

Robert Challe

DIFFICULTIES ON RELIGION

PRESENTED TO FATHER MALEBRANCHE

~1710

TRANSLATED BY

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The history of Deism is long, largely forgotten, and even, to some extent, untold. Among the overlooked deistic books, the *Difficulties on Religion* (*Difficultés sur la Religion*) is arguably the most important; it has been called “one of the most impressive achievements in the history of Deism¹” and “the most important document of Deism in the French Enlightenment²”. The *Difficulties* is both an unsparing attack on Christianity (and all “revealed” religion) and one of the earliest presentations of a coherent deistic belief system, written around 1710.

It appeared anonymously, and circulated in manuscript copies. Despite being what one writer calls “incontestably one of the most virulent attacks ever launched against the clergy³”, it didn’t attract the attention or persecution of the public authorities or the ecclesiastical institutions. Instead, it worked its influence subtly and quietly, as part of a large body of clandestine manuscripts that were traded in small intellectual circles in early Enlightenment France. The extent of its early influence is unclear, but it seems significant; as one early researcher put the case:

It may be reasonably debated that Rousseau, Voltaire, and Montesquieu did not acquire their ideas directly from the “Militaire Philosophe,” since there is scant evidence to show that any of them were acquainted with the full work. That the ideas did circulate in a clandestine atmosphere long before they appeared openly in the works of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu, is indisputable fact.⁴

However, it lived a second, far more influential life when a portion of it was rewritten and published by the Baron d’Holbach / Jacques-André book-mill in 1767 as *Le Militaire philosophe*. This edition included only the anti-religious first part of the book, edited to render it friendlier to

¹ C.J. Betts, *Early Deism in France: From the so-called ‘déistes’ of Lyon (1564) to Voltaire’s ‘Lettres philosophiques’ (1734)*. (1984), p. 137.

² Winfried Schroeder, *Ursprünge Des Atheismus: Untersuchungen Zur Metaphysik- Und Religionskritik Des 17. Und 18. Jahrhunderts*. (2012), p. 484.

³ Goldzink, Jean, et al. “Des Difficultés Sur La Religion Aux Illustres Françaises: Écarts et Interprétations.” *Revue D'Histoire Littéraire De La France*, vol. 101, no. 2, 2001, pp. 313–326. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40534456.

⁴ Ira O. Wade, *The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750* (1967), p. 64.

atheism. In this form it achieved broad distribution and influence. Voltaire was a great admirer, asking if there could be “anything more vigorous, more profoundly reasoned and more terrible than the *Militaire philosophe*, a work that’s crisscrossing all of Europe? Can you conceive of anything more powerful?”⁵ Melchior Grimm praised the book’s “uncommon simplicity and good sense”⁶.

Naigeon’s abridgement was the only version extant until the full manuscript was rediscovered in 1912. Since the late 20th century it has been reappraised in its original form, as an important document in the history of deism and the Enlightenment. It has received significant scholarly attention and publication in several modern critical editions.

As with so much of the anonymous, clandestine literature from this period, much of the scholarly effort has focused on identifying the author. In 1974, Francis Mars argued that it belonged to the little-known traveler, novelist and memoirist Robert Challe (or Challes) (1659-1721), a man far from famous in his own day, but who is now considered one of the great writers of his time. This suggestion was pursued, especially by Frederic Deloffre⁷, who has demonstrated harmonies in the author’s biographical details, along with lexical and grammatical similarities between the *Difficulties* and Challe’s writings. The attribution has been debated⁸, and it enjoys consensus status in the scholarly community⁹.

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The *Difficulties* are organized very simply: first, a negative section deconstructing revealed or “factitious, artificial” religion, followed by a positive exposition of what should replace it, “natural religion”.

⁵ To M. Damilaville, 8 Feb. 1768. Also see his letters 18 and 23 Nov 1767 to same.

⁶ *Correspondance littéraire*, 1 Jan 1768

⁷ Deloffre, Frédéric. “Robert Challe, Père Du Déisme Français.” *Revue D’Histoire Littéraire De La France* 79.6 (1979): 947-80.

⁸ See “Questions sur l’attribution des Difficultés” (Autour de Robert Challe. Actes du Colloque de Chartres (20-22 juin 1991) Frédéric Deloffre éd., Paris, Honoré Champion, 1993). p. 243ff. ; C. J. Betts, appendix (275-86).

⁹ Moureau, François. “Robert Challe et ‘Le Militaire Philosophe: Histoire d’une trahison philosophique?’” *Revue D’Histoire Littéraire De La France*, vol. 116, no. 2, 2016, pp. 301–313., www.jstor.org/stable/24722287. (P. 36: “modern criticism has argued and proved that Challe was indeed the anonymous author”)

It is further organized into four books: the first, “Containing that which opened my eyes”, offers some poignant regrets from the author’s participation in the Catholic dragonnades (1681) against the French Protestants. This is followed by an exposition of 21 enumerated “truths” aiming to overturn all “factitious religion”. This part, which, as mentioned above, was published as a stand-alone work, is a true war-machine, a logical armory forged to combat all revealed religion, a tool designed to be used at all times by anyone, educated or not, which relies only on logic, not disputation on historical events, to prove, ultimately, that the world’s religions are, not only wrong, but that it’s “criminal” to profess them.

Next, “A Refutation of Faith” focuses on “the monster” of faith, or belief without reason. It argues that absolutely anything, real or imagined, can be the object of faith, and that those who demand faith are always anticipating some benefit for themselves. On the other hand, simple belief in God and virtue requires no faith, only reason. The true morality and belief are crushed “under a heap of ridiculous laws”.

The next part, “An Examination of Religion”, goes into great detail on the author’s objections to Judeo-Christian doctrine, starting with the Old Testament, proceeding through the New Testament, discussing Church history and dogma, its alleged miracles, its holy rites, etc.

The *Difficulties* concludes with the fourth book¹⁰, which offers “a System of Religion based Metaphysically on Natural Lights and not on Facts”. God’s existence and nature, man’s essence, teleology, morality, free will, theodicy are all addressed. God has only performed one miracle, the creation. The universe is described as a compound of natural laws and human freedom: God foresaw, from the beginning, all possible changes in matter, but he couldn’t foresee that which depends on human free will.

Humans are immortal intelligences created with free will and embodied in matter in order to give God’s justice, an essential attribute of the divinity, a suitable object. All humans will be judged precisely according to merit. The author isn’t sure what form these punishments and rewards will take, although reincarnation is suggested as one possibility.

¹⁰ Researchers associated with the OBVIL (Observatoire de la vie littéraire) and its “Programme Robert Challe” have, on the evidence of computer-aided stylistic and lexical analysis of the texts, suggested that additional authors have added to the fourth notebook. <https://obvil.sorbonne-universite.fr/actualites/projet/challe/203>

The perfect, eternal, divine being necessarily and naturally produces, along with conviction on his existence, a deep sense of awe and reverence. This is all the religion people need and all God requires. In a concession to the needs of human society, the author outlines what family-scale worship might look like. As for public worship, he warns that this would nearly always end in the domination of a priestly class and the reintroduction of idolatry. Therefore, when he outlines some basic forms of public deistic worship (an interesting read in light of the revolutionary Cult of the Supreme Being), he describes the sort of institutions that would be needed to slow or prevent these dangers.

In short, the author of the *Difficulties* asserts that we must be free in religion, and that reason is all we need to know the essential truths. Historian Milad Houeihi argues that, in spite of Descartes, this book “articulates for the first time...a philosophical approach that identifies reason with individuality”¹¹, establishing the form of human reason championed by the Enlightenment. The central, unifying theme of the book is an individualism based on the freedom of the human will and the sufficiency of reason to guide its choices.

This translation largely follows the typescript available on the “Philosophie Cl@ndestine” website¹²; occasional manuscript variations are noted in footnotes, some of which were suggested by the edition of Roland Mortier (1970); the edition of Frédéric Deloffre and François Moureau (Droz, 2000) was also consulted.

¹¹ Milad Doueihi, *Earthly Paradise: Myths and Philosophies* (2009), pp. 83-84.

¹² <http://philosophie-clandestine.huma-num.fr/ms/53/text>

FROM THE BOOKSELLER TO THE READER

Those who are bewildered by reason because they cannot harmonize it with their interests deserve no consideration. Fair-minded readers will thank me for the gift I offer the public. The copy was shared with me by a person of distinction with whom the author left it a few years before his death; he's an officer retired from the service, and from the public who is afraid to fail to give God what he truly demands: but who suffers impatiently and with indignation, the tyranny exercised in his name. He orders all the theologians in the world to give him the solutions that his friend awaited from the famous Father Malebranche or to agree that it is right for him to hold fast to the religion, the beautiful outline of which will be given.

PREFACE¹³

It's easy to judge the spirit of this book's author from the merits of the person he asks for clarification; and to know what lies at the bottom of his heart from the way he speaks in his letter. His morality demonstrates his humanity, his candor, and his uprightness; and his sincere conviction of the immortality of the soul, and of the existence of a God who is free, purposively active, punishing crime and rewarding virtue, along with everything entailed by this conviction, is incontestable evidence of his true religiosity and his solid piety.

Ecclesiastics will certainly cry that an ungodly, execrable book has appeared which is filled with blasphemies, which can only have been written by a demon from hell; that the foundations of religion are being openly undermined. They will fulminate, they will move heaven and earth, they will stir the masses into a frenzy, they will appeal to the powerful, and spread rumors, disturbances, and confusion everywhere. In reality, this demon was one of the most upright men that ever was, loved by all those who knew him and respected by all those who had dealings with him. The book doesn't say a word that doesn't radiate the glory of God, and equity, the unique source of human happiness: but ecclesiastics call those who benefit them saints; whoever denounces their deceit and their extortions is a devil incarnate.

¹³ This preface is part of the original manuscript.

The foundations of religion are under attack; and why not? These gentlemen certainly attack them, they are certainly blasphemous. Don't the theologians of each religion attack the foundations of the other ones; don't they call their gods demons; their images idols; their prophets impostors; and their priests seducers?

