to its principles in order to destroy it.

Sitôt qu'une révolution est victorieuse, de tous côtés l'invitation lui est faite de périr pour

l'honneur de son principe, et il est rare que cette invitation ne réussisse pas auprès du grand nombre. (25)

Furthermore in *Les Révolutions d'Italie* we are informed that a successful revolution must take precautions to ensure its survival. Idealism and sincerity are not enough:

Dans les époques corrompues, si vous ne tenez pas compte de la perversité de vos adversaires, vous êtes nécessairement vaincus d'avance; car vous omettez dans vos calculs un élément qui les rend illusoires. Pour que les lois philanthropiques de la démocratie puissent être appliquées et durer, il faudrait que les hommes fussent déjà améliorés et changés par les lois de la démocratie. (26)

*Marnix* leaves us in no doubt that it was necessary for the Reformation to deal intolerantly with Catholicism. Without any hesitation Quinet approves the actions of the victorious Protestants:

[...] partout où le protestantisme a laissé la liberté à l'église ennemie, il n'a pas tardé à disparaître déshonoré [...] Reprocher au protestantisme naissant son intolérance c'est lui reprocher d'avoir voulu vivre. (27)

In *La Révolution religieuse* Quinet is quite open about his purpose: "Il faut que le catholicisme tombe!" (28) To this end he calls for "une alliance de tous les esprits libres de la terre" to work against the Church of Rome. (29) But does he not also say that no religion ever relinquishes power voluntarily? Protestantism, philosophy and education may help to remedy the situation but are not stronger measures required? If this is not the case why should Quinet devote so much space to the decrees of Constantine, Theodosius, Arcadius and Valentinian which commanded the violent suppression of paganism? Will not at some point force have to be met by force?

Le despotisme religieux comme tout autre despotisme ne peut être extirpé sans que l'on sorte de la légalité, puisque sa légalité, c'est son caprice. Aveugle, il appelle contre soi la force aveugle; et, en effet, avec le tempérament qui se forme dans les gouvernements et les religions du bon plaisir, il ne faudrait non plus se montrer trop étonné si tant de peuples serfs brisaient eux-mêmes demain ce qu'ils adorent aujourd'hui. (30)

Quinet's friends became alarmed at the direction which his thought was taking. Was the champion of freedom really preaching the persecution of Catholicism? Those who were concerned included Jules Ferry and Saint

René Taillandier. Paul Bataillard wrote to Quinet asking for clarification of his point of view since this was troubling a friend.<sup>(31)</sup> Quinet replied as follows:

Je n'ai pas la pensée de retourner purement et simplement contre le catholicisme les décrets d'Arcadius et d'Honorius. Je sais combien une pareille idée est peu de notre temps. Mais il était, je crois, nécessaire de traiter cette question théorique: "Comment ont disparu les anciennes religions."<sup>(32)</sup>

Now this letter was written in 1862 and the lines which we have just quoted show Quinet deploying what are in essence the arguments which he will use in 1866 in defence of *La Révolution*. In the early years of his exile however he was far from adopting the more nuanced approach of the 1860's. Here, for example, in contrast to the letter to Bataillard, is what Quinet wrote to Michelet in 1853:

Je pense depuis longtemps que la seule chance de salut est de délivrer la France de la religion du moyen âge: et que pour cela, il faudra une volonté semblable à celle qui, vers la fin de l'antiquité, a fermé par un décret de trois lignes les temples du paganisme dans toute l'étendue de l'empire. Je le pense encore; je crois que les temples de cette autre antiquité que nous voyons se survivre ne se fermeront pas d'eux mêmes et sans qu'on les y aide [...]<sup>(33)</sup>

If more proof were needed we have only to open the pages of *Les Révolutions d'Italie*. In this instance the author's willingness to countenance the use of intolerance is beyond question:

C'est une pensée favorite du libéralisme de nos jours, que la force grossière ne peut absolument rien contre les idées, pour moi, j'avoue n'avoir pas la même conviction de cette impuissance. [...] Quand je considère que les hommes de théorie rejettent eux-mêmes la force que Dieu met quelquefois entre leurs mains, et qu'ils tremblent de s'en servir je me demande si ce n'est pas là un témoignage de scepticisme plutôt que d'assurance. Il faut toujours une certaine foi pour oser toucher à la hache [...]<sup>(34)</sup>

Quinet even goes so far as to provide us with an argument in favour of the Terror:

[...] le plus souvent les hommes veulent une chose, et tout en la considérant comme nécessaire, ils s'effrayent des extrémités qui seules la rendent possible; témoin la Révolution française. On était libre de la vouloir ou de ne la vouloir pas; mais dès qu'on l'acceptait, la logique commandait d'en accepter l'implacable condition, qui était la terreur. Les révolutionnaires qui, en rejetant

le système de contrainte, rejetaient le système de la Révolution, ne pouvaient manquer de s'abîmer dans une contradiction aussi violente. Ils étaient dans la situation de catholiques qui eussent blasphémé contre le bûcher; l'inquisition les eût tués [...] Michel Lando, Savonarole, Carducci, périsse par la même loi éternelle; ils voulaient une chose et n'en voulaient pas la condition. C'étaient les Girondins de l'Italie. (35)

It is difficult to imagine readers of these lines suspecting that the Girondins in *La Révolution* would be portrayed as martyrs to the cause of freedom.

Powers writes that after the coup d'état Quinet "embraced the logic of faith" and began to preach the destruction of liberty. (36) If we enquire what this faith is we soon discover that it is substantially the same faith in history which sustained Quinet during his exile and permitted him to retain a modicum of hope in France. Quinet does not write from the standpoint of an utilitarian system of ethics and he does not present an interpretation of history as a working hypothesis. Freedom is the presence of the divine in history and Quinet knows what history means. He knows that Catholicism is both out of date and dangerous. That is a fact which no reasonable person could possibly deny. Now this degree of historical certainty is as relevant to the question of intolerance as it was to our discussion of democracy and universal suffrage. An accommodation with Catholicism is not bad tactics. In Quinet's words it is an armistice with evil. If one's enemies persist in not understanding history then perhaps it will become necessary to place restrictions upon their freedom. No one could be more eager than Quinet that men should act in accordance with their principles and that words should be spoken to reveal their true meaning. He sees this as logical behaviour. But is it not equally logical to expect that the defenders of the cause of freedom would grant freedom to all members of society whatever their political or religious views? Quinet would have said no. This argument sacrifices the content of the freedom in order to preserve the word, the appearance as opposed to the reality of liberty. It is the antithesis of logic. It is in fact rank stupidity and highly dangerous at that.

On the one hand Quinet believes, indeed knows, that modern man has been free since the Reformation:

N'oubliez pas que l'homme moderne est né, il y a trois siècles; depuis ce moment il n'est plus de pape, ni de concile religieux qui puisse s'imposer à la conscience individuelle. (37)

On the other hand, although he is armed with this knowledge he is confronted by the world of the Second Empire in which the power of Church is very great. A conservative Pope sits in the Vatican. Religious innovators in France remain trapped within the Catholic tradition producing but poor imitations of the Church which they reject. Perhaps intolerance is the only way of compelling the recalcitrant present to give way before what Quinet knows to be the reality of history. It is knowledge of the meaning of history which ultimately justifies intolerance. It is permissible for those who take power in the name of freedom to make use of "la force que Dieu met quelquefois entre leurs mains". But what, the reader asks, is their God if not history? Not history as blind necessity but the transcendent purpose, known to Quinet who interprets God's ways to man.

*Les Révolutions d'Italie* showed that intolerance was a necessity in those nations such as France and Italy which remained subservient to Rome. *La Révolution religieuse* gives the impression that intolerance is not so much morally wrong as only capable of being used successfully by those whose faith is unshakable. But is this really a plea for a campaign of religious persecution? Perhaps a clue is provided by the following passage in which Quinet is discussing Marnix's works:

Ne cherchez [...] point ici les capitulations de notre temps. C'est un livre non de ruse mais de vérité, sans merci et sans quartier. Si vous voulez être abusé, ne le lisez pas. Ce qu'il vous promet, il vous le donne. Pour quiconque l'aura lu jusqu'au bout, le dogme catholique aura disparu de fond en comble. Il restera l'emplacement d'une vieille église rasée, abandonnée aux sifflements et aux ricanements des vents, une dernière forme de paganisme mis à nu, une mythologie restaurée et soudain renversée, les débris épars d'une autre Diane d'Ephèse, et par-dessus ces ruines païennes, la conscience de l'homme moderne qui cherche, à travers l'Evangile, son retour à Dieu et à la liberté. (38)

In these lines the destruction of the cathedral takes on a metaphorical not a factual status. Is this an indication of what Quinet really sought: a destruction of the Church in men's minds? Similarly the chapter entitled "Ce qu'il faut faire" does not contain encouragement for would be iconoclasts. It is a plea addressed to all who sympathise with the cause of freedom to leave the Church. Moreover, we should also note that when Quinet proposes an alliance of free men against Rome he adds an important qualification:

Si l'alliance que je propose à des esprits, à des Eglises, à des systèmes, qui tous ont un intérêt commun, s'accomplissait; si par la justice de l'histoire, la loi de l'éternel talion voulait que le Droit catholique fut appliqué par la Providence à l'Eglise catholique, *avec les tempéraments qu'exige l'humanité moderne*; si les avertissements de la diplomatie se réalisent; qu'arriverait-il? La chute de cette Eglise. (39)

History can even become an argument in favour of tolerance in the present. He who knows the transcendent meaning of history knows that the present is a time of tolerance. Quinet can decide that intolerance was successful and acceptable in the 16th century while at the same time deem it incompatible with the spirit of the Enlightenment and the 19th century. This point is made in *Marnix* and in *La Révolution*. Such a viewpoint however implies a degree of moral relativism which sits uneasily with Quinet's conception of the historian as the guardian of the moral conscience.

### 3. Natural History

Natural History became Quinet's central interest during the latter half of his exile. The ideas which he developed in this field are to be found principally in two works: *La Création* (1870) and *L'Esprit nouveau* (1875). Although in the event professional scientists were critical of his theories it would be unfair to dismiss his contribution as that of an enthusiastic amateur and vulgariser. He was thoroughly conversant with the latest developments in paleontology, biology, zoology and geology. He refers knowledgeably to the works of Darwin, Wallace, Huxley, Desor, Vogt, Heer, Lyell, Favre, Lubbock and many more besides. We should not, however, suppose that *La Création* is a dry, scientific tome. Quinet remains a poet often guided by intuition and whose prose upon occasion resembles poetry. He is not setting out to popularise the discoveries of others. He seeks to use their findings in order to construct what is in essence a grand theory of cosmic evolution. As in the 1820's and 1830's the underlying aspiration is to unity and synthesis. But whereas in his earlier works Quinet had not infrequently contrasted science unfavourably with religion, he now considers that he has reason to place his faith in science. Science has rendered possible the elaboration of what he terms "la philosophie de la vie universelle". (40) Science has shown that man can retain moral values and yet cease to be isolated from nature. With the help of science and technological advance man may yet recreate the harmony and serenity of classical Greek civilisation:

En se sentant d'accord avec l'univers, l'homme se trouvera confirmé dans sa pensée. Il ne marchera plus en chancelant dans le vide; il retrouvera la sérénité perdue. Je pense qu'une grande paix entrera dans les esprits, quand ils se verront soutenus par l'expérience de toute créature [...]  
Ils prendront enfin possession de l'univers, non comme des hôtes d'un jour, mais comme possesseurs et héritiers légitimes de ses éternités.(41)

In *La Création* Quinet regrets that he had not begun a detailed study of nature at an earlier date. The opportunity had certainly presented itself since he had known Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire.(42) But what is perhaps even more surprising is that, despite his association with the Saint-Hilaire family, Quinet remained a supporter of Cuvier until the middle years of his exile. In fact the works published before 1851 contain but scant information on the subject of evolution.(43) This, however, should not be taken to mean that Quinet was a novice in such matters. He was after all the translator of Herder's *Ideen*. What is more, his reading of the 1820's, which included Schelling, Oken and Karl Ritter, suggests something more than a passing acquaintance with the philosophy of nature. Neither should we forget that the first part of *Ahasvérus* testified to a deep interest in the interpretation of ancient cosmogonies.(44) Even *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* contained a reference to embryological theory.(45) It was in *De la Nature et de l'histoire*, however, that Quinet came closest to presenting a general theory of evolution. But here, we recall, the evolutionary process was understood in relation to the Absolute's journey from unconsciousness to consciousness. This was evolution as understood by German Idealism. Hegel, for example, envisaged nature as a number of stages which arose from one another but did not actually generate one another.(46) Evolution in this sense is ideal, not real, and does not imply true descent.

