

1. Introduction

In the first volume of J.G.A. Pocock's study of the historiographical context and development of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788) Pocock makes an interesting speculative comment on the potential significance of the *Decline and Fall*'s reception history in early nineteenth century French Protestant thought. He suggested that 'if he [Gibbon] is a significant... figure in the history of Enlightened culture in England, there is also a place to be sought for him in that of French-speaking Switzerland and Protestant France; perhaps in that revival of liberal and post-Jacobin historiography which connects Germaine de Staël... with François Guizot, who translated the *Decline and Fall* into French and thought of European history in ways owing much to Gibbon even if their historical personalities were profoundly different.'¹ Pocock's conjecture that the French translation of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* forms a connection between De Staël's Coppet circle and the *doctrinaire* brand of liberalism, with which Guizot came to be associated, is worthy of exploration. We know that Benjamin Constant considered translating Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* in late 1780s.² But I will argue here that the overlap between the interest of the Coppet group in Gibbon and Guizot's own interest in the historian of Rome's decline goes beyond the anecdotal and, in fact, shows us how De Staël, Constant and Guizot were all thinking in different but inter-connected ways about both the historical role of Christianity in the development of European civilisation after the fall of the Roman Empire and the differences and similarities between ancient and modern conceptions of liberty.

These discussions can also be viewed as forming part of the early nineteenth century 'spiritualist' reaction against the anti-religious views of the *idéologues* and, by extension, of the Jacobins and Napoleon. 'Spiritualism' is usually viewed as a predominantly theological or philosophical phenomenon, but this essay will suggest that it was also a historiographical one in which alternative liberal histories that stressed the value of religious experience were developed.³ In this sense we can see these discussions about the history of early Christianity as a neglected *point de départ* for 'liberal' history in France, which is more commonly

¹ J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Volume One: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon 1737-1764* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 51.

² Dennis Wood, *Benjamin Constant: A Biography* (London, 1993), p. 78. Although Gustave Rudler questions how serious Constant was about his desire to translate Gibbon. See Gustave Rudler, *La jeunesse de Benjamin Constant (1767-1794): Le disciple du XVIIIe siècle. Utilitarisme et pessimisme. Mme de Charrière, d'après de nombreux documents inédits* (Paris, 1909), p. 183. Constant mentioned his desire to translate Gibbon in the preface to his 1787 translation of an extract from John Gillies's *History of Ancient Greece* entitled *Essais sur les moeurs des tems héroïques de la Grèce*. See Benjamin Constant, *Oeuvres complètes I: Écrits de jeunesse (1774-1795)* edited by Lucia Omacini and Jean-Daniel Candaux (Tübingen, 1998), p. 149.

³ On the nineteenth century 'spiritualist' reaction against philosophical materialism and irreligion see Paul Bénichou, *Le sacre de l'écrivain 1750-1830: Essai sur l'avènement d'un pouvoir spirituel laïque dans la France moderne* (Paris, 1996), pp. 209-263; Jean-Pierre Cotton, *Autour de Victor Cousin: Une politique de la philosophie* (Paris, 1992), pp. 191-197.

associated with the Restoration.⁴ Studying the reception of Gibbon in early nineteenth century French liberalism is a fertile way, as Pocock suggests, of beginning to explore these questions in greater depth. This essay does not therefore address Gibbon's French reception *per se* but rather considers liberal historical discourses about religion, which can be opened up through looking at Guizot's or Constant's critical engagement with Gibbon.

There are hardly any accounts of the importance of religion in Guizot's early intellectual development. Laurent Theis has argued that this lacuna in studies of Guizot's religious engagement exists because Guizot did not really discuss his Protestant faith in his historical or political works before 1850: 'Until 1850, God – under any name or with any attributes we might ascribe to Him – is not really present in Guizot's work, either in his historical writings or in his political actions.'⁵ Similarly, Pierre Rosanvallon has argued that 'before 1848, Guizot wrote little about religion'⁶ and Aurelian Craiutu has acknowledged that he has 'little to say about Guizot's religious writings' claiming that 'this choice was dictated' by his focus on Guizot's early writings.⁷ His biographer Charles Pouthas gave the most complete narrative account that we possess of the importance of religion in Guizot's moderate Calvinist upbringing in Geneva but he claimed that during the 1810s Guizot adopted a 'fatalistic' view of history and rejected the notion of a 'providential plan' in his writings.⁸ These claims are, however, difficult to substantiate when examining Guizot's intellectual development in the 1810s and his political and historical writings during the Bourbon Restoration. Contrary to these approaches, I will argue that Christianity, and an avowedly Protestant interpretation of Christianity, continued to play a central role within Guizot's growth both as a historian and as a political thinker.⁹

Some recent work, such as that by the historian of philosophy Bertrand Binoche on private religion and public opinion in early nineteenth-century France¹⁰ or Pierre Manent's book on the Greek *polis* and the Roman city and their conceptual uses in nineteenth-century arguments about politics and religion¹¹, has sketched the outlines of a more complex examination of the

⁴ On the development of 'liberal' historiography in France during the Restoration see Stanley Mellon, *The Political Uses of History: A Study of Historians in the French Restoration* (Stanford, 1958).

⁵ Laurent Theis, 'Guizot et le problème religieux', in *François Guizot et la culture politique de son temps* ed. Marina Valensise (Paris, 1991), p. 253. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

⁶ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le moment Guizot* (Paris, 1985), p. 385.

⁷ Aurelian Craiutu, *Liberalism under Siege: The Political Thought of the Doctrinaires* (Lanham, MD, 2003), p. 10.

⁸ Charles H. Pouthas, *La Jeunesse de Guizot (1787-1814)* (Paris, 1936), pp. 379-380.

⁹ There are two notable exceptions to this widespread failure to acknowledge the importance of Guizot's religious engagement within his early intellectual development, but neither deal explicitly with Guizot's historical account of early Christianity. See Pierre-Yves Kirschleger, *La religion de Guizot* (Geneva, 1999); Lucien Jaume, 'Guizot et la philosophie de la représentation', *Droits* no. 15 (1992), esp. pp. 142-144.

¹⁰ Bertrand Binoche, *Religion privée, opinion publique* (Paris, 2012).

¹¹ Pierre Manent, *Les Métamorphoses de la cité: Essai sur la dynamique de l'Occident* (Paris, 2012).

post-revolutionary arguments over religion and their relation to the development of liberalism. In this essay I hope to be able to expand on the arguments outlined in these works.

François Guizot's 1812 translation of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*¹² was the first major historical work that he produced in his literary career, at the age of twenty-five.¹³ In his *Mémoires* Guizot identified his translation of Gibbon, alongside the journal *Annales de l'éducation* which he edited with his future wife Paulan de Meulan from 1811-1814, as the first literary work to garner him 'some attention from serious men', attention which then led directly to his appointment to a chair in modern history at the Sorbonne in 1812.¹⁴ It should also be noted that within the circles in which Guizot mixed in Paris in the 1800s, there were many distinguished translators of eighteenth-century English and Scottish historical and philosophical texts. Guizot's former philosophy teacher at the Académie in Geneva, Pierre Prévost (1751-1839), translated Dugald Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* in 1809 and Guizot himself reviewed the translation for *Le Publiciste*.¹⁵ Similarly Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard (1732-1817)¹⁶, whose *salon* Guizot regularly frequented in the 1800s, had produced an influential French translation of William Robertson's *History of the Reign of Charles V* in 1771.¹⁷ In short, in the circles in which Guizot mixed during the Napoleonic period, there was a profound awareness of the methodology of the Scottish philosophical historians and an appreciation of their

¹² The edition of the translation to which I'll refer to throughout is the corrected 1828 reprint of Guizot's original 1812 edition. Edward Gibbon, *Histoire de la décadence et de la chute de l'Empire romain d'Édouard Gibbon Traduite de l'anglais: Entièrement revue et corrigée, précédée d'une notice sur la vie et le caractère de Gibbon, et accompagné de notes critiques et historiques relatives, pour la plupart, à l'histoire de la propagation du christianisme* par M. François Guizot, (Paris, 1828), 13 vols.

¹³ On Guizot's edition of Gibbon see François Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps* Vol. I (Paris, 1858), pp. 14-15; François Guizot, 'Le Christianisme et le spiritualisme', *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 September 1869, pp. 5-34. The existing secondary literature on Guizot's translation of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is small. See, however, Pouthas, *La jeunesse de Guizot (1787-1814)*, pp. 316-320; Kirschleger, *La religion de Guizot*, pp. 87-91; Gabriel Louis Moyal, 'Traduire l'Angleterre sous la Restauration: Gibbon et Shakespeare de Guizot', *Meta: journal de traducteurs: Meta: Translators' Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2005, pp. 881-905; Gabriel Louis Moyal, 'L'usage de l'histoire: Gibbon dans Guizot', *Re-reading/La relecture: Essays in honour of Graham Falconer* (Newcastle, 2012), pp. 211-237; Boris Réizov, *L'historiographie romantique française 1815-1830* (Moscow, n.d), p. 271; Jean-François Jacouty, *Ethique, histoire et politique chez Guizot: Genèse d'une pensée et pratiques jusqu'à la révolution de Juillet* Vol. I (Lille, 1997), pp. 141-154.

¹⁴ Guizot, *Mémoires* Vol. I, p. 14. The most significant contemporary reviews of Guizot's translation of Gibbon were by Charles Vanderbourg and Claude Fauriel. See Charles Vanderbourg, 'Compte rendu d'*Histoire de la décadence et de la chute de l'Empire romain* par Edouard Gibbon', *Mercure de France* vol. 52 (1812), pp. 160-167, 499-505; Claude Fauriel, 'Compte rendu d'*Histoire de la décadence et de la chute de l'Empire romain* par Edouard Gibbon', *Le Moniteur français universel* 30 August 1812, p. 243.