There is, therefore, a general right to combat all the religions, or else they're all wrong to clash with each other. If the ministers of religion didn't have a greater interest in maintaining their laws, dogmas, and precepts than people have in following them, they wouldn't make so much noise. The Pope, the bishop, the parish priest preaches against the mufti, the Imam against the bonze, and the talapoin against the rabbi, the rabbi preaches against the Pope, the bishop, the parish priest, the mufti, the bonze and the talapoin, the mufti against the Pope, the rabbi and the talapoin. The bonze and the talapoin preach against the Pope, the rabbi and the mufti, all of them thunder against each other. Why, then, shouldn't the philosopher, he who is wise and unprejudiced, declaim against such people? What right does each of them have that he lacks? Let's see who's in the wrong, let's see who has a right to complain, let's see who's preaching the truth.

These foundations they boast about are either good or bad. If good, there is nothing to fear; if bad, why not shake off such an unjust and heavy yoke? For what reason should people not limit themselves to what is truly glorious to God, necessary to human salvation, and useful to their tranquility?

Mr. Jacquelot¹⁴ has done well: convinced of his beliefs, as a champion of Christianity, he casts the gauntlet, and waits, with lance in hand, for the first man to appear and try and prove him wrong. He offers his proofs, and invites everyone to provide their objections, promising not to employ, like some braggart, the advantages of the reigning religion, or to expose anyone to the malevolence of the Pharisees, or the rigor of the laws extorted by the clergy; a good man can't do otherwise, and such conduct does more to honor religion than all the pomp with which it's preached, and gives him far more authority than a million rulings by the Inquisition.

¹⁴ *Dissertations sur l'existence de Dieu ou l'on démontre cette vérité par l'histoire universelle de la première antiquité du monde* (1697).

Spinoza employs his rare subtlety to establish atheism, and what is even more pernicious, the fatality and necessity of men's actions, and consequently permission for all that is most abominable; and yet, he is published and even quite readily available; in truth, he is banned, but with all due respect to princes and potentates, it might have been better to ignore him. His principles are manifestly false or arbitrary, he contradicts himself everywhere on the subject of freedom, which he assumes in a thousand parts, despite his positive denial of it.

The remedy for those writings which harm the religion professed to be the true and the only good one is to respond solidly to such things, and not to allow their sale and publication without the response and supposed refutation of them. This precaution is judicious and sufficient; far from fearing it, it's required in God's name.

The banning of books does more harm to religion than any imaginable writings. It is a clear indication that a falsehood is being upheld which can't withstand the least examination, like a counterfeiter who runs off when he sees his product tossed in the fire.

The Protestant writers insult the Papists because their objections so terrify them that they don't even want to allow access to them in theological controversy, even when accompanied by a response, since they themselves proclaim that if any books appear which attack the foundations of the Christian religion, far from detailing their contents, they won't even share their titles.

Is this not willing blindness from prejudice or self-interest? They speak at length about all the writings that destroy the foundations of every religion, except their own; *propria dissimulans, cur aliena notas*? This is rank injustice, coming from pride, against which so much is said, or rather, from cowardly and sordid self-interest, or at least from brutish party loyalty. Is this not a confession that the foundations of the Christian religion in general are no more solid than those of Papism in particular, that the Christians sense their own weakness, as the Pope does his, using cunning to win men over, and violence to repress them.

Besides, the present text can only cause harm to those who have no intention to serve God, but who are devoured by zeal to put him to work for themselves, who want respect without merit, who commit all sorts of crimes with impunity, and live in opulence and amid delights, without

work or any care. This book will be infinitely pleasant to those who sincerely seek the glory of their Creator along with their own salvation; it preaches the pure, incontestable truth, and it preaches it without selfish intentions; it asks for no tithes, wages, honorariums, pensions, annates, etc. It perfectly justifies divine justice, and removes all pretext for the wicked to defend themselves, or to live in their cursed security.

It establishes in a sound, clear, and distinct manner, that which all religions confusedly agree about; it tends only to cut away from this the dire effects of fanaticism, hypocrisy, pride, greed, ambition, and the spirit of tyranny.

The author doesn't stop there. Aside from making the fear of God and the purest morality very clear, he solves all the problems concerning Providence, foreknowledge, and the justice, mercy and goodness of God, as well as Predestination; he does away with all the contradictions that people want to find in human nature; he explains moral good and evil, along with their cause; he shows the injustice of the complaints about the distribution of the blessings of fortune; he establishes free will beyond question, based on tangible demonstrations, which will end all disputes, and preserve this truth from any attack; and all that with a few, clear principles, with which nobody can disagree.

His use of the term "demonstration", as applied to his proofs in the second notebook, is no usurpation or abuse of terminology, as in so many books, whose authors never dare reduce to syllogisms the nonsense they spout in place of proofs. Those found here are true demonstrations in proper form. This method is easier than the common way; it starts by proposing a clear and incontestable truth, then goes into detail, turning it every way to give a sense of its power and shed more light on it; then it takes this truth as the major premise of a syllogism.

Each of his arguments is complete and absolute, without needing to refer back to others by a series like those of geometry, which are indeed admirable, but which few are able to follow, and which would, consequently, be inappropriate for something that people need to understand. This is what led the author to scatter throughout his work an infinity of comparisons which are within reach of the simplest minds, the perfect correctness of which will be admired.

How happy the state, how happy the republic, where the religion described in the final section of this work could reign supreme! How happy the prince who would adhere to it, and whose subjects would accept none other! How happy would the individuals be who professed it, and who would live among those who are faithful to it! Some repetition might be found, which the author might have arranged in a somewhat ungainly fashion, but he preferred to restate important things in different ways rather than omit them. It might also be noted that certain sections might have been organized better: the number of references and interlinear notes is so high in the original, there are so many little pieces tacked on, that it has been almost impossible to avoid some mistakes. To try and put these articles in proper order would be like trying to drink the whole ocean: it has, by necessity, been necessary to leave it somewhat random.

None of all this does anything to diminish the power and correctness of the work. If it seems somewhat misshapen, this only shows too delicate a taste, or a small mind which only cares about presentation. True beauty is over their heads; it might also be that these sections are new thoughts which the author simply cast where they seemed to fit best, which seems all the more likely as they are slipshod.

If the whole thing seems too affirmative with respect to its title, and some parts livelier than expected, the reader must realize that a man of war, accustomed to speaking naturally, lacks the moderation and precautions of the man of study. He forgets this title and allows himself to be carried away by his subject and the force of his thoughts; it might also be that these parts are so sharp, and even so hard, given the quality of their addressee, that they weren't included in the copy presented to Fr. Malebranche, whether because the author omitted them out of a sense of respect, or because these bits were added later, as we have speculated.

Finally, we give notice to the reader that it has been thought necessary to remove certain historical references, which are important, but which could have been used to identify the author and bring misfortune to a poor widow, burdened with a large family, which was left with nothing by its father but his honor. Indeed, what is the suspicious cruelty of the Inquisition not capable of doing?

Those who are not made for profound arguments on somewhat abstract matters, who have no acquaintance with the exact sciences, will benefit when reading this book, not by devouring it, so to speak, but by reading it slowly, with many pauses, that they should limit themselves to, say twenty pages at a time, since passages of that length will offer some unity in their subject matter.

If we let ourselves be carried away by ardent curiosity, or if we concentrate on a certain point we go looking for, we will become so obsessed by it that all the rest will pass us by; although the eyes scan all the letters and lines, the mind is not struck by their meaning; we reach the end with a burden of confused ideas, and not informed in a clear and convincing manner, which is the effect that a text like this one should produce.

The best, at least the safest way, is to read the whole book twice, the first time, to exhaust and satisfy one's burning curiosity, which is a passion. The second time, for the benefit of one's reason, with this passion out of the way.

DIFFICULTIES ON RELIGION, PRESENTED TO FR. MALEBRANCHE

M. R. F¹⁵.

It would be too rash of me to seek to talk with you in person. Such precious hours aren't granted to strangers, especially when the reason for their visit is unknown. But I hope you might agree to cast a glance on these little notebooks containing my difficulties on religion, and which, consequently, your charity can't refuse, unless they were unworthy of the sublimity of your genius, but I don't have any worry on that account. I also feel at ease about my stylistic failings and my lack of erudition. A mind of such rare elevation, intensity, and extraordinary depth as the author of *La Recherche de la Verité* won't despise them for their artless expository style. The profession I've followed has prevented me from developing my literary abilities, but I think I have reason to trust in my own common sense and discernment. You'll be the judge, M.R.F., on this minor point. While I still quite young, along with books of history, travel, plays and novels, I eagerly read *La Recherche de la Verité*; I reread it, against my temperament and custom, I was filled with admiration, and yet I found certain parts where it seemed that the great Father Malebranche had betrayed both himself and his own principles.

I am honored to share these little remarks with you at your leisure, I even hope they'll seem more plausible to you than if they came formally from a professor, since jealousy is often more pressing than a love of truth and justice. They come from a mind without erudition, and more biased than anyone on earth as to your merits. Thus, [my remarks] can only be an effort of natural instincts, or rather, of pure and undiluted reason; if this isn't an illusion, the same will apply to everything I include here. I can assure Y.R.¹⁶ that everything here came naturally to me, that I've never even seen the cover of Spinoza or any book of that sort, nor those of the Socinians, or the deists. I've even avoided reading these sorts of books when I've had them to hand. And I was ill at ease when I came into contact with anything like them. I even refused to look at a Lucretius that one of my

¹⁵ French: M.R.P., *Mon Révérend Père*, My Reverend Father.

¹⁶ French V.R., *Votre Révérence*, Your Reverence.

friends left with me a few months ago. What little reading I've done has inevitably given occasion to some of my thoughts. I won't use even a single one of the thoughts that I might have heard from someone else through reading and conversation.

It's not that I'm claiming to say anything new here; on the contrary, I'm sure that most of this has been said or thought by many others; however, I didn't learn it from them. Most of it came to me spontaneously, and reflection provided me with everything else.

It seems to be characteristic of truth that it offers itself, naturally and without seeking, to all minds: there is no reason why falsehood would similarly appear of itself, nor why one rather than the other.

It is quite true that, by examining a question, it's possible to be misled by letting ourselves be overly impressed by one facet of a given subject. But when, unconsciously and merely on the occasion of this subject, a clear idea suddenly appears, this can only be the truth.