In *La Création* on the other hand, we are told that the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling and Hegel belongs to the past. According to Hegel nature was "un jeu subtil de l'esprit avec lui-même". In the work of the German philosopher the universe became "une dialectique de l'absolu pour broyer les faits et les rendre au néant".(47) Yet Quinet has not become a positivist concerned only with phenomena and their relations. He certainly is no materialist. The following extract gives us a clearer impression of his real position. Here he describes those aspects of philosophical systems like that of Hegel which, despite his general criticisms, he still considers to be valid:



[...] dans tous ces systèmes, une idée vraie subsiste: que les lois générales de l'esprit doivent se retrouver dans le développement de l'univers; qu'il doit y avoir une parenté entre les principes de l'intelligence et les principes sur lesquels sont fondés les divers règnes de la nature; que l'échelle des idées doit se retrouver dans l'échelle des êtres; qu'enfin, il y a une logique dans le monde physique, comme dans le monde intellectuel; que celui qui aurait le secret de cette logique aurait la clef de la terre et des cieux.(48)

*La Création* is divided into twelve books, the first nine of which present Quinet's general evolutionary scheme. In the remaining three books the author examines the implications of his theories. The division into primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary periods is accepted without question and considerable space is devoted to a description of the development of different forms of life within each period. Man's origins are looked at in the context of the analysis of the quaternary period. Quinet agrees that similarities exist between man and the higher primates but he denies that there is direct descent. He is convinced that prehistoric man was no mere variety of ape. Man is descended from "une même souche primitive que celle des singes" but all trace of the intermediary stages has been lost.(49)

Upon more than one occasion Quinet tells us that his facts are correct and are the result of objective scientific observation. His avowed aim, however, is not to restate proven facts but to investigate the relationship between history and nature in order to show that the same laws apply in both. Once this premise is accepted the barriers which separate different disciplines break down. Discoveries in the field of the natural sciences can influence history, ethics, the arts, economics. In a similar manner, unsolved problems in the understanding of nature may be solved by referring to the philosophy of history. Here we are dealing with something of much greater importance than an interchange of possibly useful ideas. Analogy becomes "une méthode de découvertes" a way of getting at the truth.(50) Thus the analogies between birdsong and human speech lead us to discover "des vérités dont on cherche vainement à pénétrer le mystère par un autre chemin".(51) Where other methods fail we turn to analogy since this method, far from being arbitrary, is based upon the contention that the same laws operate in different areas of study: "l'analogie me pousse à conclure [...]"(52)

*La Création* should be envisaged as a first step towards the construction of "la science comparée des lois de l'histoire civile et des lois

de l'histoire naturelle".<sup>(53)</sup> Quinet believes, for example, that there exist methodological similarities between paleontology and the philosophy of history. Having taken note of the influence of the ideas of Malthus upon Darwin's *Origin of Species* he urges a much extended application of this type of approach. *La Création* contains numerous examples of how the vocabulary and concepts of one discipline can be used to describe and illuminate another. In a discussion of language we are told that grammar represents "la permanence de l'espèce". It is "la structure et comme le squelette interne de l'organisation".<sup>(54)</sup> Words, in this context, become the flesh on the bones of grammar. Yet grammar, we learn, is in fact no more fixed than any natural species. In a similar fashion the discovery of the relationship between the different Indo-European tongues may cast new light upon unresolved questions of biology and zoology.

*La Création* testifies to a general acceptance of many of the evolutionary ideas then in vogue. Species are not fixed and their mutability is the result of natural selection in relation to the influence of their physical environment. Characteristics are transmitted by heredity. Quinet follows Darwin in paying attention to those creatures which, like insects, do not change or adapt to new situations. The notion of spontaneous generation is of course banished as is any possibility of a miraculous intervention by a supernatural agency.

Quinet, however, seeks to combine the notions of adaptation to milieu and inheritance of acquired characteristics with a belief in the older idea of a series of cataclysms, identified in turn with the division of geological time into four periods. This may well reflect the continuing influence of Cuvier. Quinet contends that important changes in plant and animal life correspond to drastic alterations in the relationship between land and sea. New flora and fauna develop as a result of "(une) nouvelle distribution de la terre et des eaux".<sup>(55)</sup> Large mammals can only develop on large land masses. Were the continents of the present day to revert to being collections of small islands then reptiles would eventually return to the ascendancy. Both animal and plant life are "l'expression vivante d'un certain âge historique du globe".<sup>(56)</sup> This fact is often reiterated.

The cataclysmic theory has an additional advantage - it provides an explanation of the difference between man and ape. The two are not only separated in time; they reflect different "configurations du globe". Man's upright posture proves that he, unlike the apes, originated after the emergence of mountains. Man, so Quinet claims, stands erect because he originally looked up from the plains to the mountains! The monkey on

the other hand is clearly the product of a very different environment - the forest of the tertiary period. Man and ape are separated by "plusieurs révolutions du globe".(57)

We would be wrong, however, were we to conclude that Quinet is just stating that each age produced a different environment which influenced living creatures which in turn adapted themselves as well as they could to the new situation. He qualifies his argument as follows:

[...] je ne prétends pas que le globe ait en soi la faculté de donner son moule à l'argile vivante. Je prétends seulement que la partie réfléchit le tout [...] l'espèce [...] s'est ordonné sur le plan de l'univers renouvelé.(58)

Man's upright posture cannot satisfactorily be explained in terms of the influence of environment alone. A mysterious power, "la force qui a exhaussé les Alpes", is also responsible for man's erect stance.(59) This is a subject to which we shall have to return.

Evolution in nature is not the result of chance variations: "[la nature] ne brise pas les formes capricieusement et impatientement".(60) Quinet expresses a value judgment when he discerns in the evolutionary process "une force d'ascension vers le mieux que ne peut contrebalancer toute l'inertie de la nature morte".(61) An acceptance of evolution does not lead to a denial of freedom. Quinet points out that while Darwin was correct to use Malthus in order to understand nature, there is no reason to conclude from this that the struggle of life is of itself an adequate explanation of human behaviour in history:

[...] l'homme, par son travail, peut changer le monde, augmenter les choses, créer, pour ainsi dire, un ordre nouveau. Voilà ce qui le distingue des populations végétales ou animales.  
[...] Hommes, nous protestons contre la dure loi de la bataille de la vie, où le plus faible laisse infailliblement la place au plus fort, où le vaincu a toujours tort, où le progrès se forme de l'extinction de l'inférieur par le supérieur.(62)

It is made quite plain that neither in nature nor in history is progress inevitable. Natural scientists are just as liable as historians to fall into the errors described in *Philosophie de l'histoire de France*. To interpret progress in nature or in history in terms of a linear mathematical progression leads to the justification of force and a passive submission to the world as it is. Progress is only brought about by effort:

[...] il faut un travail incessant de la créature sur elle-même et sur son espèce. Si ce travail

s'arrête, le mouvement et la vie passent à d'autres genres, c'est-à-dire à d'autres peuples, à d'autres races. [...] Ne crois pas que tout peuple, quoi qu'il fasse, est toujours en progrès. Cela n'est pas plus vrai des nations que des colonies de polypes.(63)

The desire to point to analogies and to discern the presence of the same laws in nature and in history should not be taken to mean that the differences between nature and history are superficial. Man exists in an historical dimension unknown to animals: "L'homme seul a la faculté de se mouvoir, non-seulement dans l'espace mais dans le temps".(64)

Here is how Quinet defines that which is unique to man:

C'est d'être un monde historique, c'est de se métamorphoser avec le temps, non-seulement quant à l'individu mais aussi quant à l'espèce; c'est de s'accroître de génération en génération; c'est de sécréter autour de soi une enveloppe sociale, historique, architecturale, un monde de traditions successives; en un mot, c'est d'avoir lui seul une histoire qui s'augmente, s'alimente de lui-même, quand pour tous les êtres organisés, il n'y a, il ne peut y avoir qu'une description.(65)

This capacity to bring about change is co-existent with human freedom. Men can, if they so desire, repudiate the past and resist the power of instinct. The possibility also exists that men may abandon the struggle to improve themselves. If they do so they sink back into the past and behave in a manner which is no longer truly human. Regression of this type is the source of evil:

L'homme seul a la faculté de retourner en arrière, de tomber au-dessous de lui-même, de redescendre les degrés qu'il avait franchis. Par là, il confond l'ordre universel, il dément le plan qui se découvre dans tout le reste. Il cesse d'être homme pour redevenir brute. Ce désordre, n'est-ce pas ce que nous appelons le mal? [...] Chaque crime est un anachronisme sanglant.(66)

But while Quinet contrasts human freedom with the ordered world of nature he is never slow to bring nature and history together. He welcomes the theory of embryonic recapitulation developed by Serres and looked upon favourably by many including Darwin, Agassiz and Haeckel. Nature itself teaches man the necessity of effort and perseverance. Pity, compassion, even a degree of reflection exist among animals. The time has come to describe "la psychologie du règne animal avant l'homme".(67) Consciousness is not the exclusive property of man and man too must come to recognise the power of his own unconscious mind. Quinet compares the evolutionary process in nature and in history with a man awakening from

a deep sleep and passing from unconsciousness to consciousness. Evolution does not leave us in the presence of nature "red in tooth and claw". The very theories which led others to despair come in Quinet's work to serve the cause of justice and order. The study of nature reinforces his belief in spirit, freedom and the individual:

Je vois le travail incessant de siècle en siècle,  
pour faire jaillir une intelligence libre. Tous  
les temps, tous les mondes y mettent la main.  
Autant de degrés pour monter jusqu'au sanctuaire  
de l'esprit. (68)

Although this seems at first sight a confident assertion there are two aspects of Quinet's evolutionary theories which could be said to significantly restrict freedom. The first of these concerns his attitude towards the intermingling of races. In *La Création* he tells us, in a manner reminiscent of Taine, that each race possesses "une faculté maîtresse, un organe dominant", which lends it superiority in a particular sphere of human activity. (69) He nonetheless looks favourably upon the mixing of races and cites the United States as an illustration. (70) It rapidly becomes apparent, however, that what is meant by this is a mingling of peoples who belong to the same race. (71) This leads to a surprising conclusion. Quinet now believes that the Napoleonic Empire was destined to fail since it tried to unite peoples belonging to different racial groupings. (72)

Yet the most significant differences which separate peoples are not so much racial as temporal. The history of mankind is envisaged as an embryo which passes through different stages. At a certain moment in this process a given form ceases to develop:

L'histoire [...] n'est rien autre chose que le  
spectacle de ces formes organisées qui s'arrêtent,  
se fixent et se pétrifient, l'une après l'autre,  
sur le chemin du temps. (73)

When viewed in this light the natives of Africa can be said to correspond to the Stone Age, modern Russia to fifteenth century Europe and Islam to the time of Moses. Religions, institutions and peoples are all capable of being understood in this fashion. The Papacy can conveniently be dismissed as a rare survivor of theocracy, a form of social organisation belonging firmly to the past. In some instances, the temporal gap is so great that as a result certain peoples stand irrevocably condemned by the march of history:

Des peuples placés à des degrés absolument  
différents sur l'échelle du temps ne peuvent  
produire ensemble une forme nouvelle de société.

