

Slavery:

During their journey to the United States, Tocqueville and Beaumont were concretely confronted with slavery, which led them to engage, upon their return, in the fight for abolition. Their condemnation of slavery is immediate and absolute. The misfortunes of the times had willed that Christianity admitted in the 16th century the development of modern slavery, doubly immoral because it deprived the individual of his freedom and his humanity, and absolutely opposed to the values of original Christianity which "is a religion of free men"; Tocqueville recalls this with insistence: early Christianity operated a reversal of values, affirmed the equal dignity of individuals before God, and formulated a first message of universality. He thus takes up the Pauline tradition which takes the message of Christ out of the Jewish world to address it to pagans and the entire world; the meaning of the *Epistle to the Galatians* is absolutely universal and the itinerary that leads Peter and Paul to the capital of the empire underscores the universalist will that suppresses differences. Salvation is no longer reserved for Jews alone; differences are abolished between circumcised and uncircumcised, as between men and women, masters and slaves.

The Christic message is absolutely innovative and revolutionary insofar as, affirming the equality of all men, it denies *de facto* any value to servitude, which the most inspired Greeks or Romans could not or did not know how to do: "The most profound and vast geniuses of Rome and Greece could never arrive at this idea so general, but at the same time so simple, of the similarity of men and of the equal right that each of them brings, at birth, to liberty; and they strove to prove that slavery was in nature and that it would always exist. Moreover, everything indicates that those of the ancients who had been slaves before becoming free, and of whom several have left us beautiful writings, viewed servitude in this same light. [...] Their mind, after having extended in several directions, found itself therefore bounded on that one, and Jesus Christ had to come to earth to make it understood that all members of the human species were naturally similar and equal."

But it is in the sixteenth century especially that the Church failed in its mission by accepting the official resumption, and on a very large scale, of a servitude which, moreover, rested on a racial distinction which lowered Blacks to the rank of the brute and betrayed the message of the Gospels and the text of Saint Paul for whom there exists only one humanity in Christ: "Christianity, after having struggled for a long time against the selfish passions which, in the 16th century caused slavery to be re-established, had tired and resigned itself." It was certainly possible to establish a difference of responsibility between the Church and Christians; Christianity had destroyed servitude; the Christians of the sixteenth century re-established it, but what is the relevance of such a distinction? What is Christianity without Christians and the Church? The evangelical message of this religion of free men was betrayed by priests as well as by masters; the latter, after having refused in a first phase the diffusion among the slaves of the Christic message as a bearer of liberty, called, in a second phase, upon the priests to spread a message of submission to order and of servitude, and the priests unfortunately accepted to divulge this perverted expression of the initial message:

"In several of the countries where Europeans introduced servitude, masters always opposed either openly or in secret that the word of the Gospel reached the ear of the Negroes. Christianity is a religion of free men; and they fear that by developing it in the soul of their slaves, one might come to awaken some instincts of liberty there. When it happened to them, on the contrary, to call the priest to the aid of order, and to introduce him themselves into their workshops, [...] he

appeared in the eyes of the slave only as the substitute of the master and the sanctifier of slavery."

For Tocqueville, original Christianity gave an extraordinary example, "[it] destroyed slavery by asserting the rights of the slave." It brought forth a universal value that it did not know how to defend when it admitted a new form of slavery when European nations launched into the conquest and exploitation of the New World. But there exist degrees in the absolute evil that slavery constitutes. If slavery is no more defensible in antiquity than it is starting from the Renaissance, modern slavery is worse still than the preceding one. It was possible to get out of ancient slavery, it was possible for a master to manumit one or several of his slaves, at his death, or in any other circumstances. Manumission conferred a status to the one who benefited from it; he was free, even if he was not an Athenian or Roman citizen. Modern slavery is worse still than ancient slavery. Both are immoral, inhuman, degrading because they destroy humanity in man, but modern slavery invented a sub-humanity founded on racial criteria. This is an intellectual and moral perversion that Tocqueville denounces by reaffirming ceaselessly with force the oneness of the human race and the abomination of all racist or racialist ideological drifts:

"What is more contrary to the instinct of man than permanent differences established between people evidently similar? (...) [Europeans] have violated toward the Black all the rights of humanity."

The Europeans, having become American citizens, whom he met were majoritarily incapable of accepting living in the same space as Blacks, so much so that in the States that had abolished servitude, their presence was forbidden, for example in Ohio. In these same States, Blacks then possessed civil rights, but they would have risked their lives in attempting to exercise them. Human nature is everywhere the same, recalls with force the first letter published on October 22, 1843, in *Le Siècle*, before underscoring that the spirit of the Enlightenment constitutes a secularized resumption of the values of universality of original Christianity. For Tocqueville, there exists no spectacle more beautiful and more edifying than that of the accession of slaves, our human brothers, our fellows, to the liberty that guarantees their dignity as men. To do this, one must destroy the ideological pivot of modern slavery: racism.