

# Novalis, “Christendom or Europe” (1799)

## Abstract

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In his short, tragedy-ridden life, Novalis (1772–1801), born Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg, wrote masterful poems that scaled the heights of early Romanticism. In this essay, composed in 1799 but first published in 1826, Novalis deploys the burgeoning German historicist imagination to sketch out a philosophical history of western Christendom from the Middle Ages to the fraught era of the French Revolution. Novalis employs (as Hegel also famously did) a dialectical style that highlights the historical interaction of intellectual-cultural opposites and contradictions. His vision of a reunited Christendom, brought to pass through a “venerable European Council,” does not hark back in reactionary manner to an irrecoverable past, but rather offers a kind of Romantic utopia of modernity.

## Source

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### Christendom or Europe

Once there were fine, resplendent times when Europe was a Christian land, when one Christendom occupied this humanly constituted continent. One great common interest united the remotest provinces of this broad spiritual realm. Without great worldly possessions, one Head guided and unified the great political forces. A numerous guild, to which everyone had access, stood directly beneath him and carried out his behests and strove with zeal to confirm his beneficent power. Every member of this organization was universally honored, and if the common people sought comfort or help, protection or counsel from this member, and in return were happy to provide generously for his manifold needs, he also found protection, respect, and a hearing among the more powerful, and everyone cared for these chosen men, equipped with miraculous powers, as for children of Heaven whose presence and favor spread manifold blessing abroad. Childlike faith bound men to their pronouncements. How cheerfully every man could fulfill his earthly labors when, through the agency of these holy persons, a secure future was prepared for him and every misstep forgiven, when every discolored spot in life was obliterated by them and made clean. They were the experienced helmsmen upon the great unknown sea, in whose keeping one might disdain all storms and count on a sure attainment of the coast and a landing at the world of the true home.

Before their words the wildest and most voracious propensities were obliged to yield respect and obedience. Peace proceeded from them. They preached solely love for the holy and wondrously beautiful Lady of Christendom, who, endowed with divine powers, was prepared to rescue any believer from the most dread perils. They told of celestial persons long since dead who, by virtue of adherence and loyalty to that Blessed Mother and to her divine and benevolent Child, withstood the temptation of the earthly world and achieved honors and had now become protective and beneficent powers to their living brethren, willing helpers in tribulation, intercessors for human infirmities, and efficacious friends of mankind before the heavenly throne. With what serenity people used to depart from the beautiful assemblies in the mysterious churches, which were adorned with cheering pictures, filled with sweet fragrances, and animated by holy and exalting music. Therein the consecrated remains of former God-fearing men were gratefully preserved in precious reliquaries. And through them was manifest the divine goodness and omnipotence, the powerful beneficence of these happy saints, in splendid wonders and signs. In this way loving souls preserve locks of hair or bits of writing of their departed loved ones and feed the sweet flame thereby until reuniting death. With heartfelt care people used to gather from everywhere whatever had belonged to these beloved souls, and each man considered himself fortunate

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who was able to procure, or so much as touch, such a consoling relic. Now and again the heavenly grace seemed to have descended especially upon some strange picture or upon a grave. Thither streamed people then from all regions with lovely gifts and carried away heavenly gifts in return: peace of soul and health of body.

Assiduously this powerful peace-creating organization sought to make all men sharers in this beautiful faith and sent their colleagues into all parts of the world to proclaim everywhere the Gospel of Life and to make the Kingdom of Heaven the only kingdom on this earth. With good cause the wise Head of the Church countered insolent excrescences of human talents at the expense of the sacred sense, as well as untimely, dangerous discoveries in the area of knowledge. Thus he prevented bold thinkers from asserting publicly that the earth was an insignificant planet, for he realized that humans, together with respect for their dwelling place and their earthly homeland, would also lose respect for their heavenly home and for their race, would prefer circumscribed knowledge to infinite faith, and would become accustomed to scorning everything great and worthy of wonder and look upon these as dead legalisms. At his court assembled all the clever and reverend men in Europe. All treasures flowed thither, Jerusalem destroyed had avenged itself, and Rome itself was Jerusalem, the holy residence of divine government on earth. Princes laid their disputes before the father of Christendom, willingly laid their crowns and their splendor at his feet. Indeed, they deemed it a glory to conclude the evening of their lives as members of that high guild in godly contemplation within solitary cloister walls. How beneficial this regimen, this arrangement was, how appropriate to the inner nature of man, was shown by the mighty upsurge of all the other human powers, the harmonious development of all capacities, the tremendous height to which individual men attained in all departments of knowledge of life and of the arts, and by the universally flourishing traffic in spiritual and earthly wares within the boundaries of Europe and outward to the most distant Indies.