None of this, M.R.F., is a display of vanity, it's only to encourage your Reverence to turn the first page in hopes of finding something worthy of your attention. I presume that you'll find yourself quite compelled to respond when you realize that I'm not the only one to have been struck and shaken by these objections. I will frankly confess, M.R.F., that my faith is greatly at risk if Father Malebranche fails to satisfy me. I expect nothing from any [other] man already born or yet to be born. Besides, I insist before God, whom I believe, fear, and recognize as my creator and judge, that although everything I will say seems quite sound to me, I seek its refutation with all my heart. I will go further. If, M.R.F., you can balance, with good arguments, up to the level of mine, even if they don't entirely defeat them, then the power of education, supported by my high opinion of your adequacy, will win the day. But I won't accept any tales, exclamations, authorities, allegories, or any other proofs fit only for catechists and missionaries.

I know, M.R.F., that on any other subject such a preamble would seem excessive, but in religious matters people use all possible means, and when you said that the reality of bodies could only be guaranteed by the Holy Scriptures, that you found J.C. gloriously resurrected in an ant that

changed into a butterfly¹⁷, which you produced as a strong proof for what the preachers tell us about the consent of so many people about incredible things, what might the greatest genius not be capable of, to support such a cause?

Prejudice and commitment encourage us to find everything copacetic; what looks bad is a conviction. Things that look ridiculous to the unbiased mind are thought passable. You have, M.R.F., so many examples of similar weaknesses, and such highly regarded names that you can add your own to their number without any harm to your reputation. Everyone says that the great Fr. Malebranche is speaking as a Christian priest and theologian here; he isn't speaking as a gentleman incapable of disguising himself, or as a philosopher who wouldn't offer twaddle instead of arguments.

Nor should you, M.R.F., indulge in these clichés of libertinism and corruption of the heart, for aside from the fact that each religion can make the same critique of the others, that the Jews can say that the Christians deserted only to avoid circumcision and eat all kinds of meat, etc., for these arguments to have any semblance of validity, the sectarians of a factitious religion would have to be better than both savages and philosophers. Ha! What a difference there is, good Lord!

I call factitious religions all those which are artificial, which are built on facts, and which recognize any principles other than those of reason and any laws other than those of conscience. It isn't the wicked, the tyrants, the extortioners, the traitors, the murderers, the poisoners who rebel against religion: all these people have the same views as the rest; they even tend to be devout to the point of superstition. It's the good people, who love virtue and honor, who listen to their conscience and their reason, who are horrified to find themselves committed to ridiculous and horrid opinions.

As for me, I've been not only a Christian, a true Catholic, who devoutly said his *Obsecros*, his seven joys of Mary, his prayers to Saint Brigitte etc., and at the same time one of the most debauched of men, whereas I now lead a very orderly life and am nearly free of all passions. I

¹⁷ See Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité*, book IV, ch. VIII; where he refers to "the transformation of various worms into flies and into butterflies."

truly think that education is our most powerful influence; I would just as easily have followed the worst sort of paganism.

I will end by letting Y.R. know that when I say I possess no erudition, I mean by comparison with the savants, the critics, those with a vocation for study, for while I am far beneath such gentlemen, I am also somewhat above the common oaf. I've read all the Holy Scriptures. I have some acquaintance with history, I know some physics and I have some acquaintance with mathematics; I can understand anything solid, however sublime [abstract] it may be.

I've read your *Metaphysics*, M.R.F., and your *Christian Conversations*. I appreciate their beauty. I'm convinced by what is good in them, and I am aware of their weaker aspects. If the great Father Malebranche had been a philosopher only, he wouldn't have stumbled so many times that I hesitate to point them out. Plato would have spread pettiness, puerilities, mysterious twaddle if he'd set out to harmonize the theology of his country with his own views of the deity.

I must also beg Y.R. not to be shocked by any language that might slip out. I have assumed a personality that is free, indifferent and detached from all polite respect; a personality of a pure nature, a personality who is untamed, whose mind is unsullied by any biases or presuppositions. I see myself, M.R.F., as having been raised by your side in a desert, with a mute mother, without any other guide but our reason, and no other education but our reflections and meditations.

After that, M.R.F., no scandal is to be feared. Fr. Malebranche is no weak mind, and this text will not be distributed beyond you unless you judge it worthy of a public response, in which case it will be necessary to make a faithful and complete copy along with the refutation of each article. As I beg you in God's name to do this for me, he will be the one to reward your efforts. As for me, I can only offer you my respect and the infinite gratitude with which I will have the honor of being, all my life, M.R.F., the very humble and very obedient servant of Your Reverence.

If there is anything obscure and too compact, I'll extend and clarify it as much as you like. I hold back for fear of alarming your patience, and besides, the length of the work worries me, but if there were only one or two points to handle, I'd certainly do so with pleasure, and would surely follow them through completely.

FIRST NOTEBOOK:

CONTAINING THAT WHICH OPENED MY EYES

The first thing that shocked me in our religion was the power of the Pope. From my tenderest years, I couldn't overhear the reading of a gazette, detailing the usual disagreements between the Court of Rome and the Catholic states, without feeling an indignation that would have pulverized Pope, keys and tiara included, if I'd had the power. I couldn't understand the weakness of the sovereigns in voluntarily accepting enslavement to the sort of boor who wouldn't be worth a second glance in the street. I felt the same when I heard talk of dispensations of marriage, of excommunications, of dethronements, of interdictions on whole kingdoms, etc. But it was far worse when I saw with my own eyes the pomp, the arrogance, the debauchery, the vanity, the greed, the intrigue and the politics of this court; when I saw things like annates handed out, the purchase of absolutions, the dogma, so widespread, of breaking one's oaths and paying no heed to one's word; finally, when I realized that this revered Holiness was often an old man consumed with gout and rotting with ulcers, gnawed by the most shameful diseases, giving or refusing according to the greed of his concubine, who decided the most important things, on all sorts of matters, in the midst of their romping, thus finding herself the oracle of the Holy Spirit. Then came the Inquisition and all sorts of violence used to subjugate the masses, on the pretext of religion, and depriving humanity of all liberty; this cruelty carried to the point of transforming the executions into festive occasions and watching poor wretches and innocent people roasted, while those who do far less and with greater justice are called abominable tyrants, since as far as the ancient emperors are concerned, there is no comparison to be made: a novelty was introduced [into their empire] which sowed trouble and discord everywhere, which perturbed a state of affairs they considered excellent. Once the upper hand was gained, all the fine principles they had preached were forgotten, and the Romans were forced to abandon the religion under which they had conquered and held universal empire. This religion was false; we'll examine our own. As for the pagans of the present, why are they wrong to rid themselves of people who come to overthrow the laws and customs by which they live in peace, to bring them others which will sow hatred and discord, and enslave them to a thousand marauders?

Someone truly needs to inform the Emperor of China about what he's doing by tolerating our missionaries; he should be shown what happened to the Greek and German emperors, and how a certain English king and a count of Toulouse were handled; along with the fate of the American kings; he should be told that only the power of his empire is saving him from similar treatment, on which he can infallibly count once the majority of his subjects are infected with papism, which maintains that all is just and that only the papists are right. They will boldly preach that everything belongs to them by right, as their doctors have written and ruled; consequently, that they can seize hold of all that belongs to any other nation; he should be told that twenty thousand republics will rise up in his state, the goods and persons of which will be outside his jurisdiction, and for which he will be obliged to show more consideration and concern than they will have for him; which will loudly proclaim that they can deprive him of life and of the Empire if he doesn't share their opinion on all their fantasies, without being able, for any cause whatsoever, to issue even the slightest correction; that these people will claim exemption from all public duties, will possess the finest goods and will levy additional taxes on the people, leaving him in charge of all the State's expenditures and the risks and fatigue of war to protect them from their enemies, while these gentlemen will be at table, in bed, strolling in their sumptuous gardens, or seducing the wives and daughters of the poor wretches who risk themselves to protect them; let him be shown in all starkness how he will have to send more than ten million out of his Empire to Rome, to buy provisions for bishops and abbots, dispensations of marriages, absolutions, indulgences, etc. And finally, let the Pope declare him the enemy of God, and consequently cast off his throne, and his subjects absolved from the oath of loyalty they owe him, by means of which decree all that he will have left is his domestic servants, and he will be reduced to running barefoot, to present his shoulders for a flogging. These missionaries, these apostles have so much good faith that they will refrain from preaching these truths. They act like catamites, like honey-tongued and humble folk while they await the moment to show their claws and teeth. The masses should also be told that these people who shriek that they're not guided by self-interest, will no sooner have triumphed than they will demand a tenth of their income, of their labor and their hard work, will only marry them for large sums and will force them to be buried at great expense, that they'll forbid them the most essential and natural things, in order to sell or grant them as dispensations to them; that they will steal their wives and daughters, that they will rape and massacre them without any hope of justice.

But these Jews, these heretics are in their own country, where they should be. By what right can their conscience be violated, can they be persecuted with sword and fire, using methods that are abominable and against nature, reason and the rules of justice recognized in all nations? These people are good subjects, good citizens; their only crime is that they don't submit to the tyrannical laws which the pride and avarice of churchmen have imposed.

The whole procedure of ecclesiastics in general (which clearly shows that these revered mysteries are only nets held out to fish for wealth and honors) touched me to an infinite degree. They are so impudent as to preach poverty while swimming in wealth; humility from the heights of the most splendid estates, disinterest while grabbing where nobody owes them anything, and a hundred times more than would be due if they were indeed owed some salary, having themselves paid in advance with the most exacting rigor, which even the least manual laborers wouldn't do; sobriety and frugality amid continual feasts, abundant and delightful tables; simplicity from splendid palaces, with magnificent carriages and whole armies of servants. We don't need a suspicious mind to see them as scoundrels; but you have to be quite insensitive, lazy and cowardly to let yourself be robbed and eaten out of house and home.

After this I thought about all the ceremonies, so numerous and so similar to those of the pagan Greeks and Romans that I learned about in my school lessons; since then, I've seen the rest among the idolatrous Indians and Americans: there I've found monks, the prayer beads, relics, etc.