¹⁵ Dugald Stewart, *Éléments de la philosophie de l'esprit humain* trans. Pierre Prévost (Geneva, 1808), 3 vols. For Guizot's review see François Guizot, 'Compte Rendu de *Éléments de la philosophie de l'esprit humain*, par Dugald Stewart', in *Le Publiciste*, 16 and 19 March 1809. On Prévost's role in introducing Scottish philosophy to Switzerland and France see Daniel Schulthess, 'L'école écossaise et la philosophie d'expression française: le rôle de Pierre Prévost (Genève, 1751-1839)', *Annales Benjamin Constant*, no. 18-19 (1996), pp. 97-105.

¹⁶ On Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard see Dominique-Joseph Garat, *Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits et sur le XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1820), 2 vols.

¹⁷ William Robertson, *L'histoire du règne de l'Empereur Charles-Quint* translated by Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard (Paris and Amsterdam, 1771), 6 vols.

historiographical importance. But I will argue here that the historical interest of Guizot's notes to his edition of Gibbon goes beyond the facts of his own career.

The primary interest of the notes is due to the light that they shed on the early intellectual history of liberalism in late Napoleonic France and they are worthy of attention in two central ways. Firstly, the notes demonstrate the significance of a revisionist history of early Christianity within Guizot's nascent historiographical approach towards the history of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. They also indicate the profound ideological influence that the Swiss minister of culture and ambassador to Paris, Philipp Albert Stapfer (1767-1840)¹⁸, who Guizot lived with near Paris for much of the late 1800s, had on Guizot's conception of Christianity and indeed some of the ideas in the notes correspond remarkably closely to arguments articulated in Stapfer's writings on religion, as well as suggesting that Guizot's works relate in interesting ways to the religious historical work of Benjamin Constant in *De la religion* and other articles.¹⁹ Secondly, Guizot's editorial notes form a small but significant contribution to the complex arguments about the similarities and differences between ancient and modern conceptions of liberty, which were of such importance to the most noteworthy Francophone political thinkers of the 1800s and 1810s like Constant²⁰, J.-C.-L. Simonde de Sismondi²¹ and Madame de Staël.²²

¹⁸ On Philipp Albert Stapfer's life and thought see Rudolf Luginbühl, *Phillipe-Albert Stapfer: Helvetischer minister der Kunst und Wissenschaften, 1766-1840* trad. fr. (Paris, 1888); Louis Bourbon, *La pensée religieuse de P.A. Stapfer* (Cahors, 1899); Adolf Rohr, *Philipp Albert Stapfer: eine Biographie: im altern Bern vom Ancien régime zur Revolution (1766-1798)* (Bern, 1998); Adolf Ruhr, *Philippe Albert Stapfer: Une biographie: A Berne de l'Ancien Régime à la Révolution helvétique (1766-1798)* trans. Gérard Poupon (Bern, 2007); Adolf Rohr, *Philipp Albert Stapfer: Minister der Helvetischen Republik und Gesandter der Schweiz in Paris 1798-1803* (Baden, 2005). See also his correspondence, Philipp Albert Stapfer, *Aus Philipp Albert Stapfer's Briefwechsel* edited by Rudolf Luginbühl (Basel, 1891) 2 vols and his collected religious and philosophical works, Philipp Albert Stapfer, *Mélanges philosophiques, littéraires, historiques et religieux* (Paris, 1844) 2 vols. For commentary on Stapfer's view of Kant see Maximilien Vallois, *La formation de l'influence kantienne en France* (Paris, 1924), pp. 261-285.

¹⁹ There is a wealth of recent scholarship on the relationship between Constant's liberalism and his views on religion. See, for example, Giovanni Paoletti, *Benjamin Constant et les Anciens: Politique, religion, histoire* trans. Marie-France Merger (Paris, 2006), pp.333-408; Helena Rosenblatt, *Liberal Values: Benjamin Constant and the Politics of Religion* (Cambridge, 2008); Bryan Garsten, 'Constant on the religious spirit of liberalism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Constant* edited by Helena Rosenblatt (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 286-312; Kurt Klooke, 'Religion et société chez Benjamin Constant', in *Coppet, creuset de l'esprit libéral: Les idées politiques et constitutionnelles du groupe de Madame de Staël* edited by Lucien Jaume (Paris, 2000), pp. 121-135; Tzvetan Todorov, 'Religion according to Constant', translated by Arthur Goldhammer in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Constant*, pp. 275-285; Bryan Garsten, 'Religion and the Case against Ancient Liberty: Benjamin Constant's Other Lectures', *Political Theory* 38:1 (2010), pp. 4-33; Helena Rosenblatt, 'On the need for a Protestant Reformation: Constant, Sismondi, Guizot and Laboulaye', in *French Liberalism from Montesquieu to the Present Day* edited by Raf Geenens and Helena Rosenblatt (Cambridge, 2012); Catherine Carpenter, 'A Contextual Study of Benjamin Constant's Interest in Polytheism and Theism (1776-1806)' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 2007.

²⁰ See, most famously, Benjamin Constant, 'The Liberty of the Ancients compared with that of the Moderns' (1819), in Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings* edited and translated by Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge, 1997).

²¹ J.-C.-L. Simonde de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge*, 16 vols. (Paris, 1809-19).

²² Madame de Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (Hereafter *DL*) edited by Gérard Gengembre and Jean Goldzink (Paris, 1991).

Guizot's notes on Gibbon also show in miniature the development of his rejection of the intellectual legacy of the *idéologues*, a group that included figures like Dominique-Joseph Garat, Pierre Cabanis and Jean-Baptiste Say, and in particular their uncompromisingly anti-Christian views. In her intellectual history of the *idéologues'* journal *La Décade philosophique* Joanna Kitchin wrote that 'hostility towards Christianity is a fundamental disposition, perhaps the most important, of the philosophy professed in *La Décade'* and it was precisely this hostility which Guizot attempted to counter historically with his edition of Gibbon.²³ Say's obituary of Gibbon in *La Décade* gives a representative sense of the *idéologues'* view of the historian of Rome. In the obituary Say praised Gibbon's exposure of the bible as 'one of the most scandalous books ever written' and, while he admired Gibbon's acknowledgement of the ethical value of certain Christian ideas, he lauded his exposure of Christianity's 'supernatural' foundations.²⁴ This argument about the value of Christianity, between the *idéologues* on one side and those who would subsequently help to develop the ideas which, in different ways, would constitute nineteenth century French liberalism (Constant, De Staël, Guizot), flared up at various points in the early nineteenth century, notably during the controversy over the publication of Madame de Staël's *De la littérature* in 1800, which I shall address later.

There is very little recent scholarship on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century reception of Gibbon in France.²⁵ The first three volumes of the *Decline and Fall* had been translated in the 1780s by Louis XVI's secretary Leclerc de Sept-Chênes with, according to Sainte-Beuve, the help of the King himself but by the 1800s there was still no complete French scholarly translation.²⁶ Guizot himself had been recommended to undertake the critical edition by Suard, who Gibbon had originally intended to be the translator.²⁷ The publisher Maradan stipulated in the 1808 contract for the new edition that Pauline de Meulan, at the time a far better known book reviewer in Parisian literary society than Guizot, should collaborate with him on the edition. In the end Pauline de Meulan took on the task of revising the translation while Guizot focused on producing the editorial notes and corrections needed in order to produce a complete critical edition.

²³ Joanna Kitchin, *Un journal 'philosophique': La Décade (1794-1807)*, (Paris, 1965), p. 157. Cited in Richard Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution: An Intellectual History of Jean-Baptiste Say's Political Economy* (Oxford, 2000), p. 122.

²⁴ Jean-Baptiste Say, 'Nécrologie de Edouard Gibbon', *La Décade philosophique* no. 54, 30 Vendémiaire, an IV, p. 149. For commentary on Say's view of Gibbon and his anti-religious views see Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution*, pp.121-123.

²⁵ The only recent study of Gibbon's reception in France that I'm aware of is Michel Rapoport, 'La réception de Gibbon en France', in *L'historiographie romantique* edited by Francis Claudon, André Encrevé and Laurence Richer (Paris, 2007), pp. 111-119.

²⁶ Sainte-Beuve, *Oeuvres* Vol. II (Paris, 1960), p. 733.

²⁷ Pouthas, *La Jeunesse de Guizot*, p. 316.

In his preface, Guizot signalled that his principal concern in his additional notes to Gibbon's main text would be to comment on Gibbon's representation of the establishment of Christianity in the *Decline and Fall*. He wrote that 'my main goal and my principal intention [in this] is to revise with care the chapters which Gibbon devotes to the history of the establishment of Christianity, in order to re-establish the facts which make up these chapters in all their exactitude and under their true light.'²⁸ Guizot made it clear that his notes would be almost exclusively concerned with the first five volumes of the *Decline and Fall* because these were the volumes most concerned, firstly, with Christianity, and, secondly and relatedly, with "the move from the ancient world to the modern world, from the morality and ideas of Roman Europe to those of Europe today, which constitutes the most interesting and the most important period to be clarified in the entire work."²⁹ It is striking that in the final eight volumes of Guizot's translation of Gibbon there are no substantive editorial notes at all. He did not amend Gibbon's account of the history of the barbarian invasions, ecclesiastical history or early Frankish history.

Guizot also acknowledged in his preface the importance of the intellectual advice which Stapfer had given him about his editorial work and his use of German books from Stapfer's library. He wrote: 'without M. Stapfer's advice and the use of his library I would often have had great difficulty in discovering the works which could provide me with precise details, and I would doubtless have remained unaware of many of them; he lent me both his knowledge and his books.'³⁰ In his *Mémoires* Guizot does not mention Stapfer at all in his opening chapter on his life under the Empire from 1807-1814 and yet Stapfer's liberal Protestantism, reinforced by a particular understanding of the notion of duty in Kant's religious thought³¹, was echoed in many of Guizot's editorial notes to his edition of Gibbon.

Guizot's first substantive note in his edition is attached to Gibbon's comments about the institution of slavery in his second chapter on the state of the Roman empire in the Age of the Antonines. In this chapter, Gibbon argued that:

the perfect settlement of the Roman empire was preceded by ages of violence and rapine. The slaves consisted... of barbarian captives, taken in thousands by the chance of war... and impatient to break and to revenge their fetters. Against such internal enemies... the most severe regulations, and the cruel treatment seemed almost justified by the great law of self-

²⁸ François Guizot, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *Histoire de la décadence et de la chute de l'Empire romain* (Hereafter HDCE) Vol. I, p. 9.