Such were the fine essential characteristics of the truly Catholic or truly Christian times. For this splendid kingdom mankind was not ripe, not developed enough. It was a first love, which died away amid the press of business life, whose memory was crowded out by selfish cares, and whose bond – afterwards cried down as imposture and illusion and judged in the light of subsequent experiences – was sundered forever by a large proportion of Europeans. This great inner cleavage, which was attended by destructive wars, was a noteworthy sign of the harmfulness of culture to the sense for the Invisible, or at least of the temporary harmfulness of the culture of a certain stage. Annihilated that immortal sense cannot be, but it can be troubled, lamed, crowded out by other senses. Protracted intercourse of human beings decreases their affections, their belief in their race, and accustoms them to devoting their entire aim and endeavor solely to the means of wellbeing. Their needs and the devices for the satisfaction of their needs become more complex; and the greedy man requires so much time to get to know them and to acquire skills in them, that no time is left for the quiet composure of the spirit, for attentive observation of the inner world. In cases of conflict, present concerns seem to touch him more nearly, and thus faith and love, the fair blossoms of his youth, fall and yield place to the tarter fruits, knowledge and possessions. In late autumn one recalls the springtime as a childish dream, and with childish simplicity one hopes that the full granary will hold out forever. A certain solitariness seems to be necessary for the thriving of the higher senses, and hence a too extensive association of persons one with another will inevitably choke out many a sacred stalk and frighten away the gods who flee the unquiet tumult of distracted societies and the transactions of petty occasions.

We have, moreover, to do with times and periods, and for such, is not an oscillation, an alternation of opposing movements, essential? And is limited duration not characteristic of them? Is growth and decline not their nature? But also, is not resurrection and rejuvenation in new and vigorous form to be expected with certainty of them? Progressive, ever augmenting evolutions are the stuff of history. What now does not attain fulfillment, will attain it upon a future trial or upon a reiterated one. Nothing is perishable which history has taken up. Out of untold transmutations it emerges again in ever riper forms.

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Christianity had once appeared in full force and splendor; down to a new world-inspiration its ruin and its Letter endured amid ever increasing feebleness and derision. Infinite inertia lay heavy upon the now safe guild of the clergy. In the feeling of its esteem and its comfort it had stopped moving, while the laity had wrested experience and erudition from its hands and had taken mighty strides ahead of it on the way to culture. In the forgetfulness of its true office, which was to be the first among men in intellect, insight, and culture, base desires had grown rank, and the vulgarity and baseness of their mode of thinking became still more repugnant because of their garb and their vocation. Thus respect and confidence, the props of this and every kingdom, fell gradually away, and therewith that guild was undone. The actual mastery of Rome had, long before the violent insurrection, silently ceased to be. Merely clever, and therefore also merely transient, measures still held the corpse of the organization together and protected it from too rapid dissolution, into which category fell, for example, primarily the abolition of marriage for the clergy – a measure which, applied analogously, could bestow a redoubtable solidity upon the parallel military caste and confer upon it long extension of life. What was more natural than that finally a mind quick to take flame should preach open rebellion against the despotic Letter of the former organization, and with all the greater success because he himself was a member of the guild.