As for the care taken to cause anxiety in the minds of children before they are in a position to judge what they hear about, these legends full of ridiculous and even odious miracles, impertinent assumptions, vulgar falsehoods, which are nevertheless approved, published, preached, printed and painted in the temples, and finally authorized like all the rest of what is handed to us, like all that is holiest and most sacred in religion; as for the veneration of relics, when I saw that they were usually just rotten bones, I realized that they were just parts of a body like my own. Where is the certainty that these skeletons taken from the inexhaustible storehouses of Rome were the bodies of martyrs? Is probability of this, if any, any match for the obvious risk of idolatry, in the case of a mistake? And why run this risk of canonization which has no other basis than human testimony and which, without the least necessity, makes us risk paying divine

honors to men who are damned? For ultimately, even if some advantage could be found in the deposition of men who are biased, compromised, etc., do we know the intentions of these supposed saints? Witnesses can only testify about material things. Do we even know if they were baptized? What if their priest was like Louis Gauffredi, who baptized in the name of the Devil, or a Jew or a Mahometan, like some I've known in Spain? But worse still, people are canonized for crimes, for abandoning their essential duties and causing a thousand misfortunes, for breaking promises. Really, who will respond to this objection? St. Paul himself says that he doesn't know whether he is worthy of love or hate, that he doesn't feel guilty about anything, but that nevertheless he isn't justified. Does the Pope know the actions and intentions of John of Capistrano just as St. Paul knew his own? Even if he had a good knowledge of them, he should remain in uncertainty like Paul. If miracles are alleged, aside from the fact that no reasonable person should believe them and that no wise man ever sees them, J.C. said that he would send to the pit of hell those who performed miracles in his name. The Antichrist will perform them: tell me, M.R.F.: it is, therefore, evident that these canonizations are nothing other than a way to acquire relief and pay with smoke for very real services, at the expense of the true worship that is due to God alone. Indeed, what could be finer and cheaper than to erect temples and altars to people, to attribute rain or good weather to them, as well as storms and good winds, the protection of cities and entire kingdoms, etc.? St. Louis ruined France, caused the death of a million men, he himself fell into slavery and ultimately died of the plague. Had he succeeded, the Pope would have gained two or three million annually, with an immense increase of power and grandeur. How to pay for all that? A stroke of the pen, he's written into the catalogue of saints. Apparently, the same would be done for King James the Second, who broke his oaths and promises, violated the fundamental laws of the kingdom and ruined his whole family. I'll pass from these to all these paupers vagabonding through town and country, with no other profession than demanding what is called charity, to so many mendicant monks, very fat and well housed, without any other concern than to act important and pleasant, while a shameless scoundrel goes to fleece the poor who, living on top of each other in holes with their families, are crushed beneath their tasks and taxes; and so many other rich and proud monks, wearing the title of poor and humble, who accumulate lands and seigneuries, baronies and jurisdiction, castles with desirable exemptions, each of which spends more than most gentlemen's income, who have to provide for their daughters and raise their boys.

The visible possessions of the bishop who tonsured me was also very jarring; when I compared his table with ours; it was a lean day: I quickly realized what little a fast means when made this way, any more than a feast, when a man's profession is to do nothing.

The sight of a certain church [devoted to the Virgin Mary], when my mother brought me along, while fulfilling a certain vow, gave me a strong distaste for the cult of images from my childhood. On the way there I had expected that I would see the Virgin in the air, as portrayed in the paintings, but when I was shown a pathetic little figurine of black stone, against which they pressed rosary beads at the end of a rod, I was dumbfounded and nothing has ever seemed as ridiculous to me. I wasn't yet seven years old, but all the big ideas that had been impressed on me about Our-Lady-of-the-Ardillières faded like a dream. I saw a stone as a stone, and I saw full well that this stone, so praised and so famous, so full of power, needed a stake to hold it up and an iron grate to keep it safe. Why, I asked myself, travel so far, wear oneself out, and spend so much? Don't we have a thousand similar grotesques closer to hand? Finally, this office in the middle of the church to take money from poor idiots gave me a very poor opinion of the idol's ministers.

Around the age of 12, I began to notice how bad the preacher's arguments were: they failed to convince me of anything but their wish to look smart. A certain catechism, which, to support what is said of the broken sacramental bread – that it contains, in each of its pieces, the whole body of Jesus Christ – said that we see ourselves complete in each shard of a broken mirror, and a thousand other absurdities, filled me with doubts and suspicion.

A certain book¹⁸, with fine examples, fell into my hands when I was in second grade, around the age of 13. I loved it. Certain shapes, with all their lines and points, were very attractive to me. The sort of pride which paints mercury behind objects to show us ourselves instead of letting us see God through them, the hooked instrument called reflection, by which the philosophers had passed under the walls of the City of True Pleasure, charmed me. But when I came to the part that said: "What do I see? Philedon on his knees at the feet of a crucifix?", I thought I was dreaming, so little had what I'd read led me to such a conversion. It certainly wasn't a corrupt

¹⁸ *Les Délices de l'esprit, dialogues dédiés aux beaux esprits du monde* (1658), by Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin (1595-1676).

heart that closed my eyes: I think I was still within my baptismal innocence, with a faith that was blind, without suspicion and invincible.

But when philosophical responses were made to the arguments I used against the substantial forms and absolute accidents of the councils, the decisions of the Popes and the mystery of the Eucharist, I began right away to doubt and to form a plan to examine what religion is.

Although young, and only around 18 years old, the power of education meant that I was still devout, and still covered myself with signs of the cross from head to foot in my excessive fear of devils, ghosts and sorcerers. Fortunately, by dropping the portfolio [student's satchel], having made decisions to face far more real dangers than these, it didn't take long to shake off my panicky fears, and that dealt yet another great blow to my faith. I said to myself: I was convinced by these follies, I now see how null and void they are. Won't the same apply to everything else?

The persecution of the Huguenots came soon after this. Oh! M.R.F., what cruelties and what harshness I witnessed! When I remember how, full of wine, we dragged a poor old man, suffering terribly from gout, out of his bed, where even his sheets were a burden to him, and made him dance in the public square, how his pitiful cries and the tears of his two poor girls who groveled at our feet did nothing to soften our barbarity — what a cruel memory! I struggle to hold my pen, and my eyes can hardly guide it.

But what an attack on this religion, the equity and gentleness of which is so loudly proclaimed, what an attack on the opinion of this grace which sustained the martyrs: none of that had any effect; we had to abandon the house, having ruined it. But it was the Bishop and the priests who sent us there, who urged us to all manner of excess, who preached that God uses all sorts of means, and who laughed when they were told of similar horrors.

All of which led me to reread the New Testament, some selections from the Fathers and the theologians, which, in truth, had a bad effect. Then I turned to the Christian philosophers, who made things even worse. When I saw that the efforts of so many great geniuses came down to such miserable efforts and such vague, ambiguous speeches, and who give no proofs and who can do nothing but daze or dazzle children or silly women, I concluded that there could not be

anything solid or good to be said for it. I must say that I was never more repelled by religion than when reading the books written to explain or support it.

I could be mistaken, but I think I see foul play in these books. All the authors start with the existence of God, which nobody doubts; thus, the only purpose they have in mind is to smear with the odious label of atheist those who are more convinced than they are about God's existence, who have more correct ideas of him, who worship him far better, since it comes from the bottom of their hearts and without any present interest; whereas all these henchmen of factitious religion make themselves a smallholding, or even a seignury in his name and stick with religion for the sake of large incomes, great honors, or simply the anticipation of such things.

These authors also claim to ambush minds and gain respect and confidence by displaying their knowledge and grasp of things. Most people expect that a man who says fine and good things at the beginning of their book won't end it with commonplaces. Biased in this way, they give to authority the same consent that they had given to reason. But what a terrible fall for a rational man, when, from these sublime speculations, these authors come down to the facts and the point in question; what vacuities, what puerilities, what false arguments, what false coinage, what utter nonsense!

Another subject is the mistreatment of those who have something to offer that will shed light on the truth, the care taken to impose silence on them, which extends to the utmost cruelty against those whose unusual genius leads them to dazzling discoveries which have no natural connection with such a terrible religion, while idiots and rascals are magnificently rewarded for vapid words, speeches in the air, and manifest falsehoods.

The truth has no need for such unseemly proceedings. But lies are introduced by craft, promoted by impudence, and upheld by cruelty. This is the source of the public prohibitions on teaching the truth, and of the tyranny that is wielded in the colleges and universities, where professors must swear that they will only teach doctrines that they know are false and ridiculous.

What shall I say of the insolence of using any means, no matter how baseless, to cast off the soundest principles, to elude the clearest passages in the book presented as the law of God, as

well as the best arguments when unfavorable, and taking literally all that is convenient and advantageous, and calling figurative whatever doesn't fit? What could be more positive than these words: "You have received freely, give freely; carry neither gold, nor silver; wear no purse." Could anything be clearer *per se*, with respect to what is said before and after it, and with respect to the speaker's intentions? Nothing could be more reasonable and accurate. Don't they laugh at it? They [claim to] sell nothing, but give anything for money, and give nothing without it.

A whole multitude of such things have lined up in my mind: these priests without merit or learning, brutes, lechers, etc. are, after their ordinations, just as they were before them, although this ordination is supposed to grant them a real and physical character. Where, then, is the virtue of this character, of this entity that's supposed to enter their souls? I have never seen any tangible effects unless it's unlimited greed and avarice, brutish arrogance or a hypocritical attitude ["*tartuffe*"] accompanied by insolent presumption.

These ridiculous principles of the invocation of the saints, as if God could be won over by solicitations, just as those who call themselves his lieutenants are seduced by the solicitation of their catamites or mistresses. It's because nobody wants a God who sees everything, who is everywhere, a God who only acts according to his own wisdom and justice. Such a God is worthy of worship, but he is useless for human ambition and avarice; what they want is one who needs petitioners, so that everyone can grab whatever saint they want, with fraud in hand. This is what leads to all the vows, the bargaining, the insane and insolent propositions made to God, which no servant of any self-respecting powerful human would dare make to him: "If you free me from prison, I'll give you my weight in gold"; "If you bring me victory in this battle, I'll murder the first person who runs to me, even my own daughter"; "I'll build you a sumptuous building where I'll keep fattened like pigs a staff of idiots who only want to debauch the local women and girls, stuff themselves with wines and meats, save for a few hours when they'll sing the opposite of their actual thoughts and desires." What they want is a God who can be created when needed, to force the masses to attend this fine show and pay its producer.

Impertinent titles like "God's Vicar" and "Vice-God", which are impious, [allowing them, under] the pretext of showing everyone the highest things on earth, to crush the masses with an incredible yoke. This is to make a comparison between God's omnipotence and human weakness

with an argument that is just as ridiculous as concluding that a man who has two good eyes needs a guide, since a blind man can't do without one.