Le moyen âge, là où il existe, ne peut, en restant moyen âge, épouser l'homme moderne. Le Peau-Rouge d'Amérique ne peut épouser la société anglo-saxonne. [...] L'intervalle de temps qui les sépare est trop grand, les esprits trop distants pour que l'union soit féconde. [...] La nature ne consent pas à brouiller ses dates et à confondre ses époques dans un anachronisme vivant. (74)

Here we have another clear illustration of the extent to which Quinet's faith in freedom needs to be interpreted in relation to history. There is, however, a more disturbing aspect to *La Création*. In chapter ten of the eleventh book we are told that mankind does not escape the consequences of the law of natural selection. At this point Quinet defends a position which is, to say the least, morally ambivalent in view of his reiterated rejection of any identification of might with right:

Les petits Etats n'ont-ils pas lutté contre les grands, et ceux-ci entre eux, Jérusalem contre Babylone, l'Abyssine contre l'Egypte, la Grèce contre la Perse, la Sabine contre Rome, comme les variétés de la même espèce, jusqu'à ce que la moins douée ait été absorbée ou supplantée par l'espèce supérieure? (75)

The Russian revolutionary Tkachev commented upon these lines in an article which he wrote on *La Création*. Quinet "an eternal worshipper of freedom and irreconcilable enemy of despotism" had been led astray by his acceptance of social Darwinism. Tkachev argued that the analogy between nature and history was both false and dangerous. Human society could not be explained by laws similar to the laws of nature. We might add that as in the case of intolerance, history, the vehicle of freedom, reveals itself to be capable in certain circumstances of oppressing the freedom of particular groups or individuals. (76)

NOTES

- (1) *La Révolution*, vol. 2, p. 364.
- (2) *Révision* (1851), *Oeuvres complètes*, Hachette, n.d., vol. XIV, pp. 453-5.
- (3) *Le Siège de Paris*, p. 251.
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- (5) *La République*, p. 14. "La déraison de la Commune de Paris" was a consequence of the Assembly's failure to accept wholeheartedly the Republic. The population which had withstood the siege with such heroism sank into political apathy when it became obvious that the Republic was still only provisional. There then arose a mood which encouraged insurrection and produced the circumstances in which it might take place. (*Le Siège de Paris*, p. 146)
- (6) *Le Siège de Paris*, p. 204.
- (7) *Aux Paysans*, *Oeuvres complètes*, Pagnerre, vol. 11, p. 430.
- (8) *La République*, p. 19.
- (9) *Ibid.*, p. 302.
- (10) *Ibid.*, p. 304.
- (11) *Ibid.*, pp. 303-4.
- (12) *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- (13) *Le Siège de Paris*, p. 267. Cf. *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 71 and *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 4, p. 428.
- (14) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 209.
- (15) *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- (16) *Ibid.*, pp. 209-10 and 100.
- (17) *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- (18) Ed. de Pressensé, op. cit., p. 520.
- (19) *La Révolution*, vol. 2, p. 174.
- (20) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 390.
- (21) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 197. On the distinction between freedom and religion see below chapter six.
- (22) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 3, p. 118.
- (23) *L'Enseignement du peuple*, p. 57.
- (24) *Révision*, pp. 437-8.
- (25) *Marnix*, p. 72.

- (26) *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, pp. 188-9.
- (27) *Marnix*, p. 80.
- (28) *La Révolution française*, p. 170.
- (29) *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- (30) *Ibid.*, p. 195.
- (31) See O. Bořtos, "Paul Bataillard. Un ami oublié d'Edgar Quinet", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1932, p. 225.
- (32) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 2, pp. 250-1.
- (33) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 58-9.
- (34) *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, p. 387.
- (35) *Ibid.*, p. 190. Cf. *Le Siècle de Paris*, p. 72.
- (36) Powers, op. cit., p. 149.
- (37) *La Révolution religieuse*, p. 201.
- (38) *Ibid.*, pp. 167-9.
- (39) *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- (40) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 344. For a full discussion and detailed bibliography of Darwinism in France see Y. Corny, *L'Introduction du darwinisme en France au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Vrin, 1974.
- (41) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 342.
- (42) See Quinet's *Discours sur Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Pagnerre, vol. 2, pp. 339-42.
- (43) According to *Le Génie des religions* (pp. 10-11) evolution in nature ceased once man had emerged: "Enfin, l'homme s'élève, et tout rentre dans la paix. Lasse de ce dernier travail, la nature retombe dans l'ancienne immobilité; elle n'enfante plus rien; son dernier fils a épuisé ses entrailles. Plus d'organisations, plus de combinaisons nouvelles".
- (44) Among the Saint-Simonians Michel Chevalier developed a rather similar mixture of myth and scientific theory in the early 1830's. See Robert Aron's preface to P.-J. Proudhon, *Portrait de Jésus*, Paris, Pierre Horay, 1951, pp. 25-6.
- (45) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 14.
- (46) See H. Höffding, "The Influence of the conception of evolution on modern philosophy", in *Darwinism and Modern Science*, ed. A. Seward, London, Cambridge U.P., 1909, pp. 446-64.
- (47) *La Création*, Paris, Librairie internationale, 1870, vol. 1, p. 95.



- (48) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 93. Cf. the comments of E. Véron: "Pour lui [Quinet], la *loi* au lieu de naître de l'observation des faits, leur est antérieure [...] il [Quinet] croit encore à la loi ontologique de la science d'autrefois, il croit à l'axiome générateur du XVIIIe siècle, célébré par M. Taine. Il cherche dans la loi, non le résultat intellectuel, mais la cause originelle des choses et des faits, la puissance créatrice qu'invoquaient les déistes qui, comprenant l'impossibilité de faire intervenir leur Dieu dans les choses de ce monde, s'en remettaient du soin de la création à l'action des lois générales, système aussi puéril que commode dont on a singulièrement abusé jusqu'à ces derniers temps". "La Création par M. Edgar Quinet", *Revue des cours littéraires de la France et de l'étranger*, August, 1870, p. 590.
- (49) *La Création*, vol. 1, p. 292.
- (50) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 25. Cf. Véron's comments: "L'auteur, emporté par son imagination, s'abandonne sans défiance à toutes les témérités des généralisations trop hâtives. Il lui suffit de quelques analogies plus ou moins constatées, pour établir aussitôt des lois dont la fragilité ne résiste pas à l'examen le plus superficiel". (p. 592)
- (51) *La Création*, vol. 2, p. 114.
- (52) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 299.
- (53) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 225.
- (54) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 166 and 167.
- (55) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 184.
- (56) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 146.
- (57) Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 277 ff.
- (58) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 147.
- (59) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 277.
- (60) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 211.
- (61) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 104.
- (62) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 258 and 259. In *La Création* Quinet goes much further than in his earlier work in welcoming technological progress.
- (63) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 243-4 and 247.
- (64) Ibid., vol. 1, p. 342.
- (65) Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 338-9.
- (66) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 398 and 399.
- (67) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 21.

- (68) *La Création*, vol. 2, p. 296.
- (69) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 294.
- (70) Herbert Spencer was later to tell reporters in America that he inferred from "biological truths" that a mixture of varieties of Aryan stock in the U.S.A. would eventually produce "a finer type of man than has hitherto existed". Quoted by R. Hofstadter in *Social Darwinism in American Thought. 1860-1895*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964, p. 34.
- (71) *La Création*, vol. 2, p. 381.
- (72) But this is not all. Quinet suggests that entire races are unable to avoid decadence: "[les Arabes] ne peuvent et ne veulent s'allier à aucun des rameaux florissants des races humaines". The Jews fare no better. (vol. 2, pp. 384 and 385)
- (73) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 341.
- (74) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 287. Quinet at this point offers the greatest sympathy for peoples in decline. There is no question of his welcoming their exploitation. He suggests rather that they should as much as possible be protected from the outside world.
- (75) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 349-50.
- (76) Quoted by F. Venturi in *Roots of Revolution*, New York, Universal Library, 1966, p. 393.

## CHAPTER SIX

Any discussion of Quinet's religious ideas after 1851 hinges upon the questions raised in *La Révolution*. In Chapter Five we described how this work constituted a remarkable departure from his earlier position. When judged from the standpoint of the 1860's the Revolution was declared to have failed.<sup>(1)</sup> It had not succeeded because it had not brought about a real religious transformation. But what did Quinet mean by this? When he discussed the civil war in the Vendée he made the following comment: "[...] le catholicisme n'aurait pu être vaincu que par une autre forme du christianisme".<sup>(2)</sup> Many readers, with more than slight justification, concluded that he regretted that France had not become Protestant in 1789.<sup>(3)</sup> And yet elsewhere in *La Révolution* he states quite categorically that it was already too late in 1789 for France to reform her religion. In the light of this ambiguity we must ask what was Quinet's attitude to Protestantism, and to the Christian faith in general, at this time?

One point is quite clear. Quinet, while attacking Catholicism, always distinguished between Christianity and the Roman Church. The same could not really be said of Michelet. The 1868 preface to the *Histoire de la Révolution française* leaves the reader in no doubt as to the profoundly anti-Christian character of the Revolution. Quinet's interpretation of the Revolution as a failure in religious terms was unlikely to appeal to his friend. In fact it produced a split between them.<sup>(4)</sup> In a letter of 1865 Michelet challenged his friend's thesis:

Je n'accepte pas [...] que le catholicisme n'eût pu être vaincu que par une autre forme chrétienne ... "La Révolution ne put s'appuyer d'aucune Eglise?" Mais pourquoi? Parce qu'elle était une Eglise.<sup>(5)</sup>

The point at issue is clarified in a subsequent letter:

Sur la Révolution nous différons. En quoi? Surtout en ce que je vous marquais en 1865, n'ayant lu qu'à moitié, dans mon amitié passionnée. Vous avez sans doute conservé cette lettre. Elle parlait du culte de la Révolution, *non chrétien*.

C'est le point capital, sans parler de nuances politiques. Celle-ci n'est pas moins que le Christianisme que vous gardez, que je supprime. *L'épaisseur du Christianisme*, rien de plus, rien de moins; à travers, nous nous entendons.<sup>(6)</sup>

In reality divergences had appeared between the two thinkers at a much earlier date.

In *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* Quinet had stressed the Christian nature of the Revolution: "Dans le vrai, l'esprit de la Révolution française est de s'identifier avec le principe du Christianisme".<sup>(7)</sup> Michelet's *Journal* for June 3, 1845, already contained serious reservations:

Mickiewicz, Quinet, Bouvet partent du vrai christianisme comme identique à la Révolution: danger de ramener, malgré l'interprétation philosophique, beaucoup d'idées au Moyen Age. [...] Moi [...] je montrerai que la Révolution a réhabilité l'antiquité et dépassé infiniment et l'antiquité et le christianisme.<sup>(8)</sup>

We must be careful, however, to avoid drawing the conclusion that Quinet is saying the same thing in *La Révolution* as in *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* simply on the grounds that in each case Michelet discerned too much sympathy for Christianity.

In fact *La Révolution* does not claim that the Revolution was identical with the Christian message. To be sure the birth of freedom in the Jeu de Paume is likened to the Christ child in the stable at Bethlehem. We would be unwise however to read too much significance into this comparison. In reality the Revolution is now more closely identified with the cause of philosophy than with religion.<sup>(9)</sup> In 1789 the French people aspired to go beyond Christianity:

Soit enthousiasme, soit audace, les Français avaient méprisé tous les degrés intermédiaires du christianisme; ils avaient prétendu s'élancer du fond même des superstitions romaines jusqu'à la possession de la vérité nue, sans passer par aucune des tentatives de réforme où d'autres nations s'étaient arrêtées. Ils ont voulu franchir d'un seul bond l'enceinte, non-seulement du catholicisme, mais du christianisme. Dans ce gigantesque effort, l'intervalle s'étant trouvé trop grand, ils ont manqué la route.<sup>(10)</sup>

Upon more than one occasion after 1851 a more critical evaluation of Christianity is apparent.<sup>(11)</sup> In a letter of 1852 Quinet expresses approval of Michelet's position on the question of grace:

Combien vous avez raison de voir dans le christianisme le principe de la grâce. C'est assurément le fond du dogme et le seul côté qui se soit montré dans l'histoire. Le principe de l'égalité a brillé un moment dans l'Évangile, avec les légendes du fils du charpentier; mais ces légendes ont été immédiatement obscurcies par la théologie orientale; le principe de la grâce est à la fois l'âme de l'Église et l'âme du moyen âge qui se prolonge jusqu'à nos jours; on ne peut sortir de l'idée de la grâce sacerdotale sans sortir du christianisme sacerdotal. Tous ceux

qui ont cherché l'idéal de l'égalité dans les légendes de l'Évangile, ont fait le contraire de l'Église; ils ont été dans le sens des hérétiques ou des révolutionnaires; ils ont voulu refaire le christianisme. (12)

*Merlin l'Enchanteur* provides further evidence. This work certainly abounds in Christian symbolism. Is Merlin the new Christ? He too has his Passion. He is imprisoned, denied by Jacques and mocked by the peoples whom he served. (13) The text however indicates that Merlin is no orthodox believer. Upon one occasion Merlin appears to have been converted to Christianity; the reader, however, is informed that the central character is in fact deluding himself. A similar example occurs later in the story. Merlin and Jacques witness the scene - already described in *Prométhée* - of the liberation of the Titan by two archangels. "Ils ne sont pas de ma légion", is the magician's comment. Yet he qualifies this remark by adding "Nous allons tous au même but". (14) This statement suggests that, as in the 1830's, Quinet is desirous to underline the unity of different faiths despite their formal differences. Perhaps even more significant in the context of the exile period is the wish in some way to reconcile a naïve expression of religious faith with a much more philosophical perception of the divine:

[Jacques et Merlin] continuèrent de s'exalter à l'envi. [...] D'extase en extase, tous deux se trouvèrent aux deux extrémités opposées du monde intellectuel. Ils se répondaient sans se soucier de s'entendre. Mais, qu'importe? Leurs langues étaient disparates, leurs coeurs se comprenaient parfaitement. [...]