The insurgents rightly termed themselves Protestants, for they protested solemnly against the usurpation of the conscience by an inconvenient and seemingly illegal force. For the time being they reappropriated, as though it were free, their silently surrendered right to the examination, determination, and choice of religion. They also set up a number of right principles, introduced a number of praiseworthy things, and abolished a number of pernicious laws. But they forgot the inevitable result of their procedure, they separated the inseparable, divided the indivisible Church, and sacrilegiously wrenched themselves loose from the universal Christian community, through which and in which alone was possible the true, the enduring rebirth. The condition of religious anarchy must not be more than transitory, because there remains constantly operative and valid the reason for dedicating a number of people exclusively to this high vocation and for making this number of people independent of temporal force with regard to these affairs. The establishment of consistories and the retention of a kind of clergy was of no help toward this requirement and was no adequate substitute for it. Unfortunately the princes had intruded themselves into this schism and many of them used these contentions for the re-enforcement and extension of their sovereign power and incomes. They were happy to be exempt from that former high influence and now took the new consistories under their paternalistic protection and guidance. They were most zealously concerned with preventing the total unification of the Protestant churches, and thus religion was irreligiously contained within the boundaries of states, whereby was laid the foundation for the gradual undermining of cosmopolitan religious interest. Thus religion lost its great political influence for the creation of peace and its proper role as unifying, individualizing principle, the role of Christendom. Religious peace was settled according to thoroughly erroneous principles antithetical to religion, and by the continuation of so-called Protestantism something entirely contradictory – a revolutionary regime – was declared perpetual.

Meanwhile, at the foundation of Protestantism there lies by no means merely that pure concept. Rather, Luther treated Christianity quite arbitrarily, misjudged its spirit, introduced another Letter and another religion, namely the holy universal validity of the Bible, and therewith unfortunately was injected into religious affairs a different, highly alien, worldly science – philosophy – whose corrosive influence becomes henceforth unmistakable. Out of a dim perception of this error he was himself elevated by a large proportion of Protestants to the rank of evangelist and his translation canonized.

This choice was highly injurious to the religious sense, for nothing so crushes its sensitivity as the Letter. In the previous situation this latter could never have become so harmful, considering the large compass, the flexibility, and the copious matter of the Catholic faith, as well as the esotericizing of the Bible and the sacred power of the councils and of the spiritual Head. But now these counterforces were abrogated, the absolute accessibility of the Bible to the people was asserted, and now the inadequate contents, the

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rough, abstract sketch of religion in these books, became all the more obvious and for the spirit of holiness infinitely weighed down free animation, penetration, and revelation.

Hence the history of Protestantism shows us no great and splendid manifestations of the supernatural any more. Only its inception gleams through a transitory blaze of heaven, and soon thereafter the desiccation of the spirit of holiness is already evident. The worldly has gained the upper hand. The sense for art suffers kindred-wise. Only rarely does a genuine, eternal spark of life leap forth here and there and a small congregation form. It expires and the congregation dissolves again and drifts with the current. Such were Zinzendorf, Jakob Böhme, and others. The moderates get the upper hand, and the era feeds on a total atony of the higher organs, on the period of practical disbelief. With the Reformation Christendom came to an end. From then on there was no such thing any more. Catholics and Protestants or Reformed stood further apart from one another in sectarian division than from Mohammedans and heathens. The remaining Catholic states went on vegetating, not without imperceptibly feeling the harmful influence of the neighboring Protestant states. Modern politics first developed at this point in time, and individual powerful states sought to take over the vacant universal Chair, which had been transformed into a throne.

To most princes it seemed a humiliation to be inconvenienced for a powerless cleric. For the first time they felt the weight of their physical power on earth, beheld the heavenly powers idle before offense to their representatives, and now sought gradually and without fuss to cast off the burdensome Roman yoke from subjects of theirs who still inclined zealously to the Pope, and to make themselves independent on earth. Their uneasy consciences were set at rest by clever soul-keepers who had nothing to lose if their spiritual children arrogated to themselves the control of church property.