²⁹ Guizot, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. I, p. 9.

³⁰ Guizot, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. I, p. 15.

³¹ For Stapfer's view of Kant see Stapfer, 'Notice sur Emmanuel Kant et revue des principaux points de sa doctrine', in *Mélanges philosophiques* Vol. I (Paris, 1844), pp. 101-190.

preservation. But when the principal nations of Europe, Asia, and Africa, were united under the laws of one sovereign, the source of the foreign supplies flowed with much less abundance... The existence of a slave became an object of greater value, and though his happiness still depended on the temper and circumstances of the master, the humanity of the latter, instead of being restrained by fear, was encouraged by the sense of his own interest. The progress of manners was accelerated by the virtue or policy of the emperors; and by the edicts of Hadrian and the Antonines, the protection of the laws was extended to the most abject part of mankind.³²

Commenting on this passage, Guizot objected strongly to the fact that Gibbon had failed to acknowledge the later, far greater importance of the introduction of Christianity in relation to the improvement of conditions for slaves in the Roman empire. Guizot cited the Scottish philosophical historian William Robertson's sermon, *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance* (1755), as a corrective to what he viewed as facts that Gibbon had either "misconstrued or voluntarily neglected" in his account.³³ Guizot quoted Robertson to suggest that it was only after the introduction of Christianity that warfare had become less bloody because before this, the reason that the barbarians fought so viciously was precisely because they feared slavery.³⁴ For Guizot, Gibbon's inaccuracy showed both his factual weakness as a historian and his fundamentally antagonistic attitude towards Christianity. Guizot concluded that this passage on slavery as an institution in the Roman world was not only full of a reprehensible indifference, but also of an exaggerated impartiality, which resembles bad faith... he attributes to *virtue* and *the sovereigns' policy* the progressive improvement in the condition of the slaves, while he is entirely silent about the most effective cause, which, after reducing the slaves' misfortunes, contributed to freeing them completely from their suffering and their chains: Christianity.³⁵ It is interesting to note that Stapfer, in a lecture delivered in 1819 at the inaugural meeting of the Biblical Society in Paris, also singled out William Robertson's 1755 discourse as an exemplar of eighteenth-century Christian historiography. In his lecture Stapfer described Robertson's sermon as demonstrating 'the same talent for revealing the salient facts of a historical period's moral physiognomy among

³² Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (hereafter *DF*) Vol. I ed. David Womersley (London, 2005), p. 67. In Guizot's edition, Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. I, p. 129.

³³ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. I, p. 127.

³⁴ The passage to which Guizot is referring can be found in William Robertson, *The Situation of the World at the time of Christ's appearance and its connexion with the Success of his Religion* (Edinburgh, 1759) Third Edition, p. 33. It should be noted that this sermon was not included within the 1824 edition of William Robertson's *Collected Works*. On Robertson's Christian view of historical progress see Thomas Ahnert, 'Fortschrittsgeschichte und Religiöse Aufklärung. William Robertson und die Deutung außereuropäischer Kulturen', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. Sonderheft, Vol. 23 (2010), pp. 101-122. On Robertson's reception in France see John Renwick, 'The reception of William Robertson's historical writings in eighteenth-century France', in *William Robertson and the expansion of empire* edited by Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 145-163.

³⁵ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. I, p. 129.

the apparent chaos of revolutions... that we admire, with such justice, in the celebrated introduction to the history of Charles the Fifth.'³⁶

2. Philipp Albert Stapfer's influence on Guizot

In order to understand the roots of Guizot's critique of Gibbon's view of the abolition of slavery we need to explore the influence of Stapfer over the formation of his views in this period.³⁷ Philipp Albert Stapfer's epistemological views and his understanding of history were both a product of his Calvinist upbringing in the republican city state of Berne and his early exposure to Kantian philosophy. In Berne in the early 1780s Stapfer was taught philosophy by Johann Samuel Ith (1747-1813), a young disciple of Kant, and he then attended the University of Göttingen from 1789 until late 1790. At Göttingen Stapfer was strongly influenced by the work of two of the founders of modern biblical scholarship, Johann David Michaelis³⁸ and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, but he also studied Kant's philosophy in greater depth. In a letter written in 1789 to his friend Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg (1771-1844) Stapfer wrote that at Göttingen 'one sees and hears nothing but Kant and more Kant. His system will soon eclipse all others.'³⁹

At Göttingen, Stapfer felt that he was witnessing a decisive struggle between 'incredulity and faith' and he was determined to uphold the importance of religious faith through his intellectual endeavours.⁴⁰ He spent some time attempting to write a critique of Gibbon, who he thought of as a 'deist'.⁴¹ He wanted to write a general history of 'ancient Christianity'.⁴²

The inference that Stapfer had a profound influence on Guizot's historical view of slavery is also supported by Stapfer's response to a letter he received in 1810 from his friend the Vaudois patriot Frédéric-César de Laharpe (1754-1838). In his letter, Laharpe recalled that when he had last visited Stapfer at his house at Belair, just outside Paris, 'we discussed the ancients' and that he (Laharpe) had expressed the view that 'if slavery was established by them [the ancients], it was never extended to include the whole populace of the nation,

³⁶ P.A. Stapfer, 'Sur l'accord des travaux des sociétés bibliques avec les vues de la providence et avec les intérêts du christianisme, suivies de l'examen de quelques-unes des objections élevées contre la tendance de ces établissements', in *Mélanges philosophiques* Vol. II (Paris, 1844), p. 17.

³⁷ For a biographical overview of Guizot's relationship with Stapfer see Charles Pouthas, *La Jeunesse de Guizot*, pp. 171-199.

³⁸ On Johann David Michaelis's thought see Avi Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment: The Berlin Debates of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 95-118. Guizot frequently cited Michaelis's studies of the New Testament in his editorial notes to his edition of Gibbon.

³⁹ Letter from Stapfer to P. E. von Fellenberg, 1789. Cited in Ruhr, *Philippe Albert Stapfer: Une biographie*, p. 73.

⁴⁰ Cited in Ruhr, *Philippe Albert Stapfer: Une biographie*, p. 77.

⁴¹ Letter from Stapfer dated 1790. Cited in Ruhr, *Philippe Albert Stapfer: Une biographie*, p. 73.

⁴² Ruhr, *Philippe Albert Stapfer: Une biographie*, p. 78.

whereas under Christian governments, entire nations were condemned en masse to the hardest servitude and remain so still, for the profit of what we call the nobility, and Christianity has never attempted to destroy these monstrous institutions, born and established in these nations after Christianity's introduction in their midst.⁴³ In Stapfer's response to Laharpe we can see the outline of Guizot's subsequent reproach to Gibbon:

I will reserve for verbal conversation that which I most objected to in your reflections on Northern slavery, which I like no more than you do, but I think that it is infinitely less harsh than the slavery of antiquity, which was completely foreign to all religious institutions and which Christianity certainly improved. Christianity is like reason; it can only operate in the long term, and in fact, when it acts quickly, it always harms itself. Moral soil must be prepared like physical soil, so that good seeds can grow in it.⁴⁴

Here Stapfer argued that while Christianity did not abolish slavery after coming into the world, it had begun to progressively prepare the way for its later abolition.

While Guizot's use of Robertson as a corrective to Gibbon's contention that the institution of slavery was improved by Roman leaders rather than by the advent of Christianity might seem like a minor point, it represents the first step in an argument which extends to a reconsideration of what separates the ancient from the modern world. In his sermon of 1755, immediately after he made his point about slavery, William Robertson made a far more wide ranging assertion. He contended that:

it has become a fashionable topic among political reasoners, to celebrate the mildness and humanity of modern manners, and to prefer the character of present times, in that respect, before the ancient: To what cause shall we ascribe this important revolution, in the sentiments and dispositions of mankind? Not to the influence of better instituted governments; for in legislative wisdom the ancients far excelled us: Not to the effects of a better-directed education; that duty... was among them an object of chief attention: Not to our superior refinements in elegant and polite arts; there we must be content to equal without pretending to surpass the ancients. The Christian religion... is the only cause capable of producing so great an effect... Under all disadvantages, the genius of the gospel exerts itself, civilizing the fiercest and most barbarous nations.⁴⁵

⁴³ Letter from F.-C.- de Laharpe to P.-A.- Stapfer, 6 July 1810, in Stapfer, *Aus Philipp Albert Stapfer's Briefwechsel* Vol. I, p. 353.

⁴⁴ Letter from P.-A.- Stapfer to F.-C.- de Laharpe, 14 July 1810, in Stapfer, *Aus Philipp Albert Stapfer's Briefwechsel* Vol. I, p. 354.

⁴⁵ Robertson, *The Situation of the World*, pp. 34-35.

For Robertson, Christianity allowed man to progress further in his moral and social development than he possibly could have done without its appearance in the world. Central to this contention was Robertson's belief in the importance of Christian progressive revelation as a source of human enlightenment. As Thomas Ahnert has shown, Robertson believed that 'without Christian revelation the natural path of spiritual and cultural development would reach an impasse, and ultimately lead even to moral error and corruption. Before coming into contact with Europeans, non-European societies had no way of accessing this form of revelation; Robertson's interpretation of these societies was shaped by his conviction that without Christianity, real progress was impossible'.⁴⁶ Robertson offered the Protestant thinkers of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century France a historiographical model which represented itself as rigorously objective while being centered upon a peculiarly Protestant philosophy of history. Guizot had professed his deep admiration for Robertson's historical method in a review published in 1808 of the German historian A.H.L Heeren's history of the crusades.⁴⁷ The ancient historians, Guizot claimed in this review, had failed to give an account of 'the economic, intellectual and moral state of all classes of inhabitants who were not a part of the sovereign cities; above all, they did not expose the influence which morals, character, institutions and events mutually exercised upon one another.' Robertson's introduction to the *History of Charles V*, Guizot wrote, was the only recent historical work which attempted to do this and hence the only history to employ a 'method in which we can flatter ourselves that we have an advantage over the ancients'.⁴⁸

Both Guizot and Stapfer concurred with the sentiment at the heart of Robertson's wider argument: that Christianity, far from being opposed to the modern world, was in fact a central part of modernity and had been essential to the civilising process in Europe after the fall of the Roman empire. As Guizot put it in his inaugural lecture as professor of modern history at the Sorbonne in 1812 (the same year in which his edition of *Decline and Fall* was published): 'the religion [Christianity] that the Germans embraced became the only means by which new ideas were revealed to them, the only point of contact between them and the inhabitants of their new homeland [the former Roman empire].'⁴⁹ This is not to say that Guizot had a naively teleological understanding of Christianity's role in the progress of European civilisation after the fall of Rome; instead he believed that, initially, the clergy had used the opportunity offered by the Barbarians' conversion to Christianity to their own advantage and that 'the liberal and beneficial influence of Christianity only grew slowly; religious animosity and

⁴⁶ Ahnert, 'Fortschrittgeschichte und Religiöse Aufklärung', p. 106.