- O incompréhensible abîme!
- O vierge Marie!
- O infini!
- O Jésus. (15)

Merlin's own faith is quite compatible with the exercise of reason and the intellectual faculties. He may differ from Jacques but we should not question the sincerity of his beliefs. No one, we are told, was less superstitious than Merlin: "Mais le mot de Dieu n'était jamais prononcé devant lui sans l'émouvoir". (16) The book shows that on fundamental religious matters Merlin is in agreement with the views held by Prester John. The latter is in charge of a monastery which is a visible representation of a tolerant syncretism. Within its walls prayers are spoken which combine invocations addressed to Brahma, Jehovah, Allah and Jesus. Yet Merlin's own faith transcends existing religions. Like Prester John, his God is the *Deus Ignotus* which cannot be identified with

the divinity worshipped by any of the transient faiths of history.<sup>(17)</sup> Jesus is but one enchanter among many.<sup>(18)</sup> None the less the presence of God continues to be felt. In his tomb, in death, Merlin is addressed by the *Deus Absconditus*.<sup>(19)</sup>

But if *Merlin* cannot be said to attribute absolute value to Christianity there can be no doubt that in other works of this period Quinet calls for the adoption of Unitarianism. At first sight this is surprising since in both *Le Christianisme et la Révolution française* and *L'Enseignement du peuple* it had been clearly stated that the conversion of France to Protestantism was really out of the question.

Quinet was in fact but one of a number of French intellectuals who expressed a sympathetic interest in Protestantism during and after the Second Empire. The reasons why Protestantism found favour were varied but a list of those interested includes Henri Martin, Carnot, Charton, Ménard, Pelletan, Sand, Prévost-Paradol and Renan. Certainly those Frenchmen who interpreted the Christian message as the liberation of man were unlikely to feel any affection for the Catholicism of the *Syllabus of Errors*. Not unnaturally they turned to a form of Christianity which respected the claims of individual conscience. Here they felt was a faith which was compatible with their commitment to political liberalism. In some instances, however, praise for the Protestant faith sprang not so much from sincere religious convictions as from motives of political expediency. In this case the argument might be said to run as follows: if the masses find it too difficult to live life in accordance with a purely secular morality let them become Protestants since no reasonable person can deny the superiority of Protestantism over Catholicism.

Channing's brand of Unitarianism aroused extensive interest in France at this time. Laboulaye, About, and Quinet's friend Bataillard were among those who were involved. The response to Channing was not, however, one of uncritical approval. Renan, for example, praised the merits of the American but maintained important reservations. Proudhon, on the other hand, dismissed Channing with a reference to "une logomachie américaine".<sup>(20)</sup> That Quinet should have favoured Unitarianism is not surprising. He had after all much appreciated New England Transcendentalism in its Emersonian form during the 1830's and 1840's. We should not, however, confuse his evident sympathy for Channing's ideas with an acceptance of the dogmatic postulates of organized Protestantism. Unitarianism after all began by opposing traditional forms of Calvinism and Emerson himself soon discovered that Unitarianism itself was a limiting force.

However, before we can draw any definite conclusions with regard to Quinet's "Protestantism" we need to pay attention to the manner in which he expressed his support for Unitarianism. The best example is to be found in the *Lettre à Sue*:

[...] s'il [l'unitarisme] conserve une ombre de l'antiquité chrétienne et s'il rassure par là l'esprit tremblant des peuples, de l'autre, il donne la main à la philosophie la plus hardie. En sorte qu'il semble tout préparé pour faire le pont sur lequel ils peuvent passer l'abîme sans vertige, sans crainte de s'y perdre, ni désir de retourner en arrière. L'Unitarisme n'est rien autre chose que la profession de foi du *Vicaire Savoyard* qui a été si longtemps l'âme de la révolution française. (21)

The impact of these lines is unambiguous: Unitarianism is not presented as the solution to the spiritual needs of modern man. It is a possible bridge between Catholicism on the one hand and the *templa serena* of philosophy on the other. It would be idle to pretend that Quinet is saying the same things as Colani, Ed. de Pressensée, Ch. Secrétan or Albert Réville. His attitude towards Protestantism is a reflection of his interpretation of history. "Le Protestantisme", he writes, "appartient au monde moderne". (22) The contribution made by the Reformation cannot be doubted but in the present, Protestants have the status of allies. Unitarianism appears as a halfway-house between religion and philosophy and as such suitable for those unable to travel further. The conclusion of *La Révolution religieuse* contains our author's message: "Sortez de la vieille Eglise, vous, vos femmes, vos enfants". (23) One obvious escape route is via "les formes les plus affranchies du christianisme". (24) For this reason Quinet looks favourably upon the introduction of the ideas of Channing into France.

"La philosophie sera toujours le partage des aristocrates" wrote Flaubert. (25) Has Quinet come to believe something similar? He certainly makes the point that only the most courageous can live by philosophy alone. The majority, on the other hand, require some form of positive religion since otherwise they will fall back into the clutches of Rome. *Les Révolutions d'Italie* contained numerous examples of how Italian philosophers suffered because the masses remained hostile to freedom due to the influence of the Church. Yet it is unfair to accuse Quinet of renouncing his oft repeated hatred of the use of religion as a means of social control. This was something which he always repudiated. The fact, none the less, remains that Unitarianism has indeed the status of an

escape route. The best form of religion is that which comes closest to "la liberté philosophique".<sup>(26)</sup> Moreover, it is important to realise the extent to which the situation prevailing in France during the 1850's and 1860's marks a continuation of the religious problems of the Revolution. The predicament of the French people after 1789 was fundamentally the same:

Il fallait que la philosophie transformât l'ancienne religion, ou que la philosophie devînt elle-même la religion du peuple nouveau. [...] Un système d'idées pures peut-il servir d'aliment à un peuple? La vérité toute nue, supposé qu'on l'eût trouvé, peut-elle véritablement suffire aux multitudes? Cela s'est-il vu ou se verra-t-il jamais.<sup>(27)</sup>

In 1874 Frédéric de Rougemont looked back over Quinet's works and commented perceptively upon the religious issues debated in *La Révolution*. It is interesting that de Rougemont, a Protestant, far from seeking to minimise the differences between Quinet's thought and Protestantism chooses to stress the change which has taken place in our author's wider evaluation of religion in relation to philosophy:

[le protestantisme] n'est à ses yeux [de Quinet] que la transition entre la foi et la raison, et sa pensée est qu'un peuple peut être renouvelé sans une foi nouvelle par la seule liberté. Erreur fatale qu'il avait autrefois rejetée et à laquelle il est revenu vers la fin de sa carrière.<sup>(28)</sup>

De Rougemont is correct. Quinet does make this very point: "Il n'y a au monde que la liberté ou une foi nouvelle pour renouveler les hommes".<sup>(29)</sup> However, by making this assertion he complicates our understanding of what he means by a religious revolution. Upon numerous occasions we have seen how political revolutions are interpreted in relation to religious ideas, as the consequences of earlier religious revolutions. Neither have we lacked examples of how Quinet sought a religious transformation in the present. In *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* he had anticipated that a new Reformation would soon dawn. This preoccupation is not absent from his later work. In *La République*, for example, the question of how to prevent the sons of reactionaries from emulating their fathers elicits the following response: "Un dieu nouveau serait seul capable d'opérer ce prodige".<sup>(30)</sup> Yet there is also evidence which substantiates de Rougemont's point. Freedom is the content of both religious and political revolutions; we are dealing with different modes of expression of the same reality:



Au treizième siècle, la liberté se montre avec les Albigeois [...] Plus tard la liberté s'est appelée Réforme [...] Au dix-huitième siècle, la liberté prend la forme de la philosophie; elle ose paraître sans déguisements, en 89, dans la politique [...] De nos jours, la liberté reparaît. Les [...] hommes du passé l'appellent radicalisme, et sous ce nom de guerre conspirent à l'anéantir.<sup>(31)</sup>

We may now turn to the wider question of the evolution of Quinet's thought after the Second Republic. We are immediately struck by a strong element of continuity. Freedom and individuality retain their dominant position; the power of mind or spirit is still considered to be paramount. There are, however, significant differences. One of these is evidently the desire to emphasise the primacy of philosophy over religion. Of equal importance, however, is the interest in natural science which we find in *La Création* and *L'Esprit nouveau*. These works contain a theory of myth and religion which differs markedly from that developed in *Le Génie des religions*.

Quinet now believes that ancient myths and religions are to be understood in relation to geology and natural history. When we examine myths what we discover is "la mémoire transformée et le retentissement des époques géologiques jusqu'à la fin de l'âge pliocène".<sup>(32)</sup> The Greek myths have the status of a pre-scientific language which modern man must decode. What were the labours of Hercules but a mythical transposition of primitive man's struggle with prehistoric creatures? According to *L'Esprit nouveau* the essence of primitive religion was fear. The animals which threatened human life were worshipped as divine. Who in 1875 could still hold to the theories of a Ballanche, a Schelling or a Creuzer concerning "la sagesse d'un peuple primitif"?<sup>(33)</sup> Gone are Quinet's earlier speculations concerning the relationship between nature and the idea of God. We have entered the age of Max Müller and left behind the age of Schelling and Creuzer. In *La Création* we learn how the Rig Veda contained the source of all subsequent developments in religion:

[...] incarnation, sacrifice, dieu enfant dans la crèche des bergers, dieu descendu sur terre, fils de l'homme, immortel chez les mortels, dieu triple en naissant, sauveur, médiateur, pacificateur. Si les langues occidentales sont renfermées en germe dans l'aryenne, les religions ne sont-elles pas aussi visiblement enfermées dans ce premier culte du foyer.<sup>(34)</sup>

According to *Le Génie des religions* it was the idea of God which in the final analysis determined all aspects of life and conduct within a given society. In *La Création*, on the other hand, the emphasis is placed

differently so as to cast doubt upon the creative dynamism of the idea of God:

Les dieux étant donnés, j'ai cherché [dans *Le Génie des religions*] à en déduire les hommes et les institutions. Le contraire peut également être tenté: les institutions étant posées et les hommes connus, en déduire les dieux. (35)

Nevertheless Quinet's later thought does not necessarily mark a break with his earlier ideas, provided, that is, that we are willing to extend the scope of the idea of God so as to include the notion of God as a cosmic force identified in turn with love.