To the good fortune of the old organization there now advanced a newly arisen order on which the dying spirit of the hierarchy seemed to have poured out its uttermost gifts, which equipped the old with new strength, and which applied itself with marvelous insight and perseverance, more astutely than had ever happened before, to the Papal kingdom and its mightier regeneration. No such society had ever been met with before in world history. Not even the ancient Roman senate had devised plans for world conquest with greater certainty of success. No one had with greater sagacity yet contemplated the execution of a greater idea. This society will ever be a model of all societies that feel organic desire for infinite expansion and everlasting duration – but also a proof forever that unguarded time alone undoes the cleverest enterprises and that the natural growth of the entire species incessantly suppresses the artificial growth of any subsection. All that is specialized unto itself has its own measure of ability; only the capacity of the race is infinite. All projects must fail which are not projects fully consonant with all the natural inclinations of the race. This society becomes still more noteworthy as mother of the so-called secret societies, a growth still unripe but surely of genuine historical importance. The new Lutheranism – not Protestantism – surely could not have a more dangerous rival. All the magic of the Catholic faith became still more potent beneath its hand. The treasures of the sciences flowed back into its cells. What had been lost in Europe they sought to regain multifold in other continents, in the furthest Occident and Orient, and to acquire and vindicate the apostolic dignity and vocation. Nor did they lag in their efforts for popularity, and they well realized how much Luther had owed to his demagogic arts, his study of the common folk. Everywhere they instituted schools, penetrated confessionals, assumed professorial chairs, and engaged the presses, became poets and sages, ministers and martyrs, and in their tremendous expansion from America across Europe to China remained in the most extraordinary agreement as to deed and doctrine. From their schools they recruited with wise selection for their order. Against the Lutherans they preached with devastating zeal and sought to make the cruellest extermination of these heretics, as actual confederates of the devil, the most urgent obligation of Catholic Christendom. To them alone the Catholic states, and in particular the Papal See, owed their long survival of the Reformation, and who knows how old the world would still look if weak leaders, jealousy of princes and other clerical orders, court intrigues, and other odd circumstances had not checked their

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bold course and with them had not all but wiped out this last bulwark of the Catholic organization. It is sleeping now, this dread order, in wretched form on the outskirts of Europe. Perhaps from thence, like the nation that is sheltering it, it will some day spread abroad with new force over its old homeland, perhaps under a different name.

The Reformation was a sign of its time. It was significant for all Europe, even if it had openly broken forth only in truly free Germany. The good minds of all nations had secretly come of age and in the illusory feeling of their vocation revolted the more sharply against obsolete constraint. The erudite is by instinct the enemy of the clergy according to the old order. The erudite and the clerical classes, once they are separated, must war to the death, for they strive for one and the same position. This separation advanced ever further, and the erudite gained the more ground the more the history of European humanity approached the age of triumphant erudition, whereas knowledge and faith entered into more decisive opposition. It was to faith that people looked to find the cause of the general impasse, and this they hoped to obviate by keen knowledge. Everywhere the sense for the holy suffered from the manifold persecutions of its previous form, its former personality. The end product of the modern manner of thinking was termed "philosophy," and under that head was reckoned everything that was opposed to the old, hence primarily every objection against religion. The initial personal hatred of the Catholic faith passed gradually over into hatred of the Bible, of the Christian faith, and finally of religion in general. Still further, the hatred of religion extended itself quite naturally and consistently to all objects of enthusiasm. It made imagination and emotion heretical, as well as morality and the love of art, the future and the past. With some difficulty it placed man first in the order of created things, and reduced the infinite creative music of the universe to the monotonous clatter of a monstrous mill, which, driven by the stream of chance and floating thereon, was supposed to be a mill in the abstract, without Builder or Miller, in fact an actual *perpetuum mobile*, a mill that milled of itself.