The ruse of calling the most common events punishments or rewards, when this could authorize error and disguise superstition. These unworthy and absurd propositions by which men have set up as miracles all the blessings that come to evil men when they have given assistance to the ministers of religion, and the misfortune suffered by the best men, whose memory is still abhorred, when they resisted the deeds and usurpations of these gentlemen.

These conversions that are so boasted of, and which are only the fruits of the human sciences, of finesse, plots, politics, and, whenever possible, violence.

These Church councils, the decisions of which are christened with the name of truth and the oracles of the Holy Spirit, and which have no advantage over the ones that decided the complete opposite, except that of being the most recent and of having obtained a decree of revision by the procedures of the court, by base and often criminal flattery, where pride and self-seeking are obviously involved.

These sacraments which are preached as so necessary and which are not in our power; these books which are reputedly holy, after having been profaned in times when they should have been better known than now; these feasts of saints who were unknown for twelve centuries, and not only invented without the least basis, but also given the utmost solemnities: the Conception, the Assumption, Saint Anna, St. Joachim, etc.

The care taken by the ecclesiastics to see their ridiculous ordinances observed, while they laugh at those of God and of reason; what a lot of noise for a poor fellow who ate an egg during Lent, or married his godmother, but he can neglect his family, mistreat his wife, let his charges starve, and so on, in all security.

Finally, as I got older, a little reading, experience and reflection have shown me that people have made, unmade and remade books, that many have been suppressed, that they have been

presumed, that things have been added and removed, and changed in the authentic books, and that they contain just as many frauds as allegories and distorted explanations.

At this point I examined [the question], not as a historian or a critic, which is an endless task and reveals nothing, but as a philosopher, as a man who, with a serious desire to find the truth, seeks it, in good faith, at its source and in its principles, and not in uncertain and muddled facts where superstition is painted in the same lines and colors as the truth; not in those books where the pros and cons are found, the yea and the nay, and where even the most skilled among us never gain a perfect understanding, but in right reason, which always speaks clearly and uniformly, even to the simplest minds. The closer I've examined the principles of our religion, the more I've seen how inconsistently things have been done; no sooner do they stupefy the masses than they ridicule them. For example, if a Mass is what we're told it is, then a single one is sufficient; there's no point repeating something that is of infinite worth; but if many are more than one, why limit the priests to saying only 368 Masses per year? It would be more reasonable to keep them busy saying them from morning to evening. The Holy Sacrament, the body, the soul, the divinity of J.C. are carried in honor of the Pope, J.C. is part of his cortège, and he goes out whenever the Pope goes out; the Pope wouldn't follow him once in a hundred thousand times. The Pope, the Bishops and the large beneficiaries leave the Mass, as a form of drudgery, to be said by people who are paid for the task. If you want a positive declaration as to how they really think of it, it's said that these holy men, these eminences, these grandees have important business that keeps them from devoting their time to the most sublime deed in all religion:

1st) This is false, they have plenty of leisure to play, hunt, make love, hold feasts; they have leisure time to govern states, to be the king's ministers, etc.;

2nd) There is no business that can be anything like as important as giving God the greatest glory he can receive, and procuring for men the surest means of attracting his blessings;

3rd) They listen to the Mass and it wouldn't take any more time to say it themselves. The fact is that they regard it as a mummery, and all its gestures as ridiculous and futile efforts; instead they attend it in repose, seated on a fine carriage, without making the slightest motion, only thinking

of their amusements, making plans for their ambition and greed, or while listening to some pleasant music.

The profession of a priest is surely the most essential of all the ecclesiastical ministries. The priest is the man who inculcates the principles, who gives the first impressions and the strongest feelings of faith; he is the man who brings people into the Church, who makes Christians, who forgives sins, who distributes the Eucharist, who marries those who will beget the Popes, the Cardinals, the Bishops, etc. On the other hand, it's a peasant's profession; a Pope, a Cardinal, an Abbot, a great Prior will never make his brother or even his nephew a priest, no, they'll be Canons, which is the most ridiculous and useless post there is: coughing, spitting, belching, etc., while a dozen oafs are busy caterwauling with the choir.

Why, since the faith of the Pope cannot fail and since faith is so powerful, does he not command mountains to leap into the sea and sink the pirates of Barbary who so terrify his states and his neighbors? Maybe he'll also convert them with such an amazing miracle.

Is it following these principles and these fine ideas of a man superior to angels, who can, at will, summon God from Heaven to Earth, that a Cardinal, who is not a priest, treats a village vicar?

God can do anything, so you only have to entreat his will: why, then, doesn't O. H. F. the Pope go to defeat the Turkish army by himself? A child who has to carry a burden of 20 pounds will appeal directly to his father, to a family friend; he doesn't call twenty other children to help this father, this brother, or this friend, because he sees clearly, if unconsciously, that all he needs is the willingness of these people, since they have the power to help him. But this would be to tempt God! We're tempting him just the same with a hundred thousand men: this army is either sufficient or not, to gain victory. If it is, it will be useless to offer vows, prayers, blessings, etc. You don't offer any to get a porter to carry a bundle of wood, or to get a hogshead of wine moved by two horses. If this army is insufficient, it's tempting God just as much as with a single man. There is no more of a miracle, or any particular intervention of God when an army of a hundred thousand men is defeated by a single soldier, than if he has a hundred thousand fellows if these hundred thousand men aren't up to the task. A special divine intervention is required, and God doesn't find any one thing harder than another.

It's also said that it's impermissible to kill oneself. And yet, young men are commanded, and the claim is made that they can kill others, since this is the only reason why kings, princes and all the powerful men don't do it themselves; besides, nothing is more common in the lives of saints than their own premature death through fasting and mortifications; a thousand examples of this are available.

The monks, these hornets of the public, make their altars shine with gold and silver grotesques, dressed like themselves; their power and miracles are preached. When storms or wars ruin these sacred locations, nobody prays to the saints to raise them back up; instead, the powerful are courted, the merchants and the bourgeois are gulled, notorious exploiters are praised, widows are bribed. Absolutions, indulgences, schemes, no means are neglected. Finally, the poor man who is made to supply the bread restores the house of these great friends of God, in whom he has vested his power. The end of the story is that the monks are the henchmen, the emissaries and the soldiers of the Pope, kept at the expense of the public at no cost to him. Thus, the reward of apotheosis [sanctification] is bestowed from time to time on someone to accredit him and make him venerable in the eyes of the average lout.

Finally, a terrible blow was leveled against my prejudices when I saw that great nations, wiser than us, or at least better behaved, were equally convinced of a thousand absurdities that we laugh at. Let us raise our minds a little, M.R.F., let's spend a moment in that intelligible country, and from up there let us look at Paris and Peking, Rome and Constantinople, Madrid and ancient Mexico. From there let's consider the Pope and the Mufti, the Bonze and the Rabbi, the peasant with his parish priest, the black man with his Marabout, the Turk with his Imam, the Persian with his Mullah, the Siamese with his Talapoin, the American, the Brazilian, the Virginian, with their *werovani*, their *coquarous*. In all honesty, who looks more ridiculous? Is it more extravagant to follow and respectfully anticipate all sorts of blessings from a statue with two faces, with a hundred arms, than from a wafer placed in a fancy dish encrusted with precious stones; to stand in a river to bring the Sun out of an eclipse, than to cast a few drops of water in the air to prevent lightning, etc.? There are no absurdities in the most extreme forms of paganism that don't have a faithful copy in our religion; parallels are not hard to find. Give me, M.R.F., a list of pagan absurdities, I'll draw up its [Christian] counterpart. Some of what we have to offer is

incomparably more shocking and pernicious, such as Purgatory, Transubstantiation, Predestination, Confession and so many other things.

A good way to suppress many disputes would be to bring them down to the facts, meaning to set aside those arguments where both parties go wrong and stubbornly stick with their opinions, enabling them to argue, either in truth or by suppositions. Their sincerely held views would be revealed.

For example, I maintain that Jupiter is better than the Christian God. You won't agree, and we could argue until we die, but I ask you, M.R.F., to which of the two kingdoms you would rather go, one where the king is a drunkard, a lecher, fickle about his concerns, who corrupts as many women and girls as he can; in the other, the monarch is chaste and sober, but he has nearly all his subjects roasted alive by sheer whim, without any consideration of their merits, their vices or virtues, like a potter making a chamber-pot from one part of his clay, and a showy vase from another. If you overlook the implication here, you would eagerly leap into the kingdom of the former, and the question would be decided, since the former is Jupiter and the latter is the God of the Christians. Confess, then, in spite of yourself, that paganism was easier to endure than Christianity, which was only able to win through surprise and by exaggerating the evils of its opponent and hiding its own horrors.

This is, no matter how you look at it, nothing but a pile of contradictions and suppositions that cancel each other out. We are commanded to love God, and at the same time he is made as odious as imaginable and conceivable. Humanity is said to be a mass of perdition damned to horrible and eternal tortures, from which God has only spared a very small number by his absolute will. By accepting this supposition, I confess that, if I belong to this small number, this love of God can be required of me, but there are a hundred thousand times more reasons to be afraid than to be hopeful; thus, I am nearly sure of being reprobate, and how should I love someone who in all likelihood has prepared eternal and endless tortures for me? If you were captured by Algerians, M.R.F., with all your community, and you knew with certainty that the Bey has given orders to have you all impaled, except for one whom he intends, by his special and gratuitous grace, to return to France with gifts; up to the point when all of this was carried out, would anyone love him? And after it happened, would anyone love such a capriciously cruel man?

It's said that baptism regenerates us, gives us a share in the Kingdom of God, that he thereby becomes our father. How can this be harmonized with predestination? Baptism is useless for those who are predestined and those who are reprobate, since the former must absolutely possess this Kingdom, while the latter are absolutely excluded from it.

