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HELENA ROSENBLATT

**Madame de Staël, the Protestant Reformation,
and the history of 'private judgement'¹**

It is a well-known fact that M^{me} de Staël held the Protestant Reformation in high regard and preferred Protestantism to all other religions. To her, Protestantism was the most moral and the most enlightened religion available ; it was the religion most compatible with, and even conducive to, progress. But why was this so, and what exactly did M^{me} de Staël mean by Protestantism ? It is an important question, because answering it will shed light on the nature of her liberalism and, more particularly, on the interconnectedness of her religious and her political views.

The Protestant Reformation has always been, and continues to be, difficult to define. It can look very different depending on whether you are a historian of theology, a historian of political thought, or a historian of culture, for example. Surely it must also have appeared quite different to the sixteenth-century participants, whether they were theologians, magistrates or common men and women. The problem of definition is only compounded by the generally agreed upon fact that the Reformation is something larger than the thought of Martin Luther and the early reformers, who perhaps did not fully understand the implications of their own teachings. Since its very inception, Protestantism has been a « movement within history »², a multifarious and evolving religion, whose practitioners and advocates have had heated arguments amongst themselves.

On the social repercussions of the Reformation, there has developed a certain amount of scholarly consensus. It is generally agreed that the Reformation encouraged literacy and stimulated an interest in public education. Thus it assisted in the development of cheap printing and the spread of books, a phenomenon which some have called a « cultural revolution » in its own right³. Many argue that the Reformation promoted

¹ I hereby gratefully acknowledge a PSC-CUNY grant that made research for this article possible, and a Hunter College Presidential Travel Award that helped fund my participation at the Coppet conference.

² John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity Interpreted through its Development*, New York, Macmillan, 1988, p. 346.

³ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

the « disenchantment » of the world⁴, thereby encouraging a new attitude to nature and the sciences⁵. On a different note, a compelling argument has been made that the Reformation revalorized marriage and promoted a « companionate » relationship between husband and wife⁶. More generally, most people now agree to link Protestantism in some way or another with the rise of individualism and even « modernity » itself, whether these things are seen as good or bad⁷. Finally, there are those who continue to argue that the Protestant Reformation contributed to the rise of industrial capitalism⁸.

When it comes to the Reformation's *political* legacy there is less agreement. French scholarship often affirms the close connections between Protestantism and liberalism. According to Claude Nicolet,

[c]'est en effet un lieu commun au moins depuis Madame de Staël et Benjamin Constant, d'affirmer le lien entre le protestantisme et le libéralisme, entre l'esprit de libre examen, la liberté de conscience en matière religieuse, et la liberté de penser qui aboutit à la ruine de l'absolutisme et au gouvernement constitutionnel et représentatif⁹.

In Germany, however, the legacy of the Reformation has for a long time been described in almost the opposite terms. A. J. P. Taylor put it succinctly when he wrote that

Luther gave to Germany [...] the divine Right of Kings, or rather the Divine Right of any established authority. Obedience was the first, and last duty of the Christian man¹⁰.

But the tradition of viewing the Reformation as contributing to the rise of German absolutism goes much further back – at least as far as Ernst

⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, transl. T. Parsons, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1930.

⁵ Robert King Merton, *Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth-Century England*, New York, Howard Fertig, 1970 ; Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

⁶ Steven Ozment is the most well-known proponent of this idea. See, for example his *Protestants. The Birth of a Revolution*, New York, Doubleday, 1991.

⁷ See for example *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization*, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), New York, Basic Books, 1968.

⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, *op. cit.* ; Richard Henry Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1938.

⁹ Claude Nicolet, *L'idée républicaine en France, 1789-1924 : essai d'histoire critique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982, p. 49.

¹⁰ Alan John Percivale Taylor, *The Course of German History*, London, Methuen, 1961, p. 9.