One enthusiasm was generously left to poor mankind and, as a touchstone of supreme culture, was made indispensable to every shareholder in it – enthusiasm for this grand and splendid "philosophy" and more particularly for its priests and initiates. France was fortunate enough to become the womb and the seat of this new faith, which was pasted together out of pure knowledge. Yet, decried as poetry was in this new church, there were nevertheless some poets in its midst who, for the sake of effect, still made use of the old adornments and of the old light, though in so doing they ran the risk of setting the new world system on fire with the old flame. Shrewder members, however, knew how to pour cold water at once upon such listeners as had waxed warm. The members were tirelessly busy cleaning the poetry off Nature, the earth, the human soul, and the branches of learning – obliterating every trace of the holy, discrediting by sarcasm the memory of all ennobling events and persons, and stripping the world of all colorful ornament. The Light, by virtue of its mathematical submissiveness and its insolence, had become their favorite. They rejoiced that it yielded to refraction sooner than to play with colors, and thus they took from it the name of their great undertaking: Enlightenment. In Germany this undertaking was prosecuted even more thoroughly. The educational system was reformed. An attempt was made to impart to the old religion a more modern, more rational, more general meaning by carefully washing it clean of all that was marvelous or mysterious. The whole of scholarship was enlisted to cut off refuge in history, while people strove to elevate history itself to a domestic and civic portrait of manners and families. God was made into the disengaged spectator of this great, touching drama which the scholars were mounting, at the conclusion of which He was expected to entertain and solemnly admire the poets and players. By downright preference the common people were enlightened and educated to that cultivated enthusiasm, and in this way there arose a new European guild: the Lovers of Mankind and Enlighteners. What a pity that Nature remained so wondrous and incomprehensible, so poetic and infinite, in defiance of all the efforts to modernize her. If somewhere an old superstition about a higher world and the like turned up, a hue and cry was straightway raised on all sides and wherever possible the dangerous spark was quenched into ashes by "philosophy" and wit. And yet Tolerance was the watchword of the cultured, and particularly in France was reckoned synonymous with "philosophy."

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This history of modern disbelief is highly significant and the key to all the tremendous phenomena of recent times. It has its first beginning in this century, especially in the latter half, and in a brief span has grown to incalculable size and diversity. A second Reformation, more comprehensive and more specifically characteristic, was inevitable, and it had to strike first in that country which was most modernized and which, from lack of freedom, had lain longest in an asthenic state. The supernatural fire would long since have burst forth and set at naught the clever plans for enlightenment, had not secular pressure and influence come to the latter's support. But at that moment, when dissension arose between the erudite and the new regimes, between the enemies of religion and their whole fellowship, it necessarily emerged as a third, tone-setting, conciliating member, and this emergence must now be acknowledged by every friend thereof and proclaimed aloud, even if it should not be especially evident. That the time of resurrection has come, and that precisely those circumstances which seemed to be directed against its animation and which threatened to complete its destruction, have become the most favorable signs for its regeneration, this cannot remain in doubt to a person with a sense of history. Genuine anarchy is the creative element of religion. Out of the annihilation of all that is positive it raises its glorious head as a new creator of worlds. As though of himself, man rises toward heaven when nothing else holds him bound; the higher organs rise for the first time of their own will out of the general uniform mass and out of the total dissolution of all human abilities and powers, as the primaeval seed of earthly formation. The spirit of God hovers over the waters and a heavenly island is discernible above the retreating waves as the dwelling place of the new man, as the river-bed of eternal life.

Let the true beholder contemplate calmly and dispassionately the new state-toppling era. Will not the state-toppler seem to him like Sisyphus? Now he has attained the summit of equilibrium, and already the mighty weight is rolling down the other side again. It will never remain on high unless an attraction toward heaven holds it poised on the crest. All your props are too weak if your state retains its tendency toward the earth. But link it by a higher yearning to the heights of heaven, give it a relevancy to the universe, and you will have in it a never-wearying spring, and you will see your efforts richly rewarded. I refer you to history. Search amid its instructive coherency for parallel points of time and learn to use the magic wand of analogy.