The lectures of the 1840's had abounded in references to Spirit as a life giving power. Spirit found expression by acting through the minds of individuals, collective entities or "la conscience universelle du genre humain". (36) "L'Esprit" was the human spirit but only in so far as the latter struggled to participate in the divine life. In chapter four we suggested that during the 1840's Spirit in this sense corresponded to Quinet's idea of God. This is best illustrated by the following lines from the last lecture of *L'Ultramontanisme*:

Esprit de grandeur et de force, Esprit d'avenir, qui n'es pas tout renfermé dans Rome, mais qui vis aussi, qui fermentes à ce moment dans le coeur de toutes les races, qui débordes aujourd'hui, comme un fleuve après les pluies d'automne, par delà toute forme connue, toute Eglise particulière, tout symbole ancien et nouveau [...] apprends-nous, donc, enfin, seulement à ne plus nous haïr! (37)

The correspondence of the 1850's reveals a persistent reluctance on Quinet's behalf to draw a sharp dividing line between the human and the divine. He refers for example to "la divinité de l'âme humaine" and also to "l'esprit humain et divin qui meut le monde depuis trois siècles". (38) Spirit, however, has ceased to be capitalised and it generally has the meaning of the human spirit acting in history rather than the presence of the Holy Spirit. On one level this modification could be explained in terms of a change in style: the tone appropriate to the "College pulpit" does not suit the isolated life of the exile. Yet this change is surely indicative of something deeper.

In Chapter Five we pointed to the secularisation of Quinet's understanding of history, as witnessed in the article "Philosophie de l'histoire de France". The lectures delivered at the Collège de France suggested that man knew God as the indwelling of spirit in the individual

soul. After 1851, however, we discern a movement away from a traditional, biblical vocabulary and style towards a perception of the guiding principle of nature and history in a more philosophical and scientific mode.<sup>(39)</sup>

Perhaps we could put it like this: the idea of God suitable for modern man is neither the personal Creator, nor a deified humanity nor even the Spirit of the 1840's. It is the life force which is responsible for evolution in nature and progress in history and which in the final analysis guarantees the harmony of the universe. This cosmic principle is Reason; but it is also, and above all, Love.<sup>(40)</sup>

Nowhere is the importance of love more evident than in *Merlin l'Enchanteur*. Merlin loves Viviane. She symbolises Spring, nature, beauty, while he is the offspring of a union between the devil and the pious Seraphine. Merlin grows up with a divided nature, experiencing within himself the conflicts between paganism and Christianity, spirit and matter, love and desire, past and future. The good which he does stems principally from his love for Viviane. Love is the source of justice, hope, sincerity and pity. Love stands firm in face of death. Merlin's magical powers have their source in his love. Knowledge without love is powerless: "Si je n'aimais pas, malgré ma science puisée auprès de Taliesin, je ne pourrais rien de plus que les autres".<sup>(41)</sup>

The course of true love does not, however, run smooth. Merlin and Viviane separate after a disagreement. Subsequently Viviane is tempted by the thought of death and Merlin loses his magic powers. Perhaps Merlin sought in Viviane a form of love which she was incapable of providing: "J'appelais retenue, sainteté, virginité ce qui n'était, chez toi, qu'impossibilité d'aimer".<sup>(42)</sup> Merlin, never the most constant of God's creatures, is inclined to more terrestrial forms of passion. "Homme, j'aime à la manière des hommes" he declares.<sup>(43)</sup> The enchanter encounters a goodly number of earthly beauties but he comes to recognise that none can be the equal of Viviane. What could be more noble than to desire the impossible, to seek the ideal beauty of Viviane?<sup>(44)</sup> Earthly women are frail, fickle creatures in comparison. This Merlin learns to his cost.

Merlin eventually decides to look again for Viviane. She represents a love which transcends the mutability of all things. However, he is unable to find his beloved and he sinks into a despair worthy of Ahasvérus. In addition, he loses the power to work his enchantments; he has become "l'enchanteur désenchanté". His thoughts turn to death since no hope of finding Viviane remains. Merlin, the friend of mankind, the defender of

the weak and the oppressed becomes a misanthrope. Finally, however, this unhappy period draws to a close and the loved ones are reunited and live together in a magic tower cut off from the rest of mankind. This tower is also Merlin's tomb and as such it is the symbol which dominates the latter half of the second volume. On one level this undoubtedly represents the fate of Quinet and his wife in exile ignored by a decadent world. Beyond this however, these pages constitute a meditation upon life, death and immortality. Love triumphs over death; and Formose, the child of Merlin and Viviane, is born in the tomb. Hope springs eternal; Eros overcomes Thanatos. In Merlin's words "Je me ris de la mort; elle est venue, et c'est moi qui l'ai ensevelie".<sup>(45)</sup>

Merlin's religion is a religion of love. "[...] tu crois à l'amour?" asks Satan. "C'est là ma foi", replies Merlin.<sup>(46)</sup> Love, however, needs to be tempered by wisdom.<sup>(47)</sup> Love is associated with all which Quinet reveres. In a just society love is the bond which unites ruler and ruled. Love alone is able to reconcile the claims of freedom with those of equality. Love is the source of hope. The religion of love is a faith which values the future. The poet becomes a prophet; "[...] l'avenir s'écoule de mes lèvres" declares Merlin.<sup>(48)</sup> Love is the source of poetry.<sup>(49)</sup> It is the force which powers the creative imagination - we are shown Merlin in his tomb composing the great works of French literature subsequently copied by mere mortals. Art itself, according to *L'Esprit nouveau*, may be described as "une dépendance du grand domaine de l'amour".<sup>(50)</sup>

But love cannot exist in the absence of freedom, and love itself serves as a liberating force. In *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, Quinet describes how a transformation of society was wrought by love and the art of the troubadours:

Emancipation réelle de l'esclave par l'amour  
de celle à laquelle il appartient, instinct  
avoué de fraternité sociale, égalité des âmes,  
tout est contenue dans ces épousailles in-  
visibles de la noble dame et de l'humble serf  
[...] La femme moderne est sortie de l'inertie  
païenne; elle a la première plongé ses regards  
sur l'abîme des classes déchues.<sup>(51)</sup>

Love is a regenerative force capable of transforming societies, nations and peoples. Even a Caliban, the meanest of creatures will respond to the message of love. Jacques Bonhomme too may be redeemed. He grows wise in the shadow of Merlin's tomb and at the close of the novel is about to marry - out of love of course - the daughter of Jonathan le Yankee.

But whilst the importance of love in Quinet's later thought is unquestionable our discussion thus far has begged the notoriously difficult question of how to define love. By "amour" does Quinet mean Epithemia, Eros, Philia or Agape? Even the most eminent modern scholars have failed to reach agreement on the true nature of the relationship between the Greek Eros and the Agape of the New Testament. Anders Nygren considered that the two concepts had little in common whereas Paul Tillich sought to unite them. (53)

Quinet was fully aware of the role played by Platonism and Neoplatonism in the development of Christian thought. His own theory of love, however, has more in common with the Greek doctrine of Eros than with the Agape of the New Testament if we accept that the latter may be defined as "the redeeming love of God shown in his action of forgiveness and redemption in Jesus Christ". (54) In Quinet's later works love has more the status of a cosmic force. This, however, is not to deny the existence of points of contact between the two conceptions. In the character of Merlin, for example, we find examples of how love takes the form of what might be termed a sacrificial, unselfish giving. (55) Love may itself be interpreted as an expression of spirit, of the ultimate power which sustains the universe. It is clear, however, that in Quinet's case human love is understood in relation to this general power rather than being understood as a participation in the love of God for man revealed and imparted in Jesus Christ. (56)

Love is "le seul des anciens dieux qui vive encore comme au premier jour d'Uranus et de Saturne". (57) Human love is understood in relation to a general cosmic pattern wherein love is interpreted as the dynamic principle. Quinet stands within a tradition which runs from Parmenides and Plato to the Renaissance Platonists. Love is a cosmic principle, the creative power which dissipates chaos. Our attention is explicitly drawn to the similarities between this theory and certain aspects of Greek thought which we find in Hesiod's *Theogony* and in the Orphic cosmogony:

Hésiode et les anciens étaient plus près que nous de la vérité, lorsqu'ils faisaient naître les notions morales, non du calcul, mais de l'amour universel. Celui-ci, antérieur aux dieux, le plus beau des dieux immortels, étaient à leurs yeux le créateur de toutes choses. (...) Mêlée à chaque créature, cette force cosmogonique, âme et foyer de la vie universelle, n'est-elle pas devenue trop étrangère à nos conceptions scientifiques de

la vie? [...] Accordez-moi [...] que ce qui a dissipé, à l'origine, le chaos, brisé le premier oeuf du monde, produit et varié les espèces, éveillé la conscience individuelle, créé l'univers animé, évoqué dans chaque être le génie intérieur, n'a pas été une maladie ou une névrose de la nature vivante. (58)

Even in nature love cannot be explained exclusively in terms of desire. Animals and birds seek to mate with the most beautiful example of their species. But this is not merely the unconscious desire for the self-preservation of the species through its fittest members. Quinet argues that the discoveries of modern science have taught us to discern in sexual selection among animals and birds "la préoccupation du beau, et une sorte d'esthétique inconsciente". (59) Among human beings love is not just a quest for immortality through procreation. Two lovers aspire to wholeness, to unity but also to moral goodness. Their love accords them a liberation from time. They transcend the sufferings of the moment and enter into contact with a more profound reality. The purpose of love extends beyond the reproduction of the species. Love between a man and a woman implies their shared desire for the future to be better than the present. When two people choose one another as partners out of love "ils rentrent dans la loi universelle qui a créé le monde animé". (60)

We might say that as Plato in the *Symposium* contrasts Diotima's theory of love with the views previously presented by Aristophanes so Quinet conceives of love as desire but more importantly as the love of beauty, wisdom, goodness and truth. Love, however, is active and creative rather than contemplative. Love is above all the power which sustains the cosmos and it is in relation to this force that we must understand man's moral sense and his idea of justice:

Je crois apercevoir [...] que la Justice est née de l'amour et qu'il y en a un premier germe inconscient dans toute créature vivante. [...] Je m'obstine à penser que la même force qui tient les mondes en équilibre, descendue dans l'esprit de l'homme, y devient équité, justice, sentiment moral. (61)

The moral order, therefore, like the natural order, is based upon love. For this reason to behave morally is not just to conform to the laws of a given society. It is to be in harmony with the order of nature. Morality is not a matter of self interest but of cosmic progress. Those who pursue the just course cannot by any means be assured of happiness or success but Quinet believes that we should not be downcast by the apparent victory of evil over good. Mankind may benefit even if

the individual suffers. In this struggle man and nature are united; there exists "une force universelle cosmogonique qui soutient la vérité dans l'homme".<sup>(62)</sup> In his search for truth and sincerity man has the support of "la force accumulée de toutes les vérités inconscientes qui soutiennent l'univers".<sup>(63)</sup>

Love may be identified with that force which Quinet refers to as "la vie universelle". But what is this power? In *La Création* there is no *fiat lux* no first cause, no creation *ex nihilo*. It is indeed difficult to speak of there ever having been a beginning in the Biblical sense:

Où sont les origines de la vie? elles reculent à mesure que nous croyons les saisir; elles semblent se confondre avec les origines du globe. Dans la première effluve de matière, peut-être se trouvaient déjà les semences ardentes des êtres à venir.<sup>(64)</sup>

In both *La Création* and *Merlin* there is evidence to suggest that Quinet favoured the nebular hypothesis. Life is understood as a cosmic force:

[la vie] n'a pas surgi à telle époque, à telle couche du terrain; mais elle appartient à l'univers; elle est de nature cosmique. Semée dans les espaces du monde, recueillie dans les flancs des nébuleuses, elle a voyagé avec elles de cieus en cieus.<sup>(65)</sup>

Or again:

La vie n'est pas limitée à un point de l'espace ou de la durée. [...] Ce n'est pas une planète seule qui l'a produite; un tel effort n'appartient pas à un corps céleste en particulier. Pour enfanter le premier vivant, il a fallu autre chose qu'un astre détaché, morcelé dans un coin limité de la nature. Il a fallu l'effort de la nature entière, je veux dire de toute la masse nébuleuse ou plutôt de l'univers. Le premier vivant a son premier ancêtre dans l'infini.<sup>(66)</sup>

In Chapter Four we suggested that Quinet's God might best be understood in terms of the unfolding of a creative process. In the 1870's this still remains the case despite the fact that the cosmic power is now identified with love rather than with spirit. What is more, the key ideas of the 1840's - the value of change and creativity, the belief in immortality, the urge to the future - all reappear in the later writings and hence serve to underline the continuity of Quinet's thought.