⁴⁷ François Guizot, 'Compte rendu d'*Essai sur l'influence des croisades* par A.H.L Heeren: premier article', *Le Publiciste* (1 December 1808).

⁴⁸ Guizot, 'Compte rendu d'*Essai sur l'influence des croisades* par A.H.L Heeren'.

⁴⁹ François Guizot, 'Discours prononcé pour l'ouverture du Cours d'histoire moderne de M. Guizot, le 11 décembre 1812', in Guizot, *Mémoires* Vol. I, p. 399.

theological arguments made themselves felt first.⁵⁰ This was a view he would modify later. When he gave his 1828 lectures on the history of civilisation in Europe he identified the institution of the Church itself as having provided the key link between the Roman world and the Barbarian world and stated that, between the fourth and the fifth century, it was the 'Christian church which saved Christianity.'⁵¹ Here we can see the correspondence between Guizot's focus on the 'slow' improvement brought about in society through the emergence of Christianity and the views on the gradual but constant improvement brought about by Christianity that Stapfer had expressed. It is also striking that Benjamin Constant praised the content of Guizot's 1812 speech in a letter written in 1813 to his friend Claude Hochet, writing 'if you see Guizot, thank him for me and for Villers. He sent us a copy of the speech that he gave at the opening of his lectures on modern history. It is wise, very wise and there are even some implied thoughts which are noble and elevated.'⁵²

3. The debate of 1800: Christianity, literature and perfectibility

The most direct precursor for the arguments that Guizot, Stapfer and Constant made about early Christianity and its role in historical progress was the debate caused by the publication of Madame de Staël's *De la littérature* in 1800. The argument was in part due to what Paul Van Tieghem called 'the slightly invasive' role of political ideas in *De la littérature*, and what the Swiss critic Alexandre Vinet, in his 1844 lectures on De Staël and Chateaubriand, described more specifically as the book's 'affirmation of republican government and of republican morals' in the aftermath of 18th Brumaire, but it was also the result of her representation of the end of the Roman empire and the historical emergence of Christianity.⁵³ Even friendly critics, like the historian of literature Claude Fauriel, questioned De Staël's account of the direct link between Christianity and modern European civilisation. In his review in *La Décade philosophique* in 1800, Fauriel argued that De Staël 'exaggerated the results' of the emergence of Christianity on the progress of European civilisation and consequently ignored other circumstances which might well have led to the same eventual outcome.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ François Guizot, 'Discours prononcé pour l'ouverture du Cours d'histoire moderne...', p. 399.

⁵¹ François Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* edited by Pierre Rosanvallon (Paris, 1985), p. 85.

⁵² Letter from Benjamin Constant to Claude Hochet, 29 January 1813 in Benjamin Constant, *Correspondance générale IX (1813-1815)* edited by Cecil Courtney, Adrienne Tooke and Dennis Wood (Tübingen, 2013), p. 40.

⁵³ Paul Van Tieghem, 'Introduction', in Madame de Staël, *De la littérature* Vol. I (Hereafter *DL*) edited by Paul Van Tieghem (Geneva, 1959), p. xxxix. Alexandre Vinet, *Études sur la littérature française au XIXe siècle* Vol I. (Laussane, 1911), p.54. For a good recent account of the debate between De Staël and Chateaubriand see Florence Lotterie, *Progrès et perfectibilité: un dilemme des lumières françaises (1755-1814)* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 150-157. See also the excellent account in Sergio Moravia, *Il tramonto dell'illuminismo: Filosofia e politica nella società francese (1770-1810)* (Bari, 1968), pp. 470-480.

⁵⁴ Claude Fauriel, 'Compte rendu de *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales. Par Madame de Staël*' in *La Décade philosophique* No. 25 10 Prarial (May 1800), p. 417. On the relationship between Fauriel and De Staël see J. B. Galley, *Claude Fauriel: Membre de l'institut 1772-1843* (Saint-Étienne, 1909), pp. 84-97; Kitchin, *Un journal 'philosophique'*, pp. 142-144. For a contemporary overview of criticism of

In his review Fauriel took De Staël to task for the passage in which she wrote 'the invasion of the barbarians was without doubt a great misfortune for the nations that were contemporaries of this revolution; but even so enlightenment (*lumières*) propagated with this event. The restless southerners, by mixing with the northerners, took from them a kind of energy, and gave them a kind of suppleness, which helped them to cultivate their intellectual faculties.'⁵⁵ Fauriel questioned De Staël's account of how Christianity could make the southerners more energetic (*donner de l'énergie aux peuples amollis du Bas-Empire*), as, in fact, he argued that the primary lesson that the populace of the Roman Empire had taken from Christianity was the value of the 'contemplative life, the doctrine of absolute resignation, a disgust for the worldly.'⁵⁶

Similarly, Fauriel disputed the notion that Christianity had been the primary cause for the barbarians from the north becoming civilised. Could the barbarians, asked Fauriel, really have 'changed religion before being established... that is to say, before they had lost a part of their native ferocity, before they started to become civilised?'. If one accepted the logic of this argument, Fauriel suggested, then 'we must not view the influence of Christianity as the principal and absolute cause of the revolution which occurred in the morality of the barbarians, but only as an auxiliary cause, subordinate to other causes.'⁵⁷ In one sense, Fauriel's review gave critical form to a general misgiving that other *idéologues*, like Destutt de Tracy and Dégerando, shared with him about the weight that De Staël had placed in *De la littérature* on the beneficial aspects of Christianity for European civilisation.⁵⁸ While the *idéologues* understood that De Staël was attempting to provide a revisionist idea of Condorcet's concept of 'perfectibility' in order to counter the arguments of counter-revolutionary publicists like Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald, they did not agree with her desire to link 'perfectibility' and Christianity so explicitly, and Fauriel particularly objected to De Staël's attempt to downplay the significance of Greek civilisation in her account of human progress.⁵⁹ Having said that, De Staël's position wasn't altogether a surprise for the *idéologues* because, as Roland Mortier observed, throughout the Directory she had argued that 'a Calvinism practically reduced to natural religion' should be recognised as the

De la littérature see C-A. Sainte-Beuve, *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire sous l'Empire* Vol. I (Paris, 1861), pp. 65-91, 181-205.

⁵⁵ De Staël, *De la littérature* ed. Gengembre and Goldzink, p. 163.

⁵⁶ Fauriel, 'Compte rendu de *De la littérature...*', p. 418.

⁵⁷ Fauriel, 'Compte rendu de *De la littérature...*', p. 418.

⁵⁸ Simone de Balayé, *Madame de Staël: Lumières et liberté* (Paris, 1977), p. 88.

⁵⁹ C.f. De Staël, 'Préface de la seconde édition' in *DL* ed. Gengembre and Goldzink, p. 60. On Condorcet's idea of 'perfectibilité' see Jean-Pierre Schandeler, 'Condorcet et l'invention de la perfectibilité indéfinie: une contribution aux "sciences morales et politiques"', in *L'homme perfectible* edited by Bertrand Binoche (Seysssel, 2004). On Fauriel's criticism of De Staël's neglect of Greek civilisation see Kitchin, *Un journal 'philosophique'*, p. 143.

'state religion'.⁶⁰ However, while Fauriel was critical of De Staël's focus on the role of Christianity in human civilisation, he was nonetheless profoundly sympathetic to her interrogation of the links between the development of social institutions and literature. This was largely because he himself was developing a social theory of the historical development of separate national languages and literatures in Europe which would eventually culminate in his four volume 1836 study *Histoire de la Gaule méridionale sous la domination des conquérants germains*.⁶¹

It is also important to understand that Madame de Staël was very specific in her praise for early Christianity. Later in *De la littérature* she stated that 'Christianity, separated from sacerdotal inventions, is quite close to pure deism' and it is clear elsewhere in the book that this was the kind of Christianity that De Staël wanted to make the case for in her argument about the link between perfectibility and Christianity.⁶² It was implicit in the text that Catholicism was an inferior and anachronistic form of Christianity. This also accounted for De Staël's presentation of modern Italian and Spanish literature as being of low philosophical quality. She viewed both countries as being riddled by superstition and Catholic fanaticism⁶³, while she praised Germany for having substituted 'austere morality (*l'austérité de la morale*) for religious superstition'.⁶⁴

The most critical contemporary review of *De la littérature* appeared in the *Mercure de France* and it was published in two parts in June and July 1800. It was published anonymously, but was known by all of the *Mercure*'s readers to be by the neo-Catholic writer Fontanes (1757-1821).⁶⁵ In his long review Fontanes argued that the political portions of *De la littérature* were drawn from William Godwin's 1793 *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* and that De Staël sought, like Godwin, to overturn all existing social institutions in the name of an idea of 'perfectibility, which carries no guarantee of certainty'.⁶⁶

Fontanes' review was followed by Chateaubriand's *Lettre à M. de Fontanes sur la deuxième édition de l'ouvrage de Mme de Staël*, which was published in the *Mercure* in December 1800. If on one level Chateaubriand's letter can be seen as a work of self-promotion for his

⁶⁰ Roland Mortier, 'Philosophie et religion dans la pensée de Mme de Staël', *Rivista di letteratura moderna e comparate* Vol. 20 (1967), p. 170.