Is the Revolution to remain the French one, as the Reformation was the Lutheran one? Is Protestantism once again, contrary to nature, to be fixed as a revolutionary regime? Shall the Letter make way for the Letter? Are you seeking the seed-germ of deterioration in the old order too, in the old spirit? And do you imagine yourselves on a better tack toward the understanding of a better spirit? O would that the spirit of spirits filled you and you would desist from this foolish effort to mold history and mankind and to give it your direction! Is it not independent, not self-empowered, as well as infinitely lovable and prophetic? To study it, to follow after it, to learn from it, to keep step with it, to follow in faith its promises and hints – of these things no one thinks.

In France a great deal has been done for religion by withdrawing its right of citizenship and leaving it solely the right of tenancy in the household, and this not in One Person but in all its countless individual forms. As a strange, unprepossessing waif it must first win hearts again and be universally loved before it can be publicly worshiped again and be drawn into secular matters for friendly advice and the harmonizing of spirits. Historically noteworthy remains the attempt of that great iron mask which, under the name of Robespierre, sought in religion the mid-point and the strength of the Republic. Likewise the insensibility with which theophily, that mystique of modern Enlightenment, was taken up. Likewise the new conquests of the Jesuits. Likewise the approach to the Orient through recent political circumstances.

Of the other European countries besides Germany it may be prophesied only that, with *peace*, a new and higher religious life will begin to pulse within them and that this will soon consume all other secular interests. In Germany, on the other hand, the traces of a new world can already be demonstrated with total certainty. Germany is proceeding, at slow but sure pace, ahead of the other European countries.

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While the latter are occupied with war, speculation, and partisan spirit, the German is developing himself with all industry into a partaker in a higher epoch of culture, and this advance cannot fail to give him a great advantage over the others in the course of time. In learning and in the arts one detects a mighty ferment. Infinitely vast intelligence is being developed. Requisition is being made from new and fresh lodes of ore. Never was learning in better hands, never did it arouse greater expectations. The most varied aspects of objects are being explored. Nothing is being left unstirred, unjudged, unexamined. Everything is being worked. Writers are becoming more individualized and more powerful. Every old monument of history, every art, every branch of knowledge is finding friends, is being embraced with new love and made fruitful. A versatility without parallel, a wonderful profundity, a splendid polish, comprehensive knowledge, and a rich and mighty imagination are to be found on this side and on that side, often daringly combined. A tremendous intimation of the creative will, of the boundlessness, of the infinite multiplicity, of the sacred particularity and universal capability of the inner man seems everywhere to be astir. Awakened from the morning dream of helpless childhood, a section of the race is exerting its first powers against serpents that entwine its cradle and seek to filch from it the use of its limbs. All these things are still only intimations, incoherent and raw, but to the historical eye they give evidence of a universal individuality, a new history, a new mankind, the sweetest embrace of a young and surprised Church and a loving God, and the fervent reception of a new Messiah within its thousand members. Who does not, with sweet shame, feel himself pregnant? The newborn child will be the image of his father, a new Golden Age, with dark and infinite eyes, an Age prophetic, wonder-working, miraculously healing, comforting, and kindling eternal life – a great Age of reconciliation, a Saviour who, like a good spirit, is at home among men, believed in though not seen, visible under countless forms to believers, consumed as bread and wine, embraced as a bride, breathed as air, heard as word and song, and with heavenly delight accepted as death into the core of the subsiding body amid the supreme pangs of love.

We now stand high enough to smile amicably at those previous ages mentioned above and also to recognize remarkable crystallizations of historical matter even amid those odd follies. Gratefully we wish to press the hands of those scholars and “philosophers.” For that illusion had to be exhausted for the benefit of posterity and the scientific aspect of things had to be validated. Lovelier and more colorful stands poetry, like an India adorned, opposed to the cold, lifeless peak of that closed-room intelligence. In order that India may be so warm and resplendent in the middle of the globe, it was necessary that a cold and rigid sea, dead cliffs, fog instead of starry sky, and a long night should make both extremes inhospitable. The profound significance of mechanics lay heavy upon those anchorites in the deserts of Reason. The charm of first insight overwhelmed them; the old took its revenge upon them. To the first awareness of self they sacrificed the holiest and most beautiful things in the world in astounding denial, and they were the first to acknowledge anew through deeds and to proclaim the sacredness of Nature, the infinitude of Art, the ineluctability of knowledge, respect for the secular, and the omnipresence of the genuinely historical; and they were the first to put an end to a higher, more universal, and more terrible dominion of ghosts than they themselves had thought.