It's held that J.C., God and man, is only a single and unique person. From the very instant this nice idea is preached, it is split apart whenever the need arises; if he confesses his ignorance, it's because he's speaking as a man; man and God are not, then, the same person: the word *person* expresses indivisibility. Peter is a person because Peter cannot be split in two. Peter and John are two people, because they can be separated mentally, and because they really are distinct from each other. Peter can be ignorant while John is learned, but Peter cannot be ignorant and learned on the same subject. When J.C. said that he didn't know the day of Judgment that he was preaching, either there were two people, or he was lying; a single person can't say yes and no on the same subject on the pretext of being different characters; the question was asked of his entire person. A perfect hermaphrodite, asked whether he could impregnate a woman, would tell a lie by saying "No, only a man could do that." An excuse that he couldn't do it as a female would be in bad faith and ridiculous — since he's being asked as a male and as a female — since the male and the female are the same person. In the same way, J.C. would be questioned as both man and God, as one and the same person; in all moral unions, the same thing is true.

I once knew a ship's captain who was also a King's secretary. Asked whether he had ever been to sea, could he have responded no, on the pretext of this fine Jesuitical ruse that he had never been there *as the King's secretary*?

The whole body of monks cries out, with a voice like Polyphemus, that it's never too early to give oneself to God; based on this stunning axiom, girls of 15 are received in, who are expected to commit their entire lives to a state contrary to reason and nature; and then despair will gnaw at them until they die. Why not receive them at the age of three, which would be far better, since it would be even earlier. If the age of 15 is more mature than three years, it's still not old enough, so this addition doesn't prove anything. They wouldn't hand over the administration of their property to a monk of this age; the R. F. Procurator, the R. F. Minister, the R. F. Certifier are always

rather old people. Even mendicant monks wouldn't take a 15-year-old boy as their spiritual father. I'm not referring to the masculine side of monkery; nobody is wronged in this life for being enrolled in the sacred militia. If they lose anything, they're compensated with a thousand other things. Even if he were a King who set aside his crown, the profession of director and confessor would more abundantly provide him the wherewithal to fill all sorts of lusts and give him a way to enjoy them in greater ease than the life of royalty allows. The sophis and sultans, with their thousands of wives, know nothing of delicacy in pleasures. That's reserved for these folks of ours. To hold a young and lovely child charmed by your merits and always ready for anything and in every way, with an inexpressible docility and a respectful tenderness, is a very different sort of delight than anything enjoyed by common folk. In addition, there is the glorious satisfaction of being considered as a saint: you keep your natural qualities and acquire an infinite number of others forever. As for the troop of beggars that take up this profession, it is obviously a clear benefit; laziness, rank, immunities, the respect of people you wouldn't dignify with your contempt, etc., are true boons that these people trade against all the miseries of a poor man's life.

They demand blind faith, and then preach that we must be on guard against false prophets, that we must be careful lest we be led astray. St. Paul says that all things must be analyzed, examined, and that false prophets will appear. Which path is right, then? You might as well throw three dice, one for Papism, one for Calvinism, one for Lutheranism, etc. If I examine, if I plumb the depths, then I'm following my own judgment; if I'm to be a judge, then faith disappears. Unless it's shamelessly said: "Trust me blindly, without suspicion, without looking at what the others say".

We're told to love our neighbor as ourselves; and simultaneously we're told that the finest and most essential thing in the world is to hate ourselves: we must, therefore, hate our neighbor. I would never finish if I tried to share all the rest of such absurdities here. But the whole of it certainly deserves examination. The yoke we carry is heavy enough to drive us away from it, if we could [escape]; it's the summit of misery and an extreme folly to be the dupe of fanatics and rogues.

I fully realize that you'll tell me that I'm risking the loss of much for little gain, since even if I were the dupe of the clerics, this would only mean a few years' suffering, whereas, if they're right, I

will suffer eternal pains. That's well imagined; nothing is more specious, more touching, more liable to provoke emotion. Unfortunately, it's a phantom of an argument and proves nothing.

This argument works just as well in the mouth of the Mufti and the Pope, the Rabbi and the Talapoin, the Priest and the Minister. The Turk must remain a Turk, the Jew a Jew, the idolater an idolater, the Protestant a Protestant. The Jews cry that God is only the God of Abraham's children and the circumcised, the Turks that Mahomet holds the keys to heaven, the Protestants that the Catholic Christians are idolaters, the pagans don't hesitate to damn the Jews, Turks and Christians who blaspheme against their gods, whose history and genealogy they can trace back infinitely prior to these new sects.

There is, therefore, no greater danger in leaving Christianity than Judaism, Islam, and paganism, until you've examined things and recognized whether there really is any danger, and where it lies; but I can certainly butcher you with your own sword. You do a thousand things that are insulting to God, you give him the attributes of an abominable tyrant; you worship a wafer, a glass of wine, you impute a thousand weaknesses to the divinity, etc. Renounce all these things, on which you risk your eternal salvation, despite reason which cries out with a thousand voices that they are abominations; it only takes a slight effort against one's biases and education; at least, weighing danger against danger, there is less on one hand than the other. Finally, if you're mistaken, you have a legitimate excuse in the fact that you will have followed the lights that God gave you as your guide, instead of your present state of consigning yourself to blind and self-aggrandizing men.

Besides, the benefit to me wouldn't be limited to escaping from tyranny; I will be more faithful to my duties and will fulfill them all the better when I have reduced them to their true scope, aside from the tranquility I will enjoy, freed from a thousand vain scruples and from so many mad terrors that would assail me, continually obsessed as I would be by a thousand imaginary needs.

But even more, when I know God as he is, I will worship him eagerly, and by choice; seeing that what he requires of me is natural, just and reasonable, I'll do everything easily and willingly, as far as human weakness allows, whereas, when convinced of the Christian dogmas and crushed under the papist laws, I can only be afraid and terrified of him.

It is clear that there is no reasonable man who, after serious thought, wouldn't make it his highest good to destroy either God or himself, to avoid the risks held out to terrify us. Consider them, M.R.F., and you will agree, far from feeling veneration and gratitude, that you'll only feel outrage and that existence itself is a despicable gift.

Let's posit this, to get a confession from you. Let us suppose, M.R.F., that you are asleep, in a deep sleep that will last 8 whole days; would you have any obligation to a King who awakened you with certain medications, and at the same time covers your body with a certain powder that gives you a cruel itching, and keeps you from scratching yourself at all for these same eight days, on penalty of being roasted at low heat, but also on the promise of a fine reward if you abstain? You would surely regret your sleep and curse this King. The Christian religion does worse than this to us, especially with respect to predestination, which brings us close to despair about our salvation, since the number of the elect is almost nothing by comparison with that of the reprobate, without counting that these blessings and this suffering are completely disproportionate to each other. A blessed eternity is incomparable with a miserable eternity, the evils are worse than the blessings are good: you yourself would prefer to be annihilated than to be picked at random for heaven or hell, since there is only one good ticket for every hundred thousand bad ones.

Let's return to the advantages I would gain, aside from the liberty of body and mind. It is certain that, ever since I began earnestly to shrug off the articles of my catechism, I've gained very different views about God, and that, after I rid myself of certain scruples, I became a very different man with regard to my essential duties, a very different father, a different son, a different husband, a different master, a different subject, I would be a very different soldier or a very different captain. I consult reason and conscience only, who teach me what true justice is, instead of the way I used to consult religion only, which kept me dazed with trifling and unjust precepts; my scruples no longer hang on these vain practices; I laugh at the idea of fasting, I skip Mass, I no longer overlook so many minor injustices which sometimes bring great misery in their wake.

At present I laugh at all our superstitions and save all my attention for matters of equity. Since I no longer fear to die without confession, I'm easy about death. It's an enlightened indifference,

acquired through deep reflection, which shows me what life is, and what we truly owe to Him who gave it to us. I would now have a true, tranquil, modest and free sort of courage, whereas in the past I had one of temperament only, and perhaps from fear, vanity, or worse, and which didn't leave me in possession of my reason, obsessed as I was that I might not receive the sacraments or that I would look like a coward. But I wouldn't accept the offer of going to persecute the innocent, I wouldn't be the satellite of the wicked who spare neither men's goods nor their blood to expand or secure their tyranny. I would calmly refuse the greatest rewards and I would equally suffer death, if the occasion required it. Finally, I have no fear, no desires, I even find myself less eager for luxury, vanity, chasing women; I imagine that if I held some important position, those who had to deal with me would be quite lucky by comparison with most other people, and with my former ways.

The question, M.R.F., is whether I'm mistaken. To begin this examination, this is how I argue and how I divide the matter up. Either we need religion, or we don't. You will clearly reply that we must have religion.

To have a religion, either we must remain in the one we were born into, whatever it may be, or else believe they're all good and indiscriminately join the most convenient one, or else we must examine all of them and follow the one we find to be best; or else, if we find them all false and bad, make one for ourselves.

I see no middle path or alternative. You will not accept, M.R.F., either the first or the second proposition. It remains, then, to examine all the established religions, and, if they are all found to be false and pernicious, to make one for oneself, based on purely natural ideas, on reason, on the light that God has given to all men as their guide, a light which participates in his own intelligence, without which we could never discover or follow any truth, without the instinct and the dictates of the conscience which teaches us clearly, without research, without study, without instruction, without need for external consultation, always, in all places and even in spite of ourselves.

FIRST PART: A GENERAL EXAMINATION OF THE FACTITIOUS RELIGIONS

The examination of every single religion is not possible for us, since all peoples are not yet known to us, and since five hundred years would still be too little time, even if it were our sole occupation. So, let's content ourselves with grouping them together and examining them in general terms.

None of the factitious religions can harmonize their beliefs with our reason; they rub the conscience the wrong way, they pillage property and attack liberty, and even life, everywhere. Let them establish their rights or confess that they are a true tyranny wielded over people who are either ambushed or tricked. It's up to the petitioner to prove his demands, it's not the defendant's job to prove that he doesn't owe anything. If the petitioner can't prove the debt, the defendant is declared free of obligation.

Let all the proofs of each religion be gathered; they will be shown to be false and ridiculous. Even the less absurd ones are dubious and work equally well for the other faiths. And no theologian is crazy enough to propose them formally as arguments. There is no judge who would dare, on the basis of similar claims, to judge a case involving five dollars. The clear sight of the vanity of these proofs should be all one needs to escape from under their yoke.

You might object, M.R.F., that it's not right to judge your own case. This principle is true when arguing with someone who has the same interest as oneself in the judgment, and who has the same desire to be the judge. In religion, the matter concerns only oneself; therefore, we are our own natural judge. It would be madness to ask someone else, who would prefer their interests over ours. My parish priest doesn't ask me what price he should set on the grain which he extorted as tithing, or on the wax for burials. Why would I have any more confidence in what he tells me than he would have in me?