⁶¹ On the development of Fauriel's comparative method of literary history see Luc Fraisse, 'Fauriel et l'émergence des méthodes de l'histoire littéraire' in *Claude Fauriel et l'Allemagne: Idées pour une philologie des cultures* edited by Geneviève Espagne and Udo Schöning (Paris, 2014), pp. 27-76; Michel Espagne, 'Claude Fauriel en quête d'une méthode, ou l'Idéologie à l'écoute de l'Allemagne', *Romantisme* no. 73 (1991), pp. 7-17.

⁶² De Staël, *DL* Vol. I ed. Van Tieghem, p. 186.

⁶³ De Staël, *DL* Vol. I ed. Van Tieghem, p. 163.

⁶⁴ Cited in Mortier, 'Philosophie et religion', p. 172.

⁶⁵ Van Tieghem, 'Introduction' in De Staël, *DL* Vol. I, ed. Van Tieghem, p. XLVI.

⁶⁶ Van Tieghem, 'Introduction' in De Staël, *DL* Vol. I, ed. Van Tieghem, p. XLVI.

Génie du christianisme (the letter is signed 'l'auteur du *Génie du christianisme*', even though Chateaubriand's book would only be published in France in 1802), on another level it should be viewed as the most substantial critique of De Staël's thesis in *De la littérature* from a moderate Catholic stance.

At the beginning of the letter Chateaubriand asserted the principle of Christianity against De Staël's notion of 'perfectibility', cleverly invoking Pascal, a Jansenist, as an authority: 'As you know my madness is to see *Jesus-Christ* everywhere, as Mme de Staël sees *perfectibility*. I have the misfortune of believing, like Pascal, that only Christianity has explained the problem of man.'⁶⁷ Chateaubriand accused De Staël of not giving any account of early Christianity in Rome prior to the invasion of the barbarians; he took issue with De Staël's description of the 'follies of the martyrs'⁶⁸ in chapter eight of *De la littérature* and implied that she had therefore chosen to ignore 'the young virgins who preferred death to the caresses of tyrants, the men who refused to make sacrifices to idols, and sealed with their blood... the dogma of God's unity and the immortality of the soul; I think that there is philosophy!'⁶⁹ Chateaubriand represented Tertullian as a representative of freedom of conscience, through his refusal to serve the Roman emperors, and wondered why De Staël had not emphasised his importance more in her account of the development of the spirit of political liberty.⁷⁰ He gave a long account of the persecution of the early Christians by Nero before concluding with a contemporary parallel intended to disparage De Staël's representation of perfectibility: 'What a strange fate for Christians! Burnt by Nero, for atheism; guillotined by Robespierre, for their credulity: which of these tyrants was right? According to the law of *perfectibility*, it must have been Robespierre.'⁷¹

Chateaubriand's dismissal of De Staël's idea of perfectibility ultimately rested on the contention that the internal logic of her thought was dependent on an ersatz historicism. The idea of perfectibility worked, Chateaubriand argued, only if one accepted De Staël's tendentious and ahistorical narrative. On the same grounds, he disputed De Staël's contention that the spirit of melancholy was a peculiarly northern trait, which the barbarians added to Christianity. Chateaubriand argued that 'when she [De Staël] attributes to Christianity the melancholy that reigns in the genius of modern peoples, I completely agree with her; but when she joins to this cause the malign influence of the north, I no longer recognise the

⁶⁷ Chateaubriand, 'Lettre à M. de Fontanes', p. 1266.

⁶⁸ De Staël, *DL* Vol. I ed. Van Tieghem, p. 137.

⁶⁹ Chateaubriand, 'Lettre à M. de Fontanes', p. 1270.

⁷⁰ Chateaubriand, 'Lettre à M. de Fontanes', p. 1270.

⁷¹ Chateaubriand, 'Lettre à M. de Fontanes', p. 1271.

author who seemed so judicious to me before.⁷² Instead, Chateaubriand contended that the spirit of melancholy must have come from those early Christians within the Roman Empire at the time of the barbarian invasion. The early Christians must, according to Chateaubriand, have already been predisposed to 'serious meditations' as a result of the persecution they had suffered at the hands of the Roman government but the calamity of the barbarian invasion of Rome must have led them to 'an idea of sadness which could never be erased.'⁷³ Instead of the ignorant and bellicose barbarians bringing the spirit of melancholy with them from the north, it must have arisen from those religious men who 'as they had during the deluge... took refuge on mountain summits, taking with them the remnants of the arts and civilisation.'⁷⁴ It was obvious, Chateaubriand believed, that 'melancholy must have been the fruit of this monastic life.'⁷⁵ With this argument Chateaubriand disputed what he saw as De Staël's historically incorrect claim that melancholy and interior intellectual inquiry were peculiarly northern and, by historical extension, Protestant traits, at odds with the exterior, sacerdotal basis of Catholicism.

In his 1848 lectures on Chateaubriand Sainte-Beuve argued that one of Chateaubriand's main aims in writing his letter to Fontanes was to undermine the parallel that De Staël had implicitly drawn between the fall of Rome to the barbarians and the aftermath of the Revolution of 1789 in France.⁷⁶ De Staël acknowledged, as Sainte-Beuve observed, that certain events that had taken place as a result of the Revolution had been to 'the detriment of morals, letters and philosophy' in France but she argued that this was analogous to the descent into barbarism that had initially followed the sacking of Rome, and that, with the passage of time, 'the introduction of a new class in the government of France would produce a similar effect, and make a new path in the world, after having simulated barbarism.'⁷⁷

One way of understanding what De Staël was attempting to do with her revisionist conception of 'perfectibility' is to view the publication of *De la littérature* as representing a transition in

⁷² Chateaubriand, 'Lettre à M. de Fontanes', p. 1271.

⁷³ Chateaubriand, 'Lettre à M. de Fontanes', p. 1271.

⁷⁴ Chateaubriand, 'Lettre à M. de Fontanes', p. 1272.

⁷⁵ Chateaubriand, 'Lettre à M. de Fontanes', p. 1272. It is interesting to note that in his *Esquisse de l'histoire de l'église* (1804) the French expositor of Kant's work Charles de Villers (1765-1815) seems to side with Chateaubriand's view that melancholy must have originated in monastic life. In his *Esquisse* Villers wrote that 'the persecutions of several Emperors against Christians... led a great number of individuals from different sects to flee to uninhabited and solitary places, taking nothing with them other than their fervent devotion, which soon intensified to an exaggerated level the silence and the melancholy of the desert. These ascetics of Thebaid and Syria were the first monks.' Charles de Villers, *Esquisse de l'histoire de l'église depuis son fondateur jusqu'à la réformation* (Paris, 1804), p. 14.

⁷⁶ Sainte-Beuve, *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, p. 73.

⁷⁷ Sainte-Beuve, *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, p. 73

her thought between republicanism and liberalism.⁷⁸ Lucien Jaume referred to De Staël's proto-liberal 'hesitations' in *De la littérature* before what he calls 'the clearer formulation [of liberalism] at the turning point of 1801' and the recent work of Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson has suggested that De Staël's passage to liberalism came later with the completion of *De l'Allemagne* in 1810.⁷⁹ They point to De Staël's laudatory reference to 'the liberal impulse' (*l'impulsion libérale*) sweeping across Europe in the latter work as evidence of this development.⁸⁰ De Staël's emphasis on Christianity as an essential historical element in the advance of human perfectibility arguably represented her initial shift from the sceptical republicanism of *Des circonstances actuelles* (1798) towards the more historically contingent and religiously tolerant political theory which would reach its zenith with *De l'Allemagne*.

4. Constant's criticism of Gibbon

Like Guizot, Constant also saw Gibbon as being an earlier representative of this anti-Christian, sceptical philosophical spirit, although this was a view that he only fully developed by the 1820s. In his *Journal intime* on 29 February 1804 Constant commented on criticism of Gibbon in the *Journal des débats*: 'These wretches [the authors of the *Journal des débats*] cannot say a word without saying something stupid. Gibbon, who they accuse of partiality, was, while incredulous, the most impartial author who has ever lived; and that which they call arguments provided against his cause in spite of himself (*des arguments fournis malgré lui contre sa cause*), are on the contrary facts scrupulously brought together in order to show all the sides of all the historical questions.'⁸¹ In a later journal entry on 31 October 1804 Constant alluded to Gibbon in relation to the plan for his own long gestating *De la religion* (1824-1831), his epic work on the history of polytheism in the ancient world, commenting: 'I rethought my plan. I must still recast the arrangement of the fourth and fifth books. According to the current plan, I would fall entirely into the history of the establishment of Christianity and, on this subject, it is hardly possible to do better (*de faire mieux*) than Gibbon.'⁸² In 1804,

⁷⁸ In her recent book on Madame de Staël Biancamaria Fontana comments: 'It has often been said that the year 1800 marked a turning point in Staël's life and work; yet the exact nature of this "turn" remains unspecified.' Biancamaria Fontana, *Germaine de Staël: A Political Portrait* (Princeton and Oxford, 2016), p. 181.

⁷⁹ Madame de Staël, *De l'Allemagne* [1810] edited by Simone Balayé, (Paris, 1968) 2 vols. On *De l'Allemagne's* critical reception see I.A. Henning, *L'Allemagne de Mme de Staël et la polémique romantique: Première fortune de l'ouvrage en France et en Allemagne (1814-1830)* (Paris, 1929).

⁸⁰ Lucien Jaume, *L'Individu effacé, ou le paradoxe du libéralisme français* (Paris, 1997), p. 54. Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings: Making a Republic for the Moderns* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 135.

⁸¹ Benjamin Constant, *Journaux intimes* edited by Alfred Roulin and Charles Roth (Paris, 1952), p. 63. There is very little commentary on Constant's intellectual relationship with Gibbon but see Helena Rosenblatt's recent comments suggesting that such a comparison might be productive. Helena Rosenblatt, 'On Context and Meaning in Pocock's *Barbarism and Religion* and on Gibbon's "Protestantism" in His Chapters on Religion', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 77 No. 1 (2016), pp. 151-152.