Only through more exact knowledge of religion will those dread begotten of religious sleep, those dreams and deliria of the sacred organ, be better judged, and only then will the importance of that gift be properly appreciated. Where no gods are, ghosts prevail, and the actual development time of European ghosts – and this fairly completely accounts for their forms – was the period of transition from Greek doctrines of gods into Christianity. Come, therefore, you Lovers of Mankind and encyclopedists, into the pacific lodge and receive the fraternal kiss, cast off the grey net, and with youthful love behold the wondrous splendor of Nature, of History, and of Mankind. I shall lead you to a brother, and he shall speak with you so that your hearts shall leap up, and so that you shall clothe your dead, beloved intuition with a new body, and so that you shall embrace again and recognize what hovered before you and what the sluggish earthly intelligence could not grasp for you.

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This brother is the heartbeat of the new era. Whoever has felt it no longer doubts of the era's coming, and with sweet pride in his contemporaneity steps forth even from among the multitude to the new band of disciples. He has made a new veil for the Holy One, which, clinging, betrays the heavenly mold of her limbs and yet conceals her more decorously than any other. The veil is to the virgin what the mind is to the body, its indispensable organ, whose folds are the letters of her sweet annunciation. The infinite play of the folds is a cipher-music, for speech is too wooden and too insolent for the virgin: her lips open only for song. To me it is nothing less than the solemn call to a new primaeval assembly, the mighty wing-stroke of a passing angelic herald. These are the first pangs: let everyone prepare for delivery in birth!

The highest development in natural philosophy is now at hand and we can the more easily now survey the learned guild. The indigence of the external sciences had become the more evident in recent times the more familiar we became with them. Nature began to look ever more indigent, and, accustomed to the brilliance of our discoveries, we saw more plainly that it was only a borrowed light and that with known instruments and by known methods we would not find and construe the essential thing we sought. Each investigator had to confess that one branch of knowledge was nothing without the others, and thus there arose attempts at mystification in the branches of knowledge; the wayward soul of philosophy, demonstrated as a mere scientific element, fell into place in a symmetrical basic figure of the sciences. Others brought the concrete sciences into new circumstances, promoted a lively interchange among them, and tried to set clear their natural historical classification. And so it continues, and it is easy to estimate how favorable must be this association with both the external and internal worlds, with the higher cultivation of the intellect, with the knowledge of the former and the stimulation and culture of the latter, and how under these circumstances the weather must clear and the old heaven must again come into view, and with it the yearning for it, the living astronomy.

Now let us turn to the political spectacle of our time. The old world and the new world are engaged in battle. The defectiveness and shortcomings of the organization of states up to now have become apparent in dreadful phenomena. What if here, too, as in the branches of knowledge, closer and more multiple connections and contacts of European states were the primary historical goal of war? What if a new stirring of hitherto slumbering Europe were to come into play? What if Europe were to reawaken and a state of states, a political theory of knowledge, were to confront us! Might perhaps hierarchy, that symmetrical basic figure of states, be the principle of unification of states, as the intellectual concept of the political ego? It is impossible for secular forces to put themselves into equilibrium; only a third element, which is at once secular and superworldly, can solve that problem. Between the conflicting powers themselves no peace can be established. All peace is mere illusion, mere truce. From the standpoint of cabinets or the common consciousness, no unification is conceivable. Both parties have great and urgent claims and must make them, driven as they are by the spirit of the world and of mankind. Both are indestructible powers in the heart of man: on the one side reverence for antiquity, dependence upon historical system, love for the monuments of ancestors and of the ancient and glorious family of the state, and joy in obedience; on the other side delightful sensation of freedom, unlimited expectation of tremendous provinces of activity, pleasure in things new and young, effortless contact with all members of the state, pride in the universal validity of man, joy in one's personal rights and in the property of the whole, and the powerful feeling of citizenship. Let neither of these two hope to destroy the other. All conquests are meaningless here, for the inner capital of every kingdom lies not behind earthwalls and is not to be taken by siege.