If you say that there is a contest of interested parties between certain men who call themselves the ministers of religion and the rest of mankind, you'd be right. Said interest is what led to the invention of all the factitious religions: ambition, the thirst for power, the gratification of passions and the seeking of credit in others' minds is what produced an authority over men, which nature never gave to anyone. The same motives still lead people today to enroll in this pleasant militia.

If you decide that this is a clash of interested parties and that, as one of these parties, I can't be the judge, you have already begun to weaken the idea of your religion. So be it, then; let us take a judge who is disinterested, without party or prejudice. Let's take a savage, let's take a child whom we'll raise in the exact sciences, in the true philosophy, in sound logic. Let's teach him geometry, algebra, without mentioning any religion to him, and then present our case to him when he turns thirty.

I would bet my life that no religion will accept this challenge, that no henchman of these religions would keep the rules about the child's education if it were entrusted to them, and that when the trial comes, each party would individually claim victory, or each of them would murder or poison the judge to hide its imposture. Since this method is neither available nor easy, I will develop the means of doing without it, to discover error and establish the truth.

I will, M.R.F., establish many incontestable truths, which will be invulnerable to attack by any solid and sincere mind, which are eternal and necessary, equally visible to all and according to which everyone universally acts, and all of which are at least the sort of thing that can't be denied when one hears them proposed, and when their meaning is understood.

Upon these truths I will form arguments which not only destroy all the phantasmic proofs offered by the factitious religions, but also clearly show their impossibility; after that, to completely destroy the prejudices, the biases and scruples of education, we will go into detail on the arguments of our religion, but always without discussing the facts: this would be beyond my ability and that of most people, which even the greatest savants cannot nail down; it remains a subject of disputation, and the truth has never been reached by this path.

If I attack certain facts, it's only to cast more light on my thoughts, it's a kind of confirmation or clarification and I never base myself on these things. That is why, if I'm mistaken in these parts, as may well be the case, or if you ask for guarantees of what I'm saying, I can set them aside without fear that my courage will be affected at all. I'm not referring to present facts which can be experienced every day, but I won't focus on the rest, although I've cited them only in good faith, having learned them from honest men, from good authors, or even after witnessing them.

I can't boast of any great historical knowledge, I tend to read very few books on the subject and I have a fading memory. The average fellow is better educated than I am on this subject. I base myself only on reason, which is common to all humanity. Religion is made for all men, it is necessary to each individual, idiots or wits, deaf, blind, or with the use of all their senses. Thus, we shouldn't approach the subject by the sciences, or by acquired erudition, or by means of the senses, which are misleading and which are not equally available to everyone; but everyone is equally endowed with reason, although not with intelligence. All reason does is bring a sound judgment on what we see or hear; what the mind does is invent, or rather grasp things more intensely. Someone who needs ten years to learn geometry has the same amount of reason as its inventor; he simply doesn't have as much intelligence.

The existence of madmen and lunatics shouldn't be a snag here; incapable of doing good or evil morally, religion is not necessary for them. The same doesn't apply to those who are deaf, mute and blind.

THE FIRST TRUTH: EVERYONE IS FREE IN RELIGION. RELIGION IS A UNIQUE THING.

All that can be imagined, except religion, is of concern either to the public or to some individual. Let me explain: all my actions serve, or harm, society, the republic, or some member of society; even things that seem to relate only to my own interests fall into this category, outside of religion¹⁹. If I hurt myself, if I ruin myself, if I kill myself, I'm wounding the republic; it suffers a

¹⁹ Marginal note: Or rather, outside the end of religion, which is salvation.

degradation of its forces; I wrong my family, my relatives. But if I damn myself, neither the republic, nor the least individual will suffer for it, any more than anyone will gain anything if I am saved. This, then, is the only matter in which every man is for himself, each individual has a right to examine for himself which way to go, without being led by the multitude.

The multitude has the right to impose and force him on other occasions, since their interests are shared: it isn't right for one man to control all the rest, or the minority the majority; since everyone thinks they're right, it is right for the individual, or the minority, to submit to the majority, even when we think we can clearly see that the majority is mistaken, because this majority also thinks the minority is mistaken, that things would be worse if the minority were mistaken and the multitude had to suffer for it, and that, in any case, it is less harm done when an individual suffers because of the many, than when many are rendered miserable because of a few individuals. But, as for rewards or penalties in the afterlife, my fate concerns nobody else; I can, therefore, decide by my lights alone when I am the only concerned party.

All men are born free. There is no natural subordination aside from that of children to parents. If men were as wise as they should and could be, there would be no other form of domination: things are still this way in some savage groups.

Presumably some family robbed or insulted another one, and the offended family appealed to its neighbors and friends, the aggressors did the same and a leader was required to command different families who had no mutual subordination, each being sovereign. This is what led to the establishment of the republics and monarchies.

The inner life and religion played no role here. Thus, the monarch and the magistrate stray out of their own sphere when they try to extend their power to deciding which opinions people should have about the deity and which rites should honor it; it doesn't seem that one family ever went to war because its neighbor had different views from its own. Only the *mine* and *thine*, only the idea of distributive justice could have embittered the mind and set fire to the passions, when some offense was committed, leading one to the horror of killing and ravaging the others, and exposing oneself to similar evils.

It is therefore certain that in matters of religion each individual is free, that the prince, the magistrate and the republic have no right of command on this matter. In truth, no individual has the right to oppose the public religion: all they can do is offer criticism, as on all other occasions when someone proposes an innovation they would find useful. Those who invented paper-mills, printing, etc., couldn't force everyone else to use them, they couldn't legitimately provoke either sedition or revolt; they weren't allowed to wail and lament; they even had to drop their criticisms when commanded to do so, even when it was very wrong to reject such useful discoveries, and this [objective utility] didn't relieve them of due obedience to the public authority.

Persecutors usually pride themselves on the falsest imaginable principle: that those who have the truth on their side have a right of compulsion over those who are in error. To start with, this truth which everyone thinks they have would need to be self-evident, whereas all religion is only an opinion, the proofs of which are so frivolous that no temerity, or rather no folly can approach that of believing oneself so sure of the correctness of one's religion as to have a right to torment those who have another one.

But this is precisely what happens. Inform tyrants that they are in possession of the truth, I deny that the truth has a right to use force. Justice has a right to compel obedience. The reason why is simple: justice is a truth in which many people are concerned. But a truth, purely as a truth, Peter's acceptance of which doesn't affect James, has no right to use force, it's a truth pertaining to facts and demonstrations. There are places on Earth where the Sun appears continually for six months, and where the night is incessant for the same amount of time. Three quarters of humanity doubts this. Does someone have the right to burn them alive if they don't accept it? It's a factual truth that a long acre of land has a greater circumference than a round one; I can't force anyone to believe this. But if I've enclosed an acre of [long] land with walls at a certain cost, and the man for whom I did it only wants to pay me the same price as for having made parallel walls around a [round] acre of land, I can oblige him to pay me more. My right to use force doesn't come from the truth itself, but from the general rights that everyone has. A comparison with the truth of religion is easy to make; whatever I believe, whatever I say against religion is of no concern to the republic, but if I infer from my principles that I have a right to commit actions contrary to justice and to the property of individuals, by the law of the State I am punishable, not for my belief, but for my actions.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT

The prince and the magistrate should not interfere in things that are absolutely unrelated to the public welfare. The business of salvation is absolutely unrelated to the public welfare. Therefore, the prince and the magistrate should not interfere in the business of salvation.

Salvation is absolutely the personal affair of each individual. It's up to each individual to be involved in what is uniquely personal, therefore it's up to each individual to decide on the business of their own salvation. Therefore, it's up to each individual either to make for themselves or to choose a religion, since you yourself say that religion is the proximate and direct means to salvation.

It follows from all I've said that everything a religion contains which harms nobody is outside of human jurisdiction.

A well-ordered republic will not allow human sacrifice²⁰. It won't tolerate the idea that God is blind and acts by necessity and that man is forced to do good by triumphant grace, that he is not free: all of this delivers man over to his passions; all of this compels him to follow his inclinations; if he turns to his dark side, it authorizes all crimes and takes away all remorse. This wise republic will not allow the dogma that celibacy is a virtue, since in practice this dogma deprives the State of its greatest wealth. It will not allow it to be said that the summit of perfection is to abandon one's wife, one's children, to withdraw into a corner and give oneself to deep meditations while one's family goes to ruin. In this way the Anabaptists have nearly been destroyed²¹, not because of their religion precisely, but due to the disorders it authorized and due to their sedition²².

But let it be preached that there are subaltern gods who bring rain or shine, etc.; that the deity can be honored by flogging oneself; that a few words pronounced make a God from a bit of bread;

²⁰ Manuscript 1192 adds here: "It won't allow atheism which, removing all fear of the future, delivers the human heart to all the passions."

²¹ Manuscript 1192 reads "have been exterminated, almost with good reason."

²² Marginal note: "They said that it's a crime to bear arms for the country and refused to submit to the magistrates with respect to this policy."

that God has ministers who forgive sins, provided that no crime is authorized thereby, that women aren't being seduced, and that people aren't being robbed; impose the order necessary so that these forgivers of sins don't see their penitents, male or female, that they can never receive the least gift from them, etc. It's all insane and ridiculous, but it's not harmful to the good of the present life and society, which is the only purpose of republics, monarchies and all political governments. Be content to win a poor fellow over to reason, or to heal him with bleedings and hellebore²³.

SECOND TRUTH: RELIGION CANNOT BE DEALT WITH IN BOOKS OR SPEECHES.

Spiritual questions among spiritual beings can only be dealt with by spiritual means acting on spiritual objects; only spiritual phenomena, operations and acts can be employed. And religion is the commerce and relations between spiritual and intelligent beings, and the purely spiritual Deity. The action of the Deity towards created minds, to teach them about the order and, if you like, its will, and of these minds towards God to recognize and obey him, cannot therefore be anything but a spiritual action; religion cannot therefore be handled in any way other than by spiritual actions. God communicates with all minds, he lets himself be perceived by them up to a certain point, the mind meditates on the truths it sees and it concludes from these in favor of respect for and obedience to God, and in favor of the truths it sees in him.