Troeltsch, who decried the Lutheran ethic as one of « aloofness from the world » – a « kind of quietism » – that fostered political resignation in the population¹¹. This perspective has dominated German scholarship for quite some time. In his important survey of early modern political thought, Quentin Skinner argues that Luther not only interpreted the New Testament to prescribe « complete Christian submission to the secular authorities », but also sanctioned an « unparalleled extension » of the state's power. In accordance with St Paul's insistence in the *Epistle to the Romans*, Luther preached that all power « is an ordinance of God » and that « there are no powers except those ordained by God ». According to Skinner, Luther helped to make this passage « the most cited of all texts » in Germany¹² and thus the main influence of his political theory in early modern Europe « lay in the direction of encouraging and legitimating the emergence of unified and absolutist monarchies »¹³. More recently, the Swiss historian Peter Blickle has delivered a stronger indictment of Luther's political conservatism, also charging it with aiding and abetting the rise of German absolutism¹⁴.

It may simply be that French scholarship, which links Protestantism to liberalism and even democracy, is referring to Calvinism, while German scholarship focuses on Lutheranism. Early Calvinists, it is often argued, were more adept than Lutherans at developing a theory of political resistance¹⁵. Calvin's own thought was more focused on institutional matters than was Luther's, and Calvin had altogether a more open and positive view of the political realm. Thus Calvin could view political society not just as a remedy for sin, but as a positive blessing from God. Calvin would come to see politics as a « divinely ordained agency for man's improvement »¹⁶, and even a « boon to the righteous »¹⁷. It was in this way that he was able to play the role of « political educator » for

¹¹ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon, New York, Harper, 1960, p. 494-496, 510, 529, 532. See also William Shanahan, *German Protestants Face the Social Question*, vol. I, *The Conservative Phase, 1815-1817*, Notre Dame, Ind, University of Notre Dame Press, 1954.

¹² Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978, vol. II, p. 15, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁴ Peter Blickle, *Deutsche Untertanen. Ein Widerspruch*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 1981, p. 29-36.

¹⁵ Note, however, that Q. Skinner (*The Foundations, op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 206-207) argues that it was Luther, not Calvin, who first introduced the concept of active resistance into the political theory of the Reformation.

¹⁶ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision : Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 47.

¹⁷ Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 47.

the Protestants¹⁸. According to Michael Walzer's influential account, Calvinism gave people « a sense of purpose » and « taught previously passive men the styles and methods of political activity ». Motivated by this new sense of purpose, Calvinists devised « a novel view of politics as a kind of conscientious and continuous labor ». This is what enabled Puritanism to become the first truly revolutionary movement in modern Europe¹⁹. But in France, the Huguenot resistance theorists were certainly political educators as well ; Quentin Skinner has credited them with being among the first to develop a « genuinely political theory of revolution »²⁰. In these writings, it was once again the Calvinists, and not the Lutherans, who were the revolutionaries²¹.

In all likelihood, M^{me} de Staël would have disagreed with these modern views of Protestantism ; in particular, she would have rejected the association of Lutheranism with political passivity, and Calvinism with radical revolution. Indeed, M^{me} de Staël's perspective on the Reformation is closer to that of a handful of scholars who have questioned the standard arguments rehearsed above. Laurence Dickey, for example, has criticized the idea that Lutheranism necessarily promoted submissiveness to state authority, arguing rather that there was a strong antiauthoritarian civil impulse within the Lutheran religious tradition²². Richard Gawthrop has argued that Lutheran pietism actually played a dynamic political role in Prussia²³. Of all modern scholars, however, Steven Ozment seems to come closest to the type of argument that M^{me} de Staël made on behalf of the Reformation two hundred years ago. Insisting that « a spirit of protest » was part of the « birthright of the movement », Ozment argues that the Protestant tendency to challenge religious authority, and the commitment to the principle *ecclesia reformata, ecclesia semper reformanda* encouraged a spirit of critical inquiry that was, in its essence, profoundly liberating. Ozment calls attention to the fact that the basic criticism of the Reformation, found in countless anti-Lutheran pamphlets, was that Luther had « errantly and arrogantly pitted lone

¹⁸ S. Wolin, as cited by Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints. A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 51.