Who knows whether there has been enough of war? But it will never come to an end unless someone grasps the palm branch, which a spiritual power alone can proffer. Blood will wash over Europe until the nations perceive the fearful madness which is driving them about in a circle; until, arrested by holy music and soothed, they approach former alters in multi-hued fusion and undertake works of peace; until a great feast of love is celebrated as a festival of peace amid hot tears upon smoking battlefields. Only religion can waken Europe again, and reassure the peoples, and install Christendom with new splendor



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visibly on earth in its old peace-establishing office.

Do nations have about them everything of the human being – except his heart? – except his holy organ? Will they not become friends, as men do, beside the coffins of their loves? Will they not forget all that is hostile when heavenly compassion speaks to them? – and one misfortune, one sorrow, one emotion has filled their eyes with tears? Will sacrifice and surrender not seize them with irresistible force? And will they not yearn to be friends and allies?

Where is that old, dear faith, which alone can render blessed, in God's government on earth? Where is that heavenly trust of humans in one another, that sweet piety amid the outpouring of a God-inspired heart, that all-embracing spirit of Christendom?

Christianity is of a threefold form. One is the creative element of religion, the joy in all religion. One is intercession in and of itself, faith in the universal capacity of all earthly things to be the bread and wine of eternal life. One is faith in Christ, His Mother, and the Saints. Choose which one you will. Choose all three, it makes no difference. You will thereby become Christians and members of a single, eternal, ineffable community.

Applied, vitalized Christianity was the old Catholic faith, the last of these forms. Its omnipresence in life, its love of art, its profound humanity, the inviolability of its marriages, its communicativeness benevolent to man, its joy in poverty, obedience, and loyalty, render it unmistakable as genuine religion and comprise the basic features of its system.

It had been purified in the river of eras. In intimate and indissoluble combination with the other two forms of Christianity it will ever make fortunate this earth.

Its accidental form is as good as annihilated. The old Papacy lies in its grave and Rome for the second time has become a ruin. Shall Protestantism not cease at last and make way for a new, enduring Church?

The other continents await Europe's reconciliation and resurrection in order to join with it and become fellow-citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Should there not be presently once again in Europe a host of truly holy spirits? Should not all those truly related in religion become full of yearning to behold heaven on earth? And should they not gladly join together and begin songs of holy choirs?

Christendom must come alive again and be effective, and, without regard to national boundaries, again form a visible Church which will take into its bosom all souls athirst for the supernatural, and willingly become the mediatrix between the old world and the new.

It must once again pour out the cornucopia of blessing over peoples. From the holy womb of a venerable European Council shall Christendom arise, and the task of awakening will be prosecuted according to a comprehensive divine plan. Then no one will protest any longer against Christian and secular compulsion, for the essence of the Church will be true freedom, and all necessary reforms will be carried out under its guidance as a peaceful and formal state process.

When and when sooner? The question is not to be asked. Patience only! It will, it must come, that sacred time of endless peace when the new Jerusalem will be the capital of the world. Until then be cheerful and courageous amid the dangers of the time. Partakers of my faith, proclaim with word and deed the divine Gospel, and to the veritable and everlasting Faith remain true unto death.

Source: Novalis, *Hymns to the Night, and Other Selected Writings*, translated by Charles E. Passage. Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1960, pp. 45–63.

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Source of original German text: *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs* ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel. Bd. 2, *Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978, pp. 732–50.

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