"Je veux espérer contre toute espérance" cries Merlin.<sup>(67)</sup> Hope - or would it be more accurate to say faith? - requires an act of heroism in the dispiriting circumstances of exile. But what is hope if not the affirmation of a belief in the future and in man's capacity to bring this future into being? "L'avenir" continues to be a word of crucial importance

in Quinet's writings. Christ is "[le] fils de l'avenir"; Quinet's God remains in one sense the infinite possibilities of the future.<sup>(68)</sup> But there can be no future without freedom. This point is well made in *Les Esclaves*. As far as the slaves and gladiators are concerned the very idea of the future has become deprived of all meaning. It is "un mot vide et trompeur".<sup>(69)</sup> The loss of liberty is accompanied by the loss of a correct perception of time. The gladiators live exclusively in and for the present.<sup>(70)</sup> The seeds of rebellion are sown when the all-important words "liberté" and "avenir" reach the ears of the slaves although they had in fact been spoken with the sole intention of stirring up the Plebeians.<sup>(71)</sup>

But this theme of hope in the future leads us back to the central notion of love. What more concrete notion of hope could there be than the survival of Spartacus' son after his father's execution?<sup>(72)</sup> There is also Formose, the aptly named offspring of Merlin and Viviane who is born in the tomb of death. Furthermore we should not forget how in *L'Esprit nouveau* love between a man and a woman is understood in relation to the creation of a better future for mankind. The potentiality of the future lies in the figure of the child. In fact Quinet's plans for educational reform aim at much more than providing children with suitable instruction: "il s'agit de préparer celui qui doit guérir une société assez malade pour se frapper elle-même". The child embodies France's hope for the future: "[...] c'est bien un sauveur, un médiateur qu'il faut élever dans chaque homme, ou le monde périt".<sup>(73)</sup>

Quinet's later aesthetic theory is a further expression of this aspiration to the future. The artist continues the work of nature since the same force - love - operates in him as in the nature universe. Art is not an imitation of nature; art re-creates, perfects nature.<sup>(74)</sup> These ideas are by no means novel in Quinet's thought. During the 1830's he developed an aesthetic theory typical of metaphysical idealism. In *La Création*, however, his aim is to reconcile his earlier ideas with an acceptance of evolutionary theory. In so doing he underlines more than ever before the prophetic nature of art. Art is envisaged as a revelation of the future: "[...] l'art est le pressentiment des formes supérieures qui dorment encore dans le sein des choses actuelles".<sup>(75)</sup> By transforming nature, the artist participates in the future:

[...] l'homme par l'art, cherche, à son insu, à se placer d'avance dans le plan des oeuvres futures de la nature, à le pénétrer, à le pressentir, le réaliser. [...] Tout son art



n'est que la vision d'une créature qui perce  
d'avance les mystères des êtres encore en-  
veloppés dans les êtres actuels. (76)

Quinet does not respond warmly to the God of the Epicureans. The idea of "un Dieu éternellement oisif" holds no attraction for him. (77) He prefers to understand God as a cosmic power active in nature and in history. The presence of such a God does not, however, deprive man of responsibility. On the contrary, nature herself encourages us to act and to resist passivity:

De quelque nom que tu me nommes, Isis, Cybèle,  
Nature, Création, je ne me repose à aucun  
moment de la durée dans une quiétude inerte.  
Imite-moi.

Tout chez-moi est activité, mouvement, vie,  
ascension. Chaque espèce lutte contre un  
obstacle, et ce travail est la condition de  
son progrès.

N'espère pas, toi, seul avancer sans te  
mouvoir. (78)

In the 1870's, as in the 1840's, Quinet considers life as a continuing process of self-transformation. History and heredity certainly weigh heavily upon the individual but, within certain limits, the individual can choose to create his own character. In the final analysis he can transcend the restrictions which the past places upon his freedom. "Je ne me sens le serf d'aucun temps", declares Quinet in *L'Esprit nouveau*. (79)

Life is change and this means that we must not allow ourselves to be determined by our past. To copy the past is to imitate that which is terminated, that which is dead: "Qui se copie s'efface; qui ne se renouvelle pas se meurt". (80) Routine is mere repetition of the past and hence a denial of freedom, of the future. The free man will proceed otherwise:

Ce que j'ai été n'est point la règle de ce que  
je peux être; car chaque jour j'acquiers des  
forces que je n'avais pas. Je sens mon être qui  
s'accroît. Je ne me reposerai pas oisivement  
sur ce que j'ai fait. Je travaillerai à  
développer l'infini qui est en moi comme dans  
la nature entière. (81)

For the same reason Quinet is hostile to all narrow specialisation which stifles the creative spirit:

Ne devenons pas les esclaves de nos oeuvres,  
de quelque nature qu'elles soient; sachons les  
oublier nous-mêmes, pour ne pas nous pétrifier.  
La faculté qu'il importe de sauver la première  
est la faculté de croître et de grandir. (82)

Transformation and change involve suffering, perhaps even death. Quinet's works contain numerous examples of the sequence life - death -

rebirth. Society, the individual, art, nature, all are envisaged within the context of a process of self-transformation in which the cosmic force of universal life renews itself. Man, like all things, passes, but, like all things, he is reborn. Death need no longer be feared:

Qu'ai-je à craindre? Le sort de l'univers. Avec tout ce qui vit et respire, les mondes eux-mêmes se dissoudront pour renaître. Leur existence a ses limites marquées. Les soleils s'éteindront pour se rallumer. Demanderai-je pour moi seul un privilège qu'ils n'ont pas? Non, j'accepterai le sort commun à tous les êtres, vivre, mourir, pour revivre. (83)

On the evidence which we have examined thus far it would appear that a cosmic force, be it called love or universal life, is immanent in the universe. For this reason we are not surprised to encounter a reference to "le Verbe de la nature". (84) When Merlin tries to convert the devil he does not hand him the Bible. He produces instead "un extrait des principaux philosophes de la Nature". (85) This, however, should not be taken to mean that Quinet is identifying empirical nature directly with God. Yet at the same time there is no theistic belief in a Being transcending nature. (86) Quinet does not repeat the clear-cut repudiation of pantheism which he had included in the preface to *Prométhée*. In *La Création* we find no discussion of divine freedom or of divine love for the world in the Biblical sense. At all events Quinet's willingness to identify creation as he understands it with Cybele and Isis is unambiguous in its implications. Should we conclude that Quinet has adopted the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* after the manner of Spinoza and Giordano Bruno? There certainly are favourable references to the Dutch philosopher in *Merlin*. As far as Giordano Bruno is concerned we have only to open the relevant chapter of *Les Révolutions d'Italie*. Here Giordano Bruno is presented as a worthy precursor of Hegel. He it was who recognised the true import of the Copernican revolution and consequently freed philosophy from religion:

[...] Giordano Bruno proclame l'égalité du ciel et de la terre. Si l'enfer et le paradis disparaissent, ou plutôt s'ils se confondent, le Dieu n'est plus relégué dans un coin de la création; il est partout, en toutes choses; il n'est plus exilé à l'extrémité de l'univers. Ne le cherchez pas dans le firmament, il est en vous-même. (87)

We cannot, however, state with certainty that Quinet now identifies God with infinite substance of which all finite beings are modes. He quite simply does not work out the relationship between love and

materiality in a satisfactory manner. Similarities certainly exist between his views and the Spinozist *Deus sive natura*, but in the absence of cogent philosophical argument it would be unwise to carry them too far.

But might not Quinet also be said to be moving in the direction of the Bergson of *L'Evolution créatrice*? Both thinkers share a conception of God as life, action and freedom, as a power not distinct from the world. A well-known passage from *L'Evolution créatrice* brings out the similarities:

Si, partout, c'est la même espèce d'action qui s'accomplit, soit qu'elle se défasse, soit qu'elle tente de se refaire, j'exprime simplement cette similitude probable quand je parle d'un centre d'où les mondes jailliraient comme les fusées d'un immense bouquet, - pourvu qu'on ne donne pas ce centre pour une *chose* mais pour une continuité de jaillissement. Dieu, ainsi défini, n'a rien du tout fait; il est vie incessante, action, liberté. La création, ainsi conçue, n'est pas un mystère, nous l'expérimentons en nous dès que nous agissons librement. (88)

Both Quinet and Bergson respect the achievements of science whilst rejecting a narrow positivism; both assert the reality of spirit yet do not deny the reality of matter; both retain an element of finalism. Quinet, like Bergson, considers creation as a continuous process, a movement towards spirit and freedom which is also the emergence of consciousness.

In conclusion let us pay tribute to the astonishing vitality of Quinet's mind and to the remarkable capacity with which he absorbed material from many different disciplines. He was always eager to branch out into new fields of enquiry and in this respect it can certainly be said that he practised what he preached. But whilst being receptive to new information and to new theories Quinet never failed to relate them to his own major interests and by so doing impress upon them his own personal stamp.

NOTES

- (1) In fact this point had already been made in *Révision* (1851).
- (2) *La Révolution*, vol. 2, p. 56.
- (3) Confusion has persisted on this issue. Cf. H. Ben-Israel, *English Historians and the French Revolution*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1968, pp. 218-9 and G. Lefebvre, *La Naissance de l'historiographie moderne*, Paris, Flammarion, 1971, p. 207.
- (4) See S. Bernard-Griffiths, "Rupture entre Michelet et Quinet", in *Michelet cent ans après*, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1975, pp. 145-65.
- (5) Quoted by Mme Quinet in *Cinquante ans d'amitié. Michelet-Quinet (1825-1875)*, 2nd ed., Paris, Colin, 1903, p. 302.
- (6) *Ibid.*, p. 325.
- (7) *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 261.
- (8) J. Michelet, *op. cit.*, p. 604.
- (9) See *La Révolution*, vol. 2, p. 86.
- (10) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 526.
- (11) In *Les Esclaves* Quinet makes the point that to say that Christianity ended slavery is to ignore the fact that spiritual servitude survived the end of physical bondage. Moreover, in a private note published by Powers (*op. cit.*, p. 185) we find Quinet writing scathingly of Pauline Christianity.
- (12) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 1, pp. 13-14.
- (13) Up to a point Merlin's fate also recalls that of Napoleon, Spartacus, and Prometheus.
- (14) *Merlin l'Enchanteur*, 4th ed., Paris, Hachette, n.d., vol. 1, p. 482.
- (15) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 266, 267 and 268.
- (16) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 164.
- (17) Cf. *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 1, p. 97.
- (18) See *Merlin*, vol. 1, p. 418.
- (19) See *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 417-23.
- (20) Quoted by G. Weill in *L'Histoire de l'idée laïque en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Alcan, 1925, p. 143. Cf. Vacherot, *La Religion*, pp. 383 ff.
- (21) *Lettre à Sue*, p. 150. Quinet's attitude might with interest be compared with that of P. Larroque in his *Rénovation religieuse*, 3rd ed., Paris, Librairie internationale, 1864.

- (22) *L'Enseignement du peuple*, p. 69. See M. du Pasquier, op. cit., for a discussion of Quinet's relations with Swiss Protestants during his exile. See also M. Méry, *La Critique du christianisme chez Renouvier*, Paris, Vrin, 1952, vol. 2, p. 324.
- (23) *La Révolution religieuse*, p. 237.
- (24) *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- (25) Quoted by R. Bessède in *La Crise de la conscience catholique dans la pensée française à la fin du XIXe siècle*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1975, p. 99.
- (26) *Lettre à Sue*, p. 157.
- (27) *La Révolution*, vol. 1, p. 127.
- (28) Fr. de Rougemont, *Les Deux cités*, Paris, Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1874, vol. 2, p. 511.
- (29) *La Révolution*, vol. 1, p. 25.
- (30) *La République*, p. 233. *La Mort de la conscience humaine* also contained a reference to the need for a new God. This idea was not welcomed by Michelet. See S. Bernard-Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 159-60.
- (31) *L'Esprit nouveau*, pp. 119-20.
- (32) *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- (33) *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- (34) *La Création*, vol. 2, p. 84. Cf. L. Poliakov, *Le Mythe aryen*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1971.
- (35) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 229.
- (36) *L'Ultramontanisme*, p. 275.
- (37) *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- (38) *Lettres d'exil*, vol. 1, pp. 89 and 152.
- (39) Perhaps the term demythologisation would be more apt? The most obvious examples of this phenomenon are Quinet's reassessment of Napoleon and his reinterpretation of the Revolution. In *La Révolution* he emphasises the importance of the redistribution of property and in *L'Esprit nouveau* he explains that the Revolution served to confirm physiological changes which had already taken place. Moreover, after 1848 Quinet considers a genuine religious revolution to be out of the question in modern France. On this last point, however, the reader is left wondering what form such a religious revolution might take that would differ from Quinet's ideal of the French Republic as a secular state?
- (40) Quinet in *L'Esprit nouveau*, like Louis Ménard in his *Rêveries d'un païen mystique* is seeking to defend an ideal of love which seems threatened by the theories of Schopenhauer and Darwin. Cf. H. Peyre, op. cit., p. 379.

- (41) *Merlin*, vol. 1, p. 44.
- (42) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 45. It should be pointed out that in *Ahasvérus* and particularly in *Merlin* there is a clear desire on Quinet's behalf to include autobiographical detail of a sentimental nature alongside passages which tell of the great lovers of history, myth, legend and poetry. It is interesting to note that in a letter written to his mother in 1831 (*Correspondance*, vol. 2, p. 181) Quinet placed love at the centre of his experience of life: "[...]c'est l'amour, l'amour inextinguible, bien ou mal (faut-il le regretter), qui est le fond et la condition de ma vie". Cf. Quinet's discussion of Saint Theresa in *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, p. 188.
- (43) *Merlin*, vol. 2, p. 48.
- (44) Woman, according to *L'Esprit nouveau*, naturally worships truth and loves beauty. She is the consoler but also the inspirer of man. In *La République* Quinet rails against those who consider marriage from the point of view of pecuniary advantage. In a marriage of this type the wife loses her personality as a moral being and the consequence is adultery. Quinet - a supporter of divorce in such cases - insists that marriage must be based upon love. He remarks that during the Second Empire women were reduced to the status of frivolous, attractive objects. Under the Republic, however, woman has a religious task to fulfil: the regeneration of French society and the reconciliation of the conflicting forces within it. Cf. *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, pp. 100, 125, and 133. See J. Calo, *La Création de la femme chez Michelet*, Paris, Nizet, 1975.
- (45) *Merlin*, vol. 2, p. 330. Cf. J. Michelet, *L'Amour*, 2nd ed., Paris, Hachette, 1859, pp. 362-370.
- (46) *Merlin*, vol. 1. p. 396.
- (47) See *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 245, 250, 269, 287 and vol. 2, pp. 212, 361 and 442.
- (48) *Merlin*, vol. 1, p. 472.
- (49) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 230.
- (50) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 41.
- (51) *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, p. 85,
- (52) See A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, London, S.P.C.K., 1953 and D. D. Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, Welwyn, J. Nisbet, 1968.
- (53) In *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* Quinet refers to "les élancements d'Origène, qui tend la main au dix-neuvième siècle". (p. 61.)
- (54) Williams, op. cit., p. 2.
- (55) See *Merlin*, vol. 2, pp. 403-4.

- (56) See Williams, op. cit.,
- (57) *Merlin*, vol. 1, p. 33.
- (58) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 28. Cf. B. Juden, op. cit.
- (59) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 26.
- (60) Ibid., p. 33. The theme of the androgyne to which we referred in relation to *Ahasvérus* again occurs in *Merlin* (vol. 2, p. 200). The theme of the couple is considerably significant in Quinet's work (*Ahasvérus/Rachel, Merlin/Viviane, Spartacus/Cinthie*).
- (61) *L'Esprit nouveau*, pp. 52 and 54.
- (62) Ibid., p. 61.
- (63) Ibid., p. 63.
- (64) *La Création*, vol. 1, p. 220.
- (65) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 300. Cf. *Merlin*, vol. 1, p. 142.
- (66) *La Création*, vol. 2, pp. 303-4.
- (67) *Merlin*, vol. 1, p. 415. Cf. vol. 1, p. 413.
- (68) *Les Esclaves*, p. 357.
- (69) Ibid., p. 352.
- (70) Cf. *Merlin*, vol. 2, pp. 243 and 249.
- (71) Cf. *La Révolution*, vol. 1, pp. 11-111.
- (72) See *Les Esclaves*, p. 463.
- (73) *L'Enseignement du peuple*, p. 100. Cf. *Lettre à Sue*, p. 154 and *La République*, p. 98.
- (74) See Crossley, op. cit.
- (75) *La Création*, vol. 2, p. 360.
- (76) Ibid., vol. 2, p. 361. Cf. *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 22.
- (77) *La Création*, vol. 1, p. 23.
- (78) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 246, 247 and 248.
- (79) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 77.
- (80) *La Création*, vol. 1, p. V.
- (81) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 150.
- (82) *La République*, pp. 109-110.
- (83) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 350.

- (84) *Merlin*, vol. 1, p. 77 and *La Création*, vol. 1, p. 84.
- (85) *Merlin*, vol. 2, p. 410.
- (86) In *La Révolution* Quinet adds the following comment after his discussion of the worship of Reason and the Supreme Being: "Jamais les stoïciens adorateurs de Dieu n'ont entrepris de tuer les adorateurs du grand Tout; ils savaient qu'ils étaient de la même église. Cette vue claire a manqué aux hommes de la Révolution. Personne n'a mieux servi à les aveugler sur ces prétendues incompatibilités que Robespierre". (vol. 2, p. 269.)
- (87) *Les Révolutions d'Italie*, p. 442.
- (88) Bergson quoted by A. E. Pilkington in *Bergson and his Influence*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1976, pp. 20-21.



## CONCLUSION

When we look back over Quinet's works from the vantage point of *L'Esprit nouveau* we are immediately struck by an impression of unity. Although he has dealt with subjects which may seem to be of a disparate nature he has consistently approached them in relation to religion and history, freedom and individuality. History is the story of freedom but this in no way precludes the search for historical laws. Quite the reverse in fact.<sup>(1)</sup> Quinet wishes to see a pattern emerge which will render the whole movement of historical change intelligible. From the essays on Herder to *L'Esprit nouveau* he endeavours to understand an historical event within a wider framework which ultimately includes reference to the entire cosmos. He recognises the value of diversity but aspires to unity. His view of reality is organic and not mechanistic or deterministic. Reality is understood in relation to man's spiritual nature. Mankind and nature ultimately obey the same laws. Macrocosm and microcosm are united in general synthesis. There exists a governing principle which brings rational order to the universe. This power may be called by different names - God, the Absolute, Love, Spirit, the Idea, Universal Force - but its function as an ordering principle remains constant.

The notions of order and harmony are of the greatest importance in Quinet's thought. The same principle is present in the organisation of the universe as in the moral life of the individual: "[...] la même loi d'équilibre qui soutient les mondes, soutient dans l'homme la vérité".<sup>(2)</sup> The order of the cosmos finds expression in man's aspiration to justice: "[...] ce qui est ordre, pondération, équilibre, équivalence des forces dans la nature devient justice dans l'homme".<sup>(3)</sup>

"Tout vous répond dans l'infini" writes Quinet in *L'Esprit Nouveau*.<sup>(4)</sup> Man is not cut off from the rest of creation; he is part of a greater whole. Nature, history, art and religion are all understood in relation to the central notion of harmony. We are left in no doubt as to the philosophical tradition within which Quinet considers that he is working:

La succession des êtres n'est-elle pas ce que les modulations sont dans l'oeuvre du compositeur? La nature module les êtres, comme le musicien module les sons. [...] quand [le musicien] fait, avec quelques notes, une oeuvre multiple, inépuisable, impérissable, je ne doute pas qu'il a suivi la même méthode que la nature créatrice dans la succession harmonieuse des êtres. Où a-t-il trouvé cette loi? il ne sait;

elle est là, dit-il, en se frappant le front. Non, il se trompe. Elle est le principe des choses vivantes. Elle donne son rythme non pas seulement au musicien, mais à tout l'univers vivant: voilà l'harmonie des sphères qu'entendait Pythagore. (5)

According to *La Création* man is a mixture of pride and humility. He feels justifiably proud when he looks back upon the evolutionary process in nature, that is upon "[les] êtres antérieurs qui gravitent obscurément vers lui". On the other hand he experiences humility when he turns his mind to the future and considers "[les] êtres supérieurs dont il porte en lui la substance". (6) In 1870, as in 1830, Quinet understands religion in relation to the two worlds of nature and history:

La religion, comme la poésie, n'est souvent que la conscience de ces deux mondes; anciens rugissements de la nature en travail, sifflements des serpents diluviens qui ont trouvé un dernier écho dans le coeur de l'homme, pressentiments cachés de formes futures, encore enveloppées dans les formes du présent. Comme l'homme a aujourd'hui la perception obscure des organisations précédentes qui grondent dans son sein, de même les êtres supérieurs, dont le monde est éternellement en travail, auront la perception distincte des conditions de vie antérieure, dans une conscience plus claire et moins troublée par le bruit du chaos.

C'est là ce que veut dire cette foi à l'éternel Vivant, que rien en peut tarir; cri de toute créature; aspiration de toute vie à une vie plus haute et plus complète. (7)

In *L'Esprit nouveau* a new note of confidence is struck. The hope is expressed that with the aid of modern scientific knowledge man may at last be able to recreate a world of harmony such as he had known in ancient Greece. Man is the self-conscious expression of the life-force which sustains the universe. He need no longer feel isolated, estranged from nature. (8) It may yet be possible to establish a new relationship with the natural world:

Qu'est-ce [...] qui vous empêche de jouir de ce don de l'univers que vous avez reçu comme les Grecs, renouvelé, augmenté de tout ce que les découvertes ont ajouté à la vieille nature? [...] La fête des cieux continue, plus belle qu'au temps des Olympiades. (9)

But the more optimistic note of *L'Esprit nouveau* is not just a reflexion of Quinet's belief that man needs no longer feel isolated from nature. It would be more correct to say that he has at last become fully convinced that the world possesses genuine reality and is

not mere appearance. Doubt on this score had been a major source of the metaphysical unease present in *Ahasvérus*. Was the universe real or was it just a dream? Was it an illusion, a trick played upon man by some malevolent power? Such were the questions that had earlier haunted Quinet.

The theme of the relationship between appearance and reality often appears in Quinet's writings.<sup>(10)</sup> We must, however, concentrate upon the central point at issue which is the question of the reality of the external world. The problem, in essence, stems from the implications of Kant's critical philosophy. The German philosopher questioned man's capacity to attain knowledge concerning the nature of reality. In his view men had no faculty of intellectual intuition. Kant explained that that which we take to be reality is in fact the product of the ordering done by the a priori categories of the understanding. It followed from this that no ultimate reality could be found within experience. God and immortality were not, however, banished from Kant's philosophy but returned as postulates of the practical reason. Religious truths were rediscovered within the moral life which was interpreted as the expression of rational freedom.<sup>(11)</sup> There were many, however, who concluded, in the light of Kant's critical philosophy, that metaphysics was an impossibility.

Post-Kantian Idealism sought to overcome these difficulties by postulating the existence of a higher unity immanent in nature and which united the noumenal and the phenomenal. According to Hegel the ultimate principle was Reason or Spirit, according to Fichte it was the transcendental Ego and according to Schelling it was the principle of absolute identity. For metaphysical Idealism in general reality was understood as "the process of the self-expression or self-manifestation of infinite thought or reason".<sup>(12)</sup> What is of prime interest to us here, however, is the apparently solipsistic aspect of Kant's critical philosophy. If the world is but the product of the human understanding does this mean that it has been relegated to the status of mere appearance?

This is the argument which is put forward in *La Création*. Quinet explains that according to Kant the world did not exist as a thing in itself "mais seulement comme une apparence produite par notre entendement".<sup>(13)</sup> This error was repeated by Hegel and by Schelling and also by Eclecticism in France. It took its most extreme form, however, in the philosophy of Schopenhauer:

Le monde n'est-il qu'une apparence produite par  
notre esprit? Ecoutez [Schopenhauer] tirer la

conséquence: le problème du monde n'est résolu que chez moi. Le monde n'est que par ma volonté. J'ai pu le faire, je puis le défaire à mon gré. Fantôme que je promène à ma fantaisie, je l'ai évoqué pour mon malheur; il dépend de moi de le replonger dans le néant.

En effet, un univers complaisant qui n'est qu'une bulle de savon que nous lançons dans l'air et qui s'évanouit à notre premier souffle, cela coupe court à toutes difficultés. (14)

In fact Quinet's judgment of Schopenhauer is as unsatisfactory as is his assessment of Kant. (15) Without any hesitation he portrays the post-Kantians as though they were subjective idealists claiming that we can only achieve a knowledge of our ideas. Consequently, all that he considers necessary to disprove such theories is to proclaim the discovery of the true extent of geological time:

Nul oeil n'était encore ouvert. [...] Où était le moi, pour se forger un non-moi dans le vide? Direz-vous que cet univers, dont nous touchons les âges successifs dans la pierre, n'existait pas, ne comptait pas, parce que vous y manquiez et qu'il ne pouvait être sans vous, hors de vous? (16)

To a great extent Quinet's later work testifies to a continuing preoccupation with the subjects with which he had been concerned earlier. He holds firm to his faith in the individual. In *La Création* he makes the point that the initiative for progress lies with individuals rather than with the masses and in *L'Esprit nouveau* he reaffirms his belief in the historical Homer. He continues to place the highest value upon the individual personality although the personality itself is never adequately defined. This is perhaps understandable since the life of the personality could be said to reside in its capacity to reject its own past. Here once again, there are similarities with Bergson. Bréhier describes a Bergsonian free act as "nouveau, création, dépassement du donné, rupture de l'automatisme". Freedom in this sense cannot be explained as a choice between two alternatives. Freedom is inventive; "l'homme tend toujours, par la liberté, à dépasser les limites de la condition humaine". (17) All of this strongly recalls Quinet. Race, milieu and moment might be said to constitute the conditions within which freedom takes place. Freedom transcends human limitations since in a truly free act the individual reaches out to the future, enters into contact with Being and participates in infinity. Therein also lies the metaphysical ground of religious revolutions.

History continues to have meaning insofar as its content is freedom. But freedom is not something given; it must be fought for with ceaseless

effort. (18) Time of itself is not a creative force. Even conscience, the divine spark in man, may become completely extinguished. But the awareness of the fragility of freedom which is evident after 1851 only serves to make Quinet defend the cause of liberty more strongly than ever. In the course of *Philosophie de l'histoire de France* he reaffirms his beliefs in words which instantly recall his essay of 1827:

Nous blâmons le tiers état toutes les fois qu'il réagit au moyen âge contre l'accroissement du pouvoir absolu. Or cette idée permanente de justice, c'est la substance même de l'histoire; cette résistance, c'est précisément celle de l'âme; cette protestation, c'est le signe de la nature humaine, c'est la preuve qu'il s'agit ici d'êtres raisonnables, non d'automates; c'est le germe de la liberté future. (19)

Freedom lies at the heart of Quinet's political as well as his religious thought. His faith in liberty commands his espousal of the cause of Republican democracy. Freedom is inseparable from justice. Justice like freedom is an absolute. (20) The idea of justice allows Quinet to pass from the individual to the societal without sacrificing the dignity of the individual. He is not, however, a systematic political thinker and nowhere does he set out in great detail the particular freedoms which would need to be respected in a just society. Such a society, one assumes, would recognise that the individual is the highest manifestation of Spirit in the world. France is the collective entity which, ideally at least, is the embodiment of mankind's aspiration to freedom and justice. (21)

Although we must never forget the ambiguous nature of Quinet's position on the question of toleration of dissent, it is fair to say that in general he adopts an anti-authoritarian stance. In *La Révolution* he contrasts the Girondins with the Jacobins. The latter sought to impose authority from above by force. The Girondins, on the other hand, stood on the side of "la religion de la liberté". (22) They were the enemies of traditional forms of authority: "Le fond des Girondins était de ne plus vouloir de maître à aucun prix". (23) They were not without fault but their elimination was an act which had the most grievous consequences. The Girondins represented "un organe nécessaire de la République". (24)

Hostility towards authority imposed from above joins with Quinet's belief in individual freedom to explain the antipathy which he feels to communism and socialism. Such systems deny the supreme value of individual conscience; they reduce the individual to the status of a mere

cog in a machine. Equality - if by that we mean an equal distribution of wealth and property - is deemed an illusion. Furthermore Quinet is adamant that man cannot be adequately explained in terms of political economy alone.

Quinet's moral individualism looks back not only to the Reformation but also to the concept of the fundamental and inalienable rights of man so dear to the philosophers of the Enlightenment. There is much in his writings which recalls the broad tradition of Western liberalism: notably his defence of the individual against the power of the state and his acceptance of private property as an extension of the individual personality.<sup>(25)</sup> There is, however, an underlying tension in his thought between what is in many ways a liberal theory of the state and a belief in France as a collective entity developing dynamically in history and fulfilling a redemptive mission of essentially messianic proportions. Does this tension reflect the wider division between liberal and totalitarian democracy? J. L. Talmon has described how both types of democracy originated in the eighteenth century but subsequently diverged. Liberal democracy is associated with a pragmatic approach to politics, a belief in the minimum of coercion, a concern for the right not to conform. Totalitarian democracy also champions the cause of freedom but in this case men are willing to use coercion in order to force others to be free. Democracy of this type, remarks Talmon, develops a messianic quality which serves as a substitute for religious faith by providing a new secular morality conceived in social terms.<sup>(26)</sup> Quinet cannot be said to belong to either of these classifications but at the same time he has clear affinities with both.

It is pointless, however, to discuss Quinet's political ideas without making constant and detailed reference to his religious thought. His Republicanism, like his patriotism, was essentially an expression of his deepest religious aspirations. Indeed the overtly religious note persists into his later political writings. This fact, however, only served to highlight the distance which separated him from the younger Republicans who reached maturity during the Second Empire. The idealism and high-sounding phrases of the 1840's were not for them. In the context of the Third Republic the survivors of 1848 appeared wordy and out of date.<sup>(27)</sup> How was a man like Quinet to behave among Republicans who mocked the very idea of God? What was to be done if the supporters of educational reform confused his anticlericalism with irreligion?

No one was more aware than Quinet that religion could mean the oppression of men at the hands of a priestly caste. His own faith required the abandonment of traditional religious categories. In common with many progressive religious thinkers of his century he rejected the clear-cut division between heaven and earth and between life and immortality.<sup>(28)</sup> He offered a reinterpretation of religion which emphasised the presence of God in the world. Like Schleiermacher he believed that the miraculous was at one with the natural. History was divine revelation. Like Ritschl, he stressed the ethical content of religious experience. Religion implied action and a commitment to the social realisation of religious principles. Above all Quinet interpreted the relationship between God and the world in a manner which removed the gulf separating the human from the divine but without simultaneously deifying the human. Quinet's God is present within the world, within the individual, within conscience. The encounter between the divine and the human takes place within the spirit of the individual. As we saw in Chapter Three this led Quinet to draw his reader's attention to the humanity of Jesus in a manner surprising in the 1830's if not in the 1970's.

To be religious is to participate actively and freely in the onward movement of Life or Spirit. Quinet's God of Love is incompatible with Schopenhauer's Will, Spencer's Unknowable or Hartmann's Unconscious. The moral order is reconcilable with the natural order since history, like nature, is the rational expression of a higher principle. In the final analysis Quinet is closer to A. N. Whitehead than to Haeckel, to Hamelin than to Comte.

In Quinet's thought the religious problem is grounded in the predicament of the individual existant. Religion cannot be considered in isolation from the quest for unity and the search for harmony. But man does not turn to religion in order to seek consolation for his condition. To be religious is to be aware of the precariousness of existence and to strive to the limits of human possibilities. For Quinet there can be no conflict between science and religious belief. Religion is the expression of life, the manifestation of freedom, the transcendence of death. Above all the religious impulse in man is identified with his quest for the future. Perhaps there is no more satisfactory way to sum up the central tenet of Quinet's faith than to quote Benjamin Constant:

Borner l'homme au présent qui ne lui suffit  
jamais, lui interdire cet élan vers l'avenir  
auquel l'insuffisance du présent l'excite,  
c'est le frapper de mort.<sup>(29)</sup>

NOTES

- (1) See in particular *La Création* and the conclusion of *Les Révolutions d'Italie*.
- (2) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 62.
- (3) *Ibid.*, p. 55. Quinet's argument suggests that freedom is ultimately compatible with order. This idea recalls the penultimate section of Hugo's *Le Satyre*.
- (4) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 345.
- (5) *La Création*, vol. 2, pp. 364-5. Cf. *La République*, p. 253.
- (6) *La Création*, vol. 1, p. 104. Cf. pp. 103-5 where Quinet develops a parallel with Platonic theories of reminiscence and love.
- (7) *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.
- (8) It comes as no surprise therefore to encounter references to Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius in Quinet's later work.
- (9) *Esprit nouveau*, p. 7. The desire to develop an harmonious relationship with nature recalls Quinet's earlier use of the myth of America and also his wish to reconcile East and West.
- (10) The relationship between appearance and the reality is in fact a major theme in Quinet's writings. People are not what they seem; their words do not correspond to their deeds. Ultimately reality corresponds to Being and appearance to death. In *La Révolution* (vol. 2, p. 466) Quinet speaks of "l'aversion éternelle de la mort contre la vie, du faux contre le vrai", and in *La République* (p. 260) he writes as follows: "La mort est menteuse, la vie seul est sincère".
- (11) Cf. *La Révolution*, vol. 2, pp. 562-3: "Les Allemands, dans la philosophie, avaient détruit le principe de la certitude métaphysique; mais ils avaient laissé subsister la conscience morale sur laquelle ils prétendaient tout rebâtir. D'autres gens sont venus; ils ont extirpé la conscience, et le monde s'est trouvé dans le plus beau néant qui se verra jamais".
- (12) Copleston, op. cit., p. 19.
- (13) *La Création*, vol. 1, pp. 90-1.
- (14) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 10. This image of the "bulle de savon" occurs upon a number of occasions. Cf. the "Intermède de la première journée" in *Ahasvérus*. Cf. R. Bourgeois, *L'Ironie romantique*, Grenoble, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1974.
- (15) See Quinet's *Lettre sur Kant*, Pagnerre, vol. 10. pp. 289-92.
- (16) *L'Esprit nouveau*, p. 9.
- (17) E. Bréhier, "Liberté et métaphysique", *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 1939, pp. 4 and 5.



- (18) In *Merlin* Quinet reiterates his view that a return to Eden, to a golden age in the past is an illusion. Even Eden, would not be commensurate with modern man's aspirations. But does not the myth of Greek civilisation function at least in part as a lost paradise?
- (19) *Philosophie de l'histoire de France*, p. 387.
- (20) Cf. *L'Enseignement du peuple*: "Justice, vérité, ordre absolu, qu'est-ce que cela sinon la source éternelle des idées divines, c'est-à-dire cette essence du bien sur lequel se règlent les moeurs de l'Etat? Ce Dieu de l'ordre, de la justice, ce géomètre éternel, qui descend par degrés au fond des lois de tout peuple policé, n'est pas celui qui plaît aux castes sacerdotales". (pp. 90-1.)
- (21) Cf. Herzen's comments on Quinet's continuing faith in France recorded in *My past and thoughts*, tr. Garnett, London, Chatto and Windus, 1968, vol. 3, pp. 1490-92.
- (22) *La Révolution*, vol. 2, p. 75.
- (23) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 463.
- (24) *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 19.
- (25) Hence Quinet's admiration for the United States, a Protestant country which values the individual and respects private property.
- (26) See J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, London, Sphere, 1970.
- (27) See G. Chapman, *The Third Republic of France*, London, Macmillan, 1962, p. 18.
- (28) In *La Révolution* and in *L'Esprit nouveau* Quinet reaffirms a belief in immortality in the same manner as in the 1840's.
- (29) Quoted by P. Deguise, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

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