¹⁹ M. Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints...*, *op. cit.*, p. 2, 18.

²⁰ Q. Skinner, *The Foundations...*, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

²¹ On the subversiveness of Calvinism in the context of a sacral (French) monarchy, see also Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution. From Calvin to the Civil Constitution. 1560-1791*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1996, p. 22-29.

²² Laurence Dickey, *Hegel : Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 8-11.

²³ Richard Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

individual judgment against centuries of unanimous ecclesiastical tradition »²⁴. As we shall see, it was Protestantism's connection with « individual judgement » that M^{me} de Staël valued highly.

Scholars agree that M^{me} de Staël received a « solid » religious education²⁵, even a « strictly Protestant »²⁶ one. Her father, Jacques Necker, descended from a long line of pastors and personally authored two books on religion. M^{me} de Staël's mother, Suzanne Curchod, was the daughter of a pastor and a pious woman, according to all accounts. As a young girl, Germaine was raised on the Bible, the catechism of the Swiss theologian Osterwald, and various books of piety carefully selected by her mother. But the Necker household was an enlightened one, and the Protestantism they imparted to their daughter was of the liberal variety current in both Geneva and Paris at the time. Germaine was raised in an environment that saw no contradiction between enlightened values and religious ones, but rather saw them as inextricably connected²⁷. It has been noted that the religion Germaine imbibed as a young girl had a certain « Rousseauian » coloration to it. According to Roland Mortier, it was « une religion du coeur dictée par la conscience, une foi sans dogmes ni miracles, associée aux impératifs d'une nature tenue pour bonne et pure »²⁸. Clearly, we are far from the Calvinism of Calvin, despite the fact that M^{me} de Staël could describe herself, in at least one of her writings, as « [une] bonne calviniste »²⁹. Hers was a « reasonable, » tolerant and sentimental religion of the heart, deeply influenced by Rousseau, whose *Profession de foi du vicair savoyard* she celebrated in one of her earliest writings as a « chef-d'œuvre d'éloquence dans le sentiment [et] de métaphysique »³⁰.

²⁴ Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities. The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975, p. 76, stress added.

²⁵ Simone Balayé, *Madame de Staël. Lumières et liberté*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1979, p. 13.

²⁶ Pierre Kohler, *Madame de Staël et la Suisse*, Lausanne, Payot, 1916, p. 35 ; see also Pierre Cordey, « Madame de Staël et les prédicants lausannois », *Cahiers staëliens*, nouv. Série, 8, p. 7-21 ; Henri Perrochon, « Les sources suisses de la religion de M^{me} de Staël », in *Madame de Staël et l'Europe*, Actes du Colloque de Coppet des 18-24 juillet 1966, Paris, Klincksieck, 1970.

²⁷ See also Jean Giblein, « Note sur le protestantisme de M^{me} de S », in *Bulletin du protestantisme français*, Paris, 1954.

²⁸ Roland Mortier, « Philosophie et religion dans la pensée de Madame de Staël », *Rivista de letteratura moderna e comparate*, september-dicember 1967, p. 135.

²⁹ *Des Circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution et des principes qui doivent fonder la république en France*, Lucia Omacini (ed.), Geneva, Droz, 1979, p. 229.

³⁰ « Lettres sur J.-J. Rousseau », in *Œuvres de jeunesse*, Simone Balayé and John Isbell (eds), Paris, Desjonquères, 1997, p. 73.