God has given us the senses, faculties which the soul uses only by means of the body to judge material things, relative to the preservation of the machine with which he was pleased to unite it; also, he has given us reason, which is a purely spiritual faculty and an immediate action of the soul, to judge spiritual things relative to our duties and our true happiness.

It is not, therefore, on human books and speeches, which we can consult only by the senses, that we must base ourselves, but on metaphysical truths and the conclusions our reason draws from them.

²³ A variant reads: "Without wanting to heal them by bleeding and hellebore."

It is true that books and speeches are hybrids, containing something spiritual by the meanings men have attached to the words and by those which they have given to the figures they trace, and as they are hybrids, their minds, united as they are to a material machine, these figures and these words are conformable to their mutual relations.

But when it comes to God, who is purely spiritual, they should use only their purely spiritual faculties, just as they only use purely material means when dealing with purely physical bodies. When a piece of wood lies in your path, you push it aside, you don't pay it a compliment. We are among purely spiritual beings and purely physical beings; we must use our mind when dealing with minds, our body when handling bodies, and both when dealing with humans.

It's the same with God and intelligent beings; he acts spiritually when dealing uniquely and directly with the soul, and he acts by means of material means when dealing with the body, or with the soul relative to the body.

He has instructed the soul by means of reason, by the recognition of order, and the sight of real, necessary and eternal truths; he has given the body an organic motion, a succession of movements of different corpuscles, which is material life; he arranged all things so that the clash or touching of external bodies makes a certain impression on animate bodies, and the soul is alerted about accidents that might come to the body it's connected to, so it can to avoid them or handle them when they occur.

It is just as ridiculous to use a physical means to touch a pure spirit or grasp a truth as it is to try to move a quarry stone or an anvil with the mind.

Don't say that speeches and books instruct men in the most abstract and metaphysical truths. *Primo*, this would prove nothing; men are hybrids, as we've already said, and they have no other way of sharing their thoughts.

2) It isn't by their authority, it's by teaching one what another has discovered. You don't learn these things because they are in this book, but because you see things just as the book explains that they can be seen and teaches you how to find them. This point will be detailed later on.

The factitious religions are like a man who says: "a huge river runs between Orléans and Etampes". People go to and fro without seeing a drop of water. The authors who treat the sciences are like someone who tells you that there are many streams at Etampes. People visit them, they see them, they bathe in them.

It's well known that the histories teach by their own authority; thus, this instruction is very uncertain. Most of the facts it contains are questioned; the most authoritative among them are not certain and can be doubted without any suspicion of refusing obvious truths. None of their narrations wins an absolute consent as do our exact sciences. Besides, people only form opinions about them to the extent that these facts are within the limits of natural possibility; otherwise, they are called fables or tales if they're beyond the normal course of human powers; what are the factitious religions stuffed full of? Facts beyond the bounds of nature, custom and reason. They are, consequently, tales and fables.

Aside from that, history tells us that a certain man did this, that he said that, that he pronounced this or that judgment; but only reason rightfully decides the matter, and if the historian says anything about the merit or wrongness of these deeds, the faith I might grant him on the facts doesn't extend to the judgments he makes about them.

History teaches me that one of our kings constantly preached dissimulation. I still don't believe in this principle [on his authority]. I only heed it to the extent that reason shows me that it is good and useful and just. That gives me, at most, reason to examine a thought that might have escaped me.

But the books of factitious religion assert that God dictated them. Thus, by accepting the fact we accept the doctrine as true, since God cannot lie. These books can only pass for fables and tales, for reasons that have been already seen and for others that we'll soon see. Thus, we shouldn't accept their facts. God dictates no books, he speaks immediately to the mind, if indeed he did

have daily commands to deliver, and men only use such means when unable to communicate their conceptions in other ways.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

Purely spiritual questions among purely spiritual beings can only be handled by purely spiritual means. Religion is a purely spiritual question among spiritual beings. Therefore, religion can only be handled by purely spiritual means. To listen to speeches, to cast one's eyes on books are not purely spiritual actions. Therefore, religion can't be handled either by books or by speeches.

I mean the substance of religion, for it's simple enough to share one's thoughts with other humans about the greatness of God, or our needs and our duties to him and to other men. But it's always the job of reason to judge and, I repeat, this relates to human relations, not those between God and men. These books only ever raise the question and the ways of deciding it; but they don't give valid decisions.

I've said that reason is a purely spiritual faculty; anything that might be said to the contrary is of no weight. It might be said, for example, that a madman, an epileptic, a drunk man has lost his reason by the action of purely physical corpuscles, and draw the conclusion from this. The conclusion is false: reason is no less complete in them, although the derangements of the body keep it from carrying out its functions in an apparent way; madmen and those who suffer from a fit see things so differently from how they really are that their reasoning can be quite consistent relative to the way the thing appears to them, although this reasoning is not consistent relative to the thing in itself.

A man who sees ripe heads of wheat through a sheet of green glass would judge that they're not yet ready for harvest. The judgment, fundamentally mistaken, would be right as far as he is concerned, and his reason would have judged soundly.

This is also why these people produce so much gibberish and ridiculous deeds, their senses and imagination showing them things that are both bizarre and multitudinous. But supposing things to be as they see them and as they strike them, their judgments are correct.

Let's not stop there. Let's shed even more light on this by a metaphysical means which is as incontestable as this, and perhaps more striking, too.

The words of which languages are composed were invented by men, and consequently mean nothing but what men thought of and knew and what they have ideas about. It is therefore impossible that God would use languages to instruct humans in things that are mysteries to us; since they are new things and superior to reason, God would have to communicate new ideas, in order to make new words corresponding to them; otherwise the mystery is a sheer proposition in the air.

For example, in the Trinity, the father is the father in a different way than I am of my children; it is impossible for me to understand this word otherwise than according to the idea that is attached to it, and consequently it is impossible for me to understand what is meant by it. I can be given a different idea of paternity than that which I have of my father and myself, and if this is the idea that's meant, I discover its falseness immediately by the lights of my reason.

The same applies with all the other words people would use. They all have their own idea, with which they are bound up, and nobody can attach another one without long periphrases which do nothing but change a common idea into another one, without ever giving me a new one, which would be superior to reason and beyond the grasp of the human mind.

For example, to tell men that they must believe the Trinity is the same as telling a peasant that he must believe that Paris was *abros*²⁴. If I stop there, he won't know what I mean, he'll neither believe nor deny it.

²⁴ Epithet by which Homer designates Paris, son of Priam. The word means "handsome and cowardly", corresponding to the term "fop" in English.

Maybe it will be said that God taught the first men their language. That seems rather unlikely. Men themselves formed words to understand each other. This is why languages are so vastly different and why these languages are more or less extensive according to whether the men who use them are more or less advanced in the arts and sciences. A dictionary of the Algonquin language, which is nearly universal in North America, would only contain two or three pages.

And even if it were true that God was the author of languages, he obviously never produced the words for the mysteries of the Christian religion, since there was no talk of the Trinity before the death of Jesus Christ. Thus, the impossibility of instruction via books and speeches stands.

THIRD TRUTH: THAT WE MUST EXAMINE OUR RELIGION AND FORM A JUDGMENT ABOUT IT.

Not only can we examine whether we've made the right choice, but indeed, we must. According to the principles of all the factitious religions, they exaggerate error as something so immensely important that we must necessary and carefully examine whether we've been too casual in our choices.

Nothing could be easier than to be wrong in matters of religion, since there are a hundred thousand of them, and they're all based on the same principles. It's a country crisscrossed by a hundred thousand roads where millions of guides, all with different opinions, offer their services.

All the religions are based on books, traditions, speeches given by certain men who are distinguished by titles, honors, wealth and robes; all of them boast of their antiquity; all of them claim they were divinely and miraculously instituted; they all have legends filled with miracles, temples full of *ex votos* and gifts from those who have received miraculous favors, and this on a daily basis; they all have the same external features, they all have many followers and zealous devotees.

They all say that they are the one you must follow, and that it is important not to be mistaken. And yet, each of us has accepted, without a choice, the first one offered to us. Have we examined,

have we chosen, you and I, M.R.F.? Have we examined it even as much as we do when purchasing the cheapest trinket?

In this matter, everyone lets themselves be led like cattle who go without a thought to the slaughterhouse or the barn. We stay in the one we were born into, and it's a great peculiarity if one in a hundred thousand ever seriously examines their faith.

We profess our religion the same way we wear our kind of clothing or speak our language. I was born in Paris, I am a Papist; I wear a cloak, a wig, a hat, and I speak French, etc. It's not because Papism is the best religion, nor that a cloak is the most comfortable type of clothing, nor a hat the most pleasant head covering, nor that the French language is the sweetest and most expressive one. If I were born in Constantinople, I would speak Turkish, I would be a Mahometan, I would shave my head and wear a turban.

You think no differently, M.R.F., and in all likelihood you would have become a dervish or some other religious devotee. You would have written books promoting the Koran. Can greater blindness be imagined? Is it possible to go beyond wearing a terrible yoke one's whole life, believing that there is only one good path and that the others lead to an eternity of misery? Can we really take the first path that presents itself?

If there were only one religion on Earth, instituted from time immemorial, then we could be at ease and accept that there wouldn't be universal agreement about something false. But from one century to another a new one appears, and everyone screams at each other: "You're going astray!", and nobody cares. Everyone goes along on their path without listening.

However, either all religions are indifferent before God, in which case it would always be wise to follow the most rational and simple one, both to avoid imposing useless duties and to escape the plundering of these petty tyrants who style themselves the ministers of God; or, if God only approves one religion, or only a handful, and if he must punish the rest, then it's the height of folly to rely on the accident of birth and education, and leave it at that.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT

Not only we *can*, but we *must* examine whether we have made the right choice in a matter we find of the utmost importance, where it is easy to go wrong and where we've made such careless commitments.

Religion is thought to be of utmost importance, it is very easy be mistaken about it; people adhere to them without precaution or examination. Thus we can, and we are strictly obliged, to examine whether we have made the right choice in matters of religion.

This can be derived from your own principles, M.R.F. I see in the New Testament that we must investigate all things, watch for false prophets, that we must be careful lest we be led astray. Therefore, we must carry out an examination.

FOURTH TRUTH: THE TRUTH CAN BE FOUND AND