⁸² Constant, *Journaux intimes*, p. 157.

therefore, Constant was equivocal about Gibbon's incredulity but not about his talent as a historian.

By the 1820s, however, Constant had become far more critical of Gibbon's scepticism. In the first volume of *De la religion*, published in 1824, Constant criticised Gibbon for his attitude towards Christianity in the *Decline and Fall*. Constant argued that in England, Protestantism had become directly identified with the constitution as a consequence of the Henrician Reformation and the religious dimension of the English civil war during the seventeenth century; the result of religion being perceived as directly connected to the state, however, was that in England 'more than in any other enlightened nation, religion is dogmatic and inaccessible to all free and impartial discussion.'⁸³ He singled out Gibbon's representation of early Christianity as being symptomatic of this English flaw: 'Gibbon wasted his immense erudition, his indefatigable research, the often remarkable finesse of his observations, and his self-imposed impartiality when his partiality could be divined, by the sometimes perfidious tone which he believed himself able to use with impunity, by a complete absence of sympathy for enthusiasm, an ability without which one is incapable of describing a nascent religion, and by a revolting indifference to courage and misfortune.'⁸⁴ Constant made almost exactly the same argument against Gibbon (in a more concise fashion) in his first 1818 lecture on the history of religion at the Athénée royal.⁸⁵

For Guizot it was essential for his general argument that modern liberty was preferable to ancient liberty to demonstrate that the European states in the modern world (i.e. after the rise of Christianity) had a greater capacity for toleration than the polytheistic state religions of the ancient world. In order to show this, Guizot made a political and historical point with which Constant would have concurred. In Guizot's first footnote to Gibbon's famously sceptical fifteenth chapter of the *Decline and Fall* on 'The Progress of the Christian Religion, and the Sentiments, Manners, Numbers, and Condition, of the primitive Christians', he attempted to counter both Gibbon's claim that there was 'religious harmony [in] the ancient world' as well as his argument that in the Roman empire there was a remarkable 'facility with which the most different and even hostile nations embraced, or at least respected, each other's superstitions.'⁸⁶ In his footnote to this passage Guizot argued that 'this facility did not always prevent intolerance, which seems inherent to the religious spirit when it wields secular

⁸³ Benjamin Constant, *De la religion considérée dans sa source, ses formes et ses développements* ed. Tzvetan Todorov and Etienne Hofmann (Arles, 1999), p. 72.

⁸⁴ Constant, *De la religion*, p. 73.

⁸⁵ Benjamin Constant 'Lectures sur la religion à l'Athénée royal: Première lecture', in Benjamin Constant, *Œuvres Complètes XI: Textes de 1818* edited by Étienne Hofmann (Tübingen, 2011), p. 56. On Constant's 1818 lectures on religion and their context see Kurt Kloocke, 'Introduction', in Constant, *Œuvres Complètes XI*, pp. 37-49; Garsten, 'Religion and the Case against Ancient Liberty'.

⁸⁶ *DF*, I, p. 447. In Guizot's edition, Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 4.

authority. The separation of ecclesiastical power and civil power seems to be the only way to maintain both religion and tolerance; but this idea is very modern. The passions, which often became mixed with opinions, often made the Pagans intolerant or persecutory; witness the Persians, the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans themselves.¹⁸⁷ The phrase that stands out in Guizot's footnote is 'but this idea is very modern'; this was very close to the central idea which Benjamin Constant would later articulate in his first 1818 lecture on religion when he argued that to understand religion from a modern perspective 'one must consider it in its own right, and not as it is when power degrades it by adapting it to its own needs. While it remains free, it [religion] is always a friend of liberty.'¹⁸⁸ Both Guizot and Constant believed that it was imperative for religion to be outside of state control from a moral and political point of view and they believed this to be a peculiarly modern idea. However, in their mature thought, they had markedly different conceptions of the necessity of religious government and sacerdotal forms, and this in turn resulted in the different kinds of political emphasis that they placed on the role of religion in nineteenth-century France.

5. Guizot and Constant on early Christianity in imperial Rome

In order to understand Guizot's historical conception of the relationship between Church and State in Rome, we must turn to his 1820-1821 lectures on the history of representative government and his 1828 and 1829 lectures on the history of civilisation in Europe and France.⁸⁹ By 1821 Guizot had moved away from the conception of early Christianity, which he articulated in his notes on Gibbon, as being essentially passive in its relation to the Roman state. Instead he drew a portrait of the late Roman empire which emphasised the conflict between early Christianity and Roman civil society. He identified Christianity as one of the central components in the dismantling of Roman municipal society and argued that it had formed a separate society that was outside of the Roman state's control:

During nearly three centuries, Christian society had been silently forming in the midst and, so to speak, beneath the surface of the civil society of the Romans. It was from a very early point a true society, which had its chiefs, its laws, its expenses and its revenues... It was the only association which could procure for its members the joys of the inner life, which possessed, in the ideas and sentiments that formed its basis, the means to occupy strong minds, to exercise

⁸⁷ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Constant, 'Lectures sur la religion à l'Athénée royal: Première lecture', p. 52.

⁸⁹ François Guizot, *Histoire des origines du gouvernement représentatif en Europe* (Paris, 1851) 2 vols; Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe*; François Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en France* 5 vols. (Paris, 1829).

active imaginations, to finally satisfy the needs of intellectual and moral beings that neither oppression nor misfortune can ever completely stifle in a people.⁹⁰

For Guizot it was clear that the associational development of early Christianity had displaced the municipality as the centre of Roman civic life. 'The inhabitant of the municipality, once he had become a Christian, ceased to belong to his town in order to enter into Christian society, where the bishop was chief.'⁹¹ The Roman municipality was destroyed by the desire that men had to join the Church, and this was largely because the Church had a monopoly on moral authority, according to Guizot, which meant it came to possess a greater influence over social life in general. Here we can see a social turn in Guizot's conception of the role of early Christianity in relation to the Roman state; an idea of it as representing a separate society within the state. Clearly there had been a shift in Guizot's thought between 1812, when he criticised Gibbon for suggesting that the early Christians founded a society separate from the apparatus of the Roman state, and his emphasis after 1821 on the idea of the early Christians founding a morally richer society outside of the control of the Roman state and thereby indirectly leading to the eventual downfall of the Roman empire.

In 1824 Benjamin Constant published the first volume of *De la religion*. Constant had been working on this book since the late 1780s and its publication represented the realisation of a lifetime's endeavour to write a comparative historical study of ancient polytheism in Greece, India, Egypt and Rome. It's important to remember this when giving a comparative account of how we might think about Constant's writings on religious history in relation to Guizot's own more diffuse reflections on religious history. Although in generic terms the longer and more historically detailed account of the early Christian church that Guizot provides in his third 1829 lecture on the history of civilisation⁹² in France is more directly comparable with Constant's work than his shorter, more sociologically focused account of early Christianity in his 1828 lectures on European civilisation, the latter are more pertinent for this essay.

Constant's text had been in a state of continual flux until he published the first volume in 1824. As Kurt Klooke demonstrated he had a complete draft of the work as early as 1813 (the *Copie blanche*), but revised it to incorporate a more systematic philosophical thesis in to the 'purely historical structure' of his original draft.⁹³ Klooke also suggested that it was only in the early 1820s that Constant fully developed his historical argument about the distinction between religious sentiment and religious forms in a narrative form that – in opposition to the

⁹⁰ Guizot, *Histoire du gouvernement représentatif*, p. 308.

⁹¹ Guizot, *Histoire du gouvernement représentatif*, p. 308.

⁹² Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en France*, Vol. I, pp. 85-136.

⁹³ Klooke, *Benjamin Constant*, p. 264.

purely philosophical investigations into this distinction by Lessing and Kant – rested on empirical historical research.⁹⁴

The main body of Constant's history did not directly deal with early Christianity but he gave a very brief account of the moral importance of its arrival within the Roman world in his preface to *De la religion*. Here Constant wrote:

After Caligula, after Nero, even much later, during the reigns of Galba, Probus, Tacitus and the generals, citizens believed for a moment that liberty would be reborn. But when liberty dies its defenders fall with it. The century did not understand them. Self-interest well understood abandoned them. The world was populated by slaves, either exploiting servitude or being exploited through it. The Christians appeared: they placed their starting point outside egoism. They did not dispute the material universe, which material force kept enchained. They did not kill, they died and it was by dying that they triumphed.⁹⁵

Constant argued that the importance of Christianity in relation to the advancement of civilisation was that it exposed a Roman culture that was entirely dependent on the idea of self-interest well understood and had become unsustainably corrupt. Christianity re-invigorated the notions of interior sentiment (*le sentiment intime*) and the capacity of sacrifice (*la faculté du sacrifice*). In Constant's opinion the achievement of the early Christians was not primarily social but philosophical, and in some sense this difference of focus is suggestive of the wider disparity between the religious thought of Constant and Guizot. For Guizot, religious thought must always be understood as being necessarily connected to a nascent religious association or society; by contrast, Constant considered religious thought as being essentially interior and believed that this interiority needed to be re-inserted into contemporaneous notions of religious association.

According to Constant's account in *De la religion*, the early Christians reasserted the importance of religious sentiment (*le sentiment religieux*) in a society in which a form of religion (sacerdotal polytheism) had come to predominate at the expense of real religious and, by extension, moral feeling. This was not simply, for Constant, a philosophical point though, as he noted that with the return of religious sentiment came the return of political liberty to the Roman state. 'In the midst of universal servitude, under emperors rendered lower even than their slaves through the drunkenness of absolute power... the first Christians revived the noble doctrines of equality and fraternity between all men.'⁹⁶ To Constant it appeared obvious

⁹⁴ Klooze, *Benjamin Constant*, p. 264.

⁹⁵ Constant, *De la religion*, p. 34.