It was Lucien Jaume who first called attention to the importance of the notion of « judgement » in the liberalism of M^{me} de Staël. We know, of course, of the now famous lines in *De l'Allemagne*, in which she touts « cette liberalité de jugement, sans laquelle il est impossible d'acquérir des lumières nouvelles ou de conserver même celles qu'on a. Car on se soumet à de certaines idées reçues, non comme à des vérités mais comme au pouvoir [...] »³¹ In fact, however, references to « judgement » are sprinkled throughout her work – as they are in Benjamin Constant's. Both thinkers, as Lucien Jaume has noted, are deeply concerned with promoting independent and individual judgement « comme source et controle en même temps des lois et des institutions »³². It is a fundamental concept in their political vision. What I would like to do today is to show the Protestant coloration of this term.

The notion of 'private judgement' already had a long history in French intellectual debates when M^{me} de Staël adopted the concept, and this history was an eminently Protestant one. French Catholics had been quick to warn of both the religious and political dangers of Lutheranism when it first made its appearance. Of central concern was the Protestant doctrine of free inquiry, implicated in Luther's notion that each and every person « must decide at his own peril what he is to believe [...] How he believes is a matter for each individual's conscience »³³. Catholics responded that by granting private individuals the right to examine religious matters on their own, the Reformation made each man the judge and arbiter of his own faith, in effect giving people license to believe whatever they wished. Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) summarized what he, along with many other French Catholics, believed would be the inevitably tragic consequences of Protestantism :

Ce commencement de maladie declineroit aysément en un exécrationnable atheisme : car le vulgaire, n'ayant pas la faculté de juger des choses par elles-mesmes, se laissant emporter à la fortune et aux apparences, apres qu'on luy a mis en main la hardiesse de mespriser et controller les opinions qu'il avoit euës en extreme reverence [...] il jette tantost apres aisément en pareille

³¹ M^{me} de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1968, vol. 1, p. 48.

³² Lucien Jaume has broached this topic in his « Coppet, creuset du libéralisme comme 'culture morale' », in *Coppet, creuset de l'esprit libéral*, L. Jaume (dir.), Paris, Economica and Presses Universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 1999 ; « Problèmes du libéralisme. De Madame de Staël à Tocqueville », *Droits*, n° 30, 2000 ; « Benjamin Constant au centre de nos préoccupations », in *Benjamin Constant en l'an 2000 : nouveaux regards*, Alain Dubois, Anne Hofmann and François Rosset (eds), *Annales Benjamin Constant*, vol. 23-24, 2000.

³³ « On Secular Authority : How Far does the Obedience Owed to it Extend ? » in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, Harro Höpfl (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 25.

incertitude toutes les autres pieces de sa creance [...] et secoue comme un joug tyrannique toutes les impressions qu'il avoit receues par l'autorité des loix ou reverence de l'ancien usage³⁴.

Protestant spokesmen, like Jean Claude (1617-1687), responded by reaffirming the principle of free inquiry in religious matters. Men cannot be Christians, Claude argued, because the state or church orders them to be ; rather they must arrive at the truth on their own. The Christian religion does not advocate « une obéissance aveugle » ; rather, it asks each person to « juger des verités qu'il nous propose ». All Christians should accept their faith and religious commandments not just by « un acte d'obéissance », but also by « un acte de jugement ». God had given all men « cette admirable faculté » of being able to discern between true and false, right and wrong, and, certainly, He did not wish to prevent them from using it in a matter as important as their own salvation³⁵.

But Catholics continued to insist that the great majority of people were simply incapable of judging Scripture properly. The simple-minded masses could not be expected to understand religion correctly on their own. Thus, it was necessary for society to acknowledge « un juge commun » of religious matters, that is, the Church, and to promise « l'obéissance & la soumission » to it³⁶. Again and again it was argued that Christians could do no better than « soumett[re] leur jugement » to the Church³⁷. Not only did the Protestant doctrine of private judgment threaten to undermine religion, but it was politically subversive as well.

Over time, and particularly with the outbreak of civil wars in France, the political sins of the Reformation were increasingly stressed. Calvinists were now described not only as religious heretics but as political upstarts as well. That they had an independent and rebellious spirit was a common accusation, as was the charge that their real aim was to establish a republic in France. Although Protestants repeatedly denied that there was anything inherently seditious or republican about their religion, the accusation became harder to refute after the publication of the tracts of various Huguenot resistance theorists and, in particular, of Pierre Jurieu's *Lettres pastorales*. In it, this prominent Protestant theologian articulated a

³⁴ Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Essais*, A. Thibaudet (ed.), Paris, Gallimard, 1950, « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », p. 482.

³⁵ Jean Claude, *Défense de la Réformation contre le livre intitulé préjugés légitimes contre les Calvinistes*, Paris, L.-R. Delay, 1844, p. 122.

³⁶ Pierre Nicole, *De l'unité de l'église ou réfutation du nouveau système de M. Jurieu*, Paris, Bordelet, 1729, p. 348 & 349.

³⁷ For example, see P. Nicole, *Les Prétendus Réformez convaincus de schisme pour servir de réponse à un écrit intitulé Considérations sur les lettres circulaires de l'Assemblée du clergé de France*, Paris, A. Cailleau, 1723.

powerful theory of resistance to political authority based on a contractual theory of political power and the notion of popular sovereignty. Even the Protestant Pierre Bayle chastized Jurieu for his « republican » ideas. By the end of the seventeenth century, the famous Catholic apologist, Jacques-Benigne Bossuet (1627-1704), would draw on all of this to argue that Protestantism was sowing the seeds of anarchy in France. If allowed to survive, it would invariably lead to atheism in religion and rebellion in politics. Society would dissolve in a state of utter disorder. Such ideas lay behind the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), by which Louis XIV withdrew the right of French Protestants to practise their religion.

Eighteenth century French Protestants worked hard to convince their king that they were loyal subjects and that their religion posed no threat to his authority. They insisted that the exercise of private judgement in religious matters was entirely compatible with political obedience to a lawful monarch. Nevertheless, a stigma of rebelliousness and sectarianism lingered on, even as attitudes towards Protestantism improved in France during the eighteenth century. The apparent ease with which some Protestants could extend theological concepts into the political realm surely did not go unnoticed by concerned observers. For John Locke, for example, the right, and indeed duty, of individual judgement was a key concept in his defense of both religious toleration and the right of political rebellion. When, in the final paragraphs of the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke asks « *who shall be judge* » of whether a government is acting lawfully or not, he answers that the authority to answer that question lies with the « *Body of the People* » itself, who may also resist any ruler who oversteps his lawful bounds. Indeed, Locke even suggests that there are cases when « *every Man is Judge for himself* »³⁸. The political implications of all this is undoubtedly why, in the *Esprit des lois*, Montesquieu claimed that wherever Protestantism had been established in Europe, « *les révolutions se firent sur le pied de l'Etat politique* »³⁹. He further argued that the Catholic religion « *convient mieux à une monarchie* » while the Protestant « *s'accomode mieux d'une république* »⁴⁰. Even Voltaire, the outspoken defender of Calas and religious

³⁸ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Peter Laslett (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 24-242, p. 427. Steven Dwoletz (*The Unvarnished Doctrine. Locke, Liberalism and the American Revolution*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 1990) argues convincingly that the belief in the duty of individual judgement in religious matters served as an important « ideological preparation » for revolution amongst the New England clergy.