⁹⁶ Constant, *De la religion*, p. 62.

that political liberty could not be established without a morality directly connected to religious sentiment.⁹⁷

In Guizot's fifth 1828 lecture on the history of civilisation in Europe he singled out Constant's idea of 'religious sentiment' for criticism. Although he did not identify Constant by name it is clear, as Larry Siedentop noted in his edition of Guizot's lectures, that the lecture was in part directed against Constant because of his adoption of Constant's phrase 'religious sentiment' (*le sentiment religieux*).⁹⁸ Guizot characterised thinkers who placed their argumentative emphasis on 'religious sentiment' as people who 'think that a religion which ends in a body of priests, a legally constituted clergy, in short, a governed religion, must be, taking all things together, more injurious than useful. In their opinion, religion is a purely individual relation of man to God; and that whenever the relation loses this character, whenever an external authority comes between the individual and the object of religious creeds, – namely, God, – religion is deteriorated and society in danger.'⁹⁹ Guizot's philosophical objection to the idea of religion as being fundamentally about the manifestation of 'religious sentiment' was that 'religious sentiment' could not be the basis of a true social association. 'If we reduce religion to the religious sentiment properly so called', Guizot wrote, 'to that sentiment which is very real, though somewhat vague and uncertain as to its object... if we reduce religion to this sentiment, it seems evident to me that it should remain purely individual.'¹⁰⁰ Religious sentiment, in Guizot's view, because it must by definition remain an individual experience 'refuses to become the principle of a permanent and extensive association, to adapt itself to any system of precepts, practices or forms; in short, to give birth to a religious society and government.'¹⁰¹ According to Guizot 'religious sentiment' was too simplistic a construction of our human need for religion. Instead he contended religion 'presents itself as a collection – first, of doctrines called forth by problems which man discovers within himself; second, of precepts which correspond to those doctrines, and give to natural morality a meaning and a sanction; third, of promises which address themselves to the hopes of humanity in the future.'¹⁰² The complexity of these different facets of religion means that religion necessarily becomes an associative principle, and that therefore religions naturally demand governments to order and direct these associations.¹⁰³ It was natural for Guizot that religions should have governments like any other form of society; however, even if it were agreed that 'a body of

⁹⁷ Constant, *De la religion*, p. 62.

⁹⁸ Larry Siedentop, 'Notes' in François Guizot, *The History of Civilisation in Europe* edited by Larry Siedentop and translated by William Hazlitt (Harmondsworth, 1997), p. 250. Siedentop also points out that Guizot's argument was directed against Chateaubriand as well.

⁹⁹ Guizot, *The History of Civilisation in Europe*, p. 84.

¹⁰⁰ Guizot, *The History of Civilisation in Europe*, p. 84.

¹⁰¹ Guizot, *The History of Civilisation in Europe*, p. 84.

¹⁰² Guizot, *The History of Civilisation in Europe*, p. 85.

¹⁰³ Guizot, *The History of Civilisation in Europe*, p. 86.

religious magistrates is necessary' for a religion then the argument about whether those magistrates should be constituted according to a system of equality or a hierarchical system would always remain pertinent.

Constant gave a very different account of 'religious sentiment' and its relation to organised religion. He believed that the primacy of religious sentiment was a necessity in early nineteenth-century France in a way directly analogous to the importance it had possessed during the establishment of Christianity: 'the current crisis is the same as that which threatened human nature during the establishment of Christianity.'¹⁰⁴ The major difference between the fall of the Roman empire and Restoration France lay, according to Constant, in the fact that where as in Rome there was no predominant religious form to contain religious sentiment, in France 'we possess Christianity, and of all the forms that religious sentiment can assume, Christianity is both the most satisfying and the most pure.'¹⁰⁵

The most extended treatment of early Christianity and its relationship to religious sentiment and political liberty in Constant's work can be found in the two posthumously published final volumes of *De la religion* entitled *Du polythéisme romain considéré dans ses rapports avec la philosophie grecque et la religion chrétienne* (1833).¹⁰⁶ On a philosophical level Constant noted that theism naturally followed on from polytheism because, according to his argument, religious sentiment always tended towards a form of belief that embraced an idea of unity – in this case in the form of a single, omnipotent deity – to a greater degree.¹⁰⁷ Constant gave an idealised vision of the early Christians, at the stage before the Romans had adopted their religion, as both preaching and enacting the idea of equality between men. He cited Tertullian's argument that 'all Christians are priests' in favour of this notion and pointed to the early Christians' rejection of any organisational hierarchy or pomp in their ceremonies.¹⁰⁸ It naturally followed from the early Christians' 'moral purity, profound conviction, interior strength, exalted enthusiasm' that they should feel a 'violent and open indignation towards the tyranny which weighed down over the universe.'¹⁰⁹ Constant also suggested that when 'religious sentiment' was the only aspect of religious belief, as with the early Christians, it

¹⁰⁴ Constant, *De la religion*, p. 245.

¹⁰⁵ Constant, *De la religion*, p. 246.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin Constant, *Du polythéisme romain considéré dans ses rapports avec la philosophie grecque et la religion chrétienne* edited by M.J. Matter (Paris, 1833) 2 vols. Constant had written a shorter account of early Christianity in 1825 when he published two articles in the *Encyclopédie moderne* which were subsequently reprinted together as a single essay in his *Mélanges de littérature et de politique* in 1829. For the latter version see Benjamin Constant, 'Des causes humaines qui ont concouru à l'établissement du christianisme' in Benjamin Constant, *Oeuvres complètes XXXIII: Mélanges de littérature et de politique* edited by François Rosset (Berlin and Boston, 2012), pp. 413-431.

¹⁰⁷ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 161.

¹⁰⁸ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 241.

¹⁰⁹ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 244.

meant that 'equality, which in other times seems to man to be a right, seems to him [the early Christian] to be a duty' and argued that we see a later version of this same instinct in the desire of early Protestants like Calvin to found republics.¹¹⁰

Contrary to Guizot's argument that religions were inherently social and associative, Constant suggested that a significant part of what rendered early Christianity so threatening to the Roman state was the fact that it was a religion that 'belonged to no particular society or people'.¹¹¹ Whereas in the sacerdotal Roman polytheistic state, religion was 'essentially linked to national, civil and earthly interests', in Christianity 'life was seen as a means to reach another goal' and therefore the early Christians broke the link between patriotism and religion on which the Roman state rested.¹¹²

Constant drew historical comparisons between the early Christians and, firstly, the polytheists, and secondly, the Neoplatonists. The polytheists lacked true religious enthusiasm in comparison to the early Christians and were too directly concerned with religion as a means of achieving the advancement of their personal interest; the Neoplatonists by comparison, although far closer to the Christians in terms of their metaphysical beliefs, placed too much emphasis on the miraculous and the notion of continual divine revelation.¹¹³

Constant then attempted to provide a philosophical account of theism's superiority to polytheism and why the fall of polytheism was an inevitable result of the progress of human civilisation. His argument rested on the idea that polytheism, through being based on a system of different deities which performed daily interventions into quotidian life, could not provide any account of the immutable laws of natural scientific phenomena, whereas theism, through its focus on divine unity and the confluence of morality and religion, was better suited to an age of new scientific knowledge.¹¹⁴ Another more politically resonant aspect of his argument was Constant's contention that early Christianity had been able to replace polytheism in part because it was a non-sacerdotal religion initially whereas, in late Roman polytheism, priests controlled all aspects of the relationship between the religious and secular state. However, once Christianity became tolerated and then accepted by the Roman state, and after a hierarchical system of priesthood became established in the Christian church, then 'intolerance... became the permanent mode of theism'.¹¹⁵ After his point, Constant argued, 'the

¹¹⁰ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 243.

¹¹¹ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 251.

¹¹² Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 253.

¹¹³ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, pp. 259, 267. Guizot made a similar point about Neoplatonism and its 'mystical' nature in an editorial note to Gibbon. See Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. IV, p. 177.

¹¹⁴ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 298.

¹¹⁵ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 304.

priesthood gave itself an unlimited authority over the same peoples that had just escaped from its despotism, morality became corrupt and degraded; the mind's faculties were condemned to remain immobile, and they have only re-attained... the right to exist, through the persecution of the most courageous and enlightened men of each century who have been the priesthood's victims.¹¹⁶ One of the inherent risks of monotheistic religions, according to Constant, is that while they are morally superior to polytheistic religions, they are also more susceptible to abuse by sacerdotal power. The unity of belief inherent in Christian dogma can also be twisted so that 'knowledge of the will [of God] becomes the exclusive reserve of a privileged corporation.'¹¹⁷

At this point Constant's position became quite torturous. He didn't want to be understood to oppose all types of sacerdotal authority, in the manner of Condorcet, so he stated that 'we do not want to reject the founding of any exterior cult. Man needs an impressive institution to trace his relations with the Divine; but one must not lose sight of the fact that the cult is necessary for man and not for the Divinity, and that one cult only merits preference over any other cult to the extent that it is more likely to raise man closer to the author of his being, that is to say by giving to religious sentiment the greatest warmth and the largest development it possibly can.'¹¹⁸

The question of sacerdotal authority is the most important division between Guizot and Constant in relation to their views of both early Christianity and of the way in which religion should function in the contemporary state. Guizot argued that the establishment of sacerdotal authority was inevitable for any religion, as religion, far from being based on individual religious sentiment as Constant contended, was inherently social and associative and, like all societies, it required government. This could take many different forms – from the sacerdotal equality of the Quakers to the detailed hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church – but it was both inevitable and necessary for religions to exist in a formal and associative sense.

By contrast, in *De la religion* and *Du polythéisme romain* Constant argued that the history of religion showed that whether in polytheistic or theistic states, religions always began as independent non-sacerdotal bodies when they were closest to the source of religious sentiment. As they became established, as in the case of early Christianity, they became sacerdotal associations and this inevitably led to moral and theological corruption, as priests would attempt to assert a monopoly of knowledge over religious rites and practices. This was

¹¹⁶ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 304.

¹¹⁷ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 306.

¹¹⁸ Constant, *Du polythéisme romain* Vol. II, p. 306.

not to say that there had not been notable historical reactions against this process (e.g. Calvinism and Protestantism) but it was a necessarily constant struggle in human history. The early Christians offered, for Constant, the purest model of a religion directly connected to religious sentiment and outside the control of the state or of a hierarchical priesthood.

6. Guizot's critique of Gibbon's history

While Guizot differed from Constant on the kind of social constitution religions should have, he shared his analysis of the tolerance of the early Christians compared to the Roman polytheists. Many of Guizot's editorial notes to the fifteenth chapter of the *Decline and Fall* were designed, through historical correction, to depict early Christianity as being a more naturally tolerant religion than Gibbon had acknowledged it to be. Gibbon attempted to depict early Christianity as a zealous faith that set it itself outside of what he saw as the broadly tolerant, polytheistic Roman world. In this vein, Gibbon described the early Christians' rejection of all forms of idolatry and argued that this was a deeply exclusive and divisive belief in Roman society because 'every art and every trade that was in least concerned with the framing or adorning of idols was polluted by the stain of idolatry; a severe sentence since it devoted to eternal misery that far greater part of the community, which is employed in the exercise of liberal or mechanic professions.'¹¹⁹ Gibbon's authority for this assertion was the tract, *De Idolotaria*, by the early church father Tertullian.¹²⁰ In his footnote to this passage Guizot questioned Gibbon's use of Tertullian as an authority, arguing that the 'exaggerated and declamatory' opinions of Tertullian should not be taken as representative of 'the general opinion of the first Christians'; it was a general fault of Gibbon's work, Guizot observed, that he 'often made the particular ideas of one or other of the Church fathers look as if they were inherent to Christianity.'¹²¹ Guizot's broader point here was that Gibbon was manipulating the historical facts to give a highly partial, critical account of early Christianity, which suggested that it was, in essence, as intolerant as the polytheism that it replaced, although it's interesting to comparatively note Constant's use of Tertullian as source for his anti-sacerdotal argument in *De la religion*.

Similarly, when later in chapter fifteen Gibbon criticised the early Christians for their refusal 'to take any active part in the civil administration or the military defence of the empire' and described their conduct as demonstrating an 'indolent, or even criminal disregard to the public

¹¹⁹ *DF*, I, p. 461. In Guizot's edition, Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 36.

¹²⁰ *DF*, I, p. 461, note. 46. In Guizot's edition, Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 36.

¹²¹ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 36.

welfare¹²², Guizot argued against this view, observing that it was precisely because polytheism was so intertwined with the offices of the Roman state that Christians could not take part in public affairs. The Christians' refusal, Guizot contended, was 'the natural result of the contradiction which existed between their principles and the traditions, laws and activities of the pagan world; as Christians, they could not enter the senate, which, according to Gibbon himself, assembled every day in a temple or a consecrated place, and where each senator, before sitting down, threw down drops of wine and burned incense at the altar... the Christians could not participate without making themselves, according to their principles, guilty of impiety.'¹²³ It was, Guizot concluded, 'therefore much less because of the effect of their [the Christians] doctrine than a consequence of their situation that they had to distance themselves from affairs of state.'¹²⁴ Here we can see Guizot's historical scholarship and his political beliefs combined. Guizot's comment is not a factual correction so much as an attempt to read the facts differently from Gibbon. On Guizot's reading, the Christians were prevented from taking part in affairs of state precisely because there was no separation between Church and State in the polytheistic Roman empire. The religious intolerance of the ancient world was, according to Guizot, partly manifested in its own political institutions, but equally in its failure to distinguish at all between the realm of the secular state and the realm of organised religion.

Throughout Guizot's editorial comments to chapters fifteen and sixteen of the *Decline and Fall*, he continued to question Gibbon's historical impartiality and to suggest that he was knowingly underplaying the true extent of Roman persecution of the early Christians. In one footnote to chapter sixteen entitled 'The Conduct of the Roman Government towards the Christians, from the reign of Nero to that of Constantine', Guizot suggested that by refusing to use the Acts of the Apostles as a historical source Gibbon was seeking to suggest that the Romans had only started persecuting Christians during Nero's reign.¹²⁵ In several subsequent footnotes, Guizot questioned Gibbon's attempts to, firstly, question the authenticity of ancient accounts of the lives of early Christian martyrs like Saint Ignatius and Saint Cyprian¹²⁶ and, secondly, to suggest that the number of martyrs had been greatly exaggerated by early Christian historians like Eusebius.¹²⁷ The specificity of Guizot's complaints is less interesting than his insistence on the intolerance of the Roman authorities towards Christianity. The

¹²² *DF*, I, p. 482. In Guizot's edition, Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 80.

¹²³ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 81.

¹²⁴ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 81..

¹²⁵ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 147.

¹²⁶ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, pp. 198, 201, 208.

¹²⁷ Guizot, 'Note de l'éditeur', in Gibbon, *HDCE* Vol. III, p. 283.

'universal toleration of Polytheism', which Gibbon referred to throughout the *Decline and Fall*, was according to Guizot a historical chimera.¹²⁸

7. Conclusion

In a review of the 1828 reissue of Guizot's edition of Gibbon published in the *Quarterly Review* in 1833, the liberal Anglican historian Henry Hart Milman (who later published his own account of the history of early Christianity¹²⁹ and edited an English edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* in 1839 which incorporated many of Guizot's notes) praised Guizot for correcting in 'a body of notes, the erroneous, and expand[ing] the less philosophical views of Gibbon, more particularly as to the progress and influence of Christianity.'¹³⁰ Milman described Guizot as 'a Protestant, a liberal and rational Christian'.¹³¹ This view was shared by his French contemporaries as well; Guizot's translation of Gibbon was seen as a historically rigorous, liberal Protestant corrective to Gibbon's sceptical history by Benjamin Constant for example. In his 1812 review of the first three volumes of Guizot's translation of Gibbon, the founding editor of the *Archives littéraires de l'Europe* Charles Vanderbourg praised Guizot for combatting Gibbon's representation of Christianity with 'as much erudition as good faith' and suggested that Gibbon's religious scepticism was partly the result of his temperament being 'dominated by the spirit of his century' (*il fut dominé par l'esprit de son siècle*) and because Gibbon was 'in his opinions, his habits and even his language, as French as was English'.¹³² Vanderbourg's characterisation of Gibbon's views as representative of French eighteenth-century philosophy is suggestive of the extent to which Guizot's translation and notes were viewed by his contemporaries as forming part of the 'spiritualist' reaction of the early 1810s against the anti-religious views of the *idéologues*.

As I have shown, Guizot's edition of Gibbon demonstrated his strong adherence to liberal Protestantism during the 1810s and also casts doubt on the veracity of the intellectual break which some of Guizot's biographers have suggested occurred in 1810 between Guizot and Stapfer.¹³³ It seems improbable that Guizot would have been so effusive in his praise of

¹²⁸ *DF*, I, p. 515.

¹²⁹ Henry Hart Milman, *The history of Christianity from the birth of Christ to the Abolition of Paganism in the Roman Empire* (London: 1840), 3 vols. On Milman and Gibbon see B. W. Young, *The Victorian Eighteenth Century: An Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 76-85; Duncan Forbes, *The Liberal Anglican Idea of History* (Cambridge, 1952).

¹³⁰ Henry Hart Milman, 'Guizot's Edition of Gibbon', *Quarterly Review*, 50 (1833), p. 303.

¹³¹ Milman, 'Guizot's Edition of Gibbon', p. 303.

¹³² Vanderbourg, 'Compte rendu d'*Histoire de la décadence et de la chute de l'Empire romain* par Edouard Gibbon', pp. 163, 165, 167. On Charles Vanderbourg and his role as an expositor of German literature during the Empire see Roland Mortier, *Un Précurseur de Madame de Staël: Charles Vanderbourg 1765-1827, sa contribution aux échanges intellectuels à l'aube du XIXe siècle* (Brussels, 1955).

¹³³ Gabriel de Broglie, *Guizot* (Paris, 1990), p. 34.

Stapfer in his 1812 editorial preface, if he had truly broken with his German influenced, strongly religious conception of history by this point. It is also notable that it was probably Stapfer who introduced Guizot to William Robertson's work. It is interesting to observe how Guizot drew on the Scottish historian's authority to reject Gibbon's depiction of the decline of slavery in the Roman empire. There is, of course, more to be said about Robertson's reception history in nineteenth century France.

After he took up the chair of modern history at the Sorbonne in December 1812, Guizot's view of the development of Christianity became more historically refined and more social in its focus. In both his 1821 lectures and his later 1828-1829 lectures Guizot emphasised the fundamental importance of the expansion of Christianity for the development of European civilisation. In this view, he was partly drawing on Madame de Staël's argument in *De la littérature* that Christianity allowed European civilisation to continue to perfect itself and develop progressively in the aftermath of the fall of Rome. However, Guizot's argument in the late 1820s about the origins of Christianity also turned on the imperative need for religious government and his emphasis on religion as a fundamentally social idea. He rejected the notion that De Staël and Constant shared of the primary importance of religious sentiment in the formation of organised religion, arguing that religion was at its origin an associative principle. In his multi-volume work *De la religion* and in his posthumously published *Du polythéisme romain* Benjamin Constant gave a historicised account of the development of both polytheism and early Christianity that suggested that religions always began as independent, non-sacerdotal bodies and then eventually became dominated by a priesthood, which tended to reduce the independence of those religions and render them less tolerant and less beneficial for the maintenance of political liberty in society.

Guizot's focus in his lectures in the 1820s always remained on the social effect of religious development and the ability of early Christianity, though its social formation, to preserve knowledge after the fall of Rome. In his related defence of the priesthood he was actually quite close to the position that Chateaubriand had articulated in his attack on Madame de Staël and subsequently in the *Génie du christianisme*. While Guizot agreed with Constant that the early Christians were a group bound together by great moral and spiritual purity, he rejected the idea that this purity ultimately derived from individual religious sentiment and instead identified it as being an inherently associative achievement.

Through a closer reading of these heavily historicised arguments about the intellectual and social nature of early Christianity and the decline of Rome, it is possible to gain a clearer view of the fault lines that separate these different thinkers in terms of their conceptions of the

role of religion in contemporary society. For Guizot, Constant and De Staël the role of religion in the post-revolutionary public sphere had to be understood historically as well as politically, but the different formulations of the history of early Christianity which they provided offer us a basis for rethinking the relationship between liberalism and religion and the connection of that relationship to more expansive questions about what modern liberty might look like in this period.