³⁹ Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *L'esprit des lois*, livre 24, chap. V.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

toleration, argued that Calvinism « devait nécessairement enfanter des guerres civiles, » adding that « [il] n'y a point de pays, en effet, où la religion de Calvin et de Luther ait paru sans exciter des persécutions et des guerres »⁴¹. Thus Condorcet was not proposing anything very original when, in his *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (published posthumously in 1795), he suggested that the exercise of private judgment in the religious sphere was bound to lead to a similar exercise of private judgement in the political sphere. It seemed entirely logical to Condorcet that

Les hommes, après avoir soumis les préjugés religieux à l'examen de la raison, l'étendraient bientôt jusqu'aux préjugés politiques ; qu'éclairés sur les usurpations des papes, ils finiraient par vouloir l'être sur les usurpations des rois [...]⁴²

M^{me} de Staël's friend, Charles de Villers (1765-1815), drew on these arguments in his award-winning *Essai sur l'esprit et l'influence de la Réforme de Luther*, combining them with lessons derived from the new liberal protestantism he found in Germany⁴³. To Villers, the Reformation should be ranked among those world historical events that have « le plus puissamment contribué aux progrès de la civilisation et des lumières ». For several centuries Europe had been submerged in a state of « stupeur » and « apathie ». « L'esprit du Christ » had been lost, and a reformation was sorely needed. When it came, this Reformation gave « [u]ne impulsion nouvelle » to everything, not just religion. In fact, Villers was not so interested in discussing religion *per se*. He expressed little if any interest in Martin Luther's theology. He mentioned no specific dogmatic controversies satisfactorily resolved by Lutheranism. Instead, Villers distilled what he regarded as the true import of the Protestant Reformation, in other words, its intellectual, moral, and political effects. Most importantly, the Protestant Reformation was about intellectual emancipation. « [D]ans son principe », Villers claimed, the Reformation was nothing else but « l'acte par lequel la raison se déclarait elle-même émancipée et affranchie du joug de l'autorité arbitraire ». Through the

⁴¹ Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Louis Moland (éd.) Paris, Garnier Frères, 1878 ; Kraus reprint 1967, vol. XV, p. 39.

⁴² Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, Alain Pons (ed), Paris, Flammarion, 1988, p. 195.

⁴³ M^{me} de Staël's indebtedness to Villers has been noted by Louis Wittmer, *Charles de Villers 1765-1815. Un intermédiaire entre la France et l'Allemagne et un précurseur de Madame de Staël*, Genève, Georg et Cie, 1908 ; J. Isbell, *The Birth of European Romanticism. Truth and Propaganda in Staël's 'De l'Allemagne', 1810-1813*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Reformation, the human spirit was liberated from both the « contrainte extérieure que lui imposait le despotisme hiérarchique » and the « contrainte intérieure, de l'apathie » caused by « une aveugle superstition ». Thanks to the movement inaugurated by Luther, man left his prior state of « tutelle » and began to use his intellectual faculties with more freedom and energy. As minds became more « scrutateur[s] », morals improved. Protestantism « fait travailler les têtes », thus contributing to the « culture graduelle du genre humain »⁴⁴.

Inevitably, such an important event as the Reformation would have not only moral, but also political repercussions. Due to the Reformation, « on osa penser, raisonner, examiner ce qui auparavant ne comportait qu'une soumission aveugle ». Thus, what started as a simple blow to the ecclesiastical system, « amena un changement considérable dans la situation politique ». People's minds were opened to new political ideas ; they became more receptive to ideas of liberty. Freedom in the intellectual and religious realm fostered freedom in the political. « La réformation, » he wrote, « qui d'abord n'était qu'un retour à la liberté dans l'ordre des choses religieuses, devint donc [...] un retour aussi vers la liberté dans l'ordre politique »⁴⁵.

Of course, reactionary theorists used very similar arguments to blame the Protestant Reformation for a whole string of political calamities including the French Revolution. From exile in Lausanne in 1794, Joseph de Maistre wrote that :

c'est de l'ombre d'un cloître que sort un des plus grands fléaux du genre humain. Luther paroît ; Calvin le suit. Guerre des paysans ; guerre de trente ans ; guerre civile de France ; [...] journée de la Saint-Barthélemy ; [...] meurtre de Henry III, de Henri IV, de Marie Stuart, de Charles I^{er} ; et de nos jours enfin la révolution française, qui part de la même source⁴⁶.

Qu'est-ce-que le protestantisme ? » asked Maistre ; « [c]'est l'insurrection de la raison individuelle contre la raison générale ». The Protestant innovators shamelessly « substituèrent le jugement particulier au jugement catholique. » In doing so, they committed not only a « religious heresy », but a « civil » one as well,

parce qu'en affranchissant le peuple du joug de l'obéissance et lui accordant la souveraineté religieuse [le protestantisme] déchaîne l'orgueil général contre

⁴⁴ Charles de Villers, *Essai sur l'esprit et l'influence de la réformation de Luther*, Paris, Chez Henrichs, 1804, p. 3, 21, 32, 226, 284, 298, 358, 369.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3, 134.

⁴⁶ Joseph de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, Paris, Garnier, 1980, p. 46-47.

l'autorité [...] [E]n établissant l'indépendance des jugements, la discussion libre des principes et le mépris des traditions, il sape par la base tous les dogmes nationaux qui sont, comme nous l'avons vu, le palladium de toutes les grandes institutions civiles et religieuses⁴⁷.

Similarly, in an article published in the *Mercure de France* in the summer of 1806⁴⁸, Bonald called Protestant dogmas « le levain de toutes les révolutions » and charged them with having introduced ideas of « démocratie » into the body politic. He singled out « [l]e droit d'examen et d'interprétation des divines Ecritures » as particularly harmful and ultimately destructive of the « monarchical » principles of Catholicism.

Dès que les particuliers, dont la collection forme le peuple, pouvoient être juges et législateurs dans l'état religieux, à plus forte raison pouvoient-ils être législateurs et juges dans l'état civil et politique [...]⁴⁹

In response to such arguments, M^{me} de Staël was defiantly unapologetic. In her *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, published posthumously in 1818, she wrote :

Loin de se dissimuler que la liberté de conscience tient de près à la liberté politique, il me semble que les protestants doivent se vanter de cette analogie. Ils ont toujours été et seront toujours des amis de la liberté ; l'esprit d'examen en matière de religion conduit nécessairement au gouvernement représentatif en fait d'institution politiques⁵⁰.

We know, of course, that in her unpublished manuscript, *Des circonstances actuelles*, M^{me} de Staël had at one time proposed that Protestantism be made France's state religion. We now understand a little bit better why. Although she dropped this formal proposal in her subsequent writings, the reasons why she preferred Protestantism remained the same. As she wrote in *De la littérature*, « [l]a réformation est l'époque de l'histoire qui a le plus efficacement servi la perfectibilité de l'espèce humaine »⁵¹. An

⁴⁷ *Id.*, *Réflexions sur le protestantisme dans ses rapports avec la souveraineté*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7-8, Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1979 [of 1884 Lyon edition], p. 64, 65, 67.

⁴⁸ Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald, « De l'unité religieuse en Europe », in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. X, : *Mélanges littéraires, politiques et philosophiques*, Genève, Slatkine, 1982, p. 259.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁵⁰ M^{me} de Staël, *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, Jacques Godechot (ed.), Paris, Tallandier, 2000, p. 73

⁵¹ *Ead.*, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, Paris, InfoMédia, 1998, p. 186.

essential advantage of Protestantism was that it favored reflection and thus encouraged the development of judgement. In *De l'Allemagne*, she proudly repeated many times the accusation of her Catholic adversaries : « Le droit d'examiner [...] est le fondement du protestantisme. »⁵² But this, she argued, was the very reason why Protestantism was able to evolve and remain relevant to modern life ; it was why Protestantism was the religion of progress, while Catholicism remained frozen in an antiquated past. What France needed, she insisted once last time in her *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, was « [une] religion fondée sur l'examen »⁵³, in other words, a religion that fostered the development of the kind of mentally alert and responsible citizenry needed in a liberal polity.

⁵² Ead., *De l'Allemagne*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 247.

⁵³ Ead., *Considérations...*, p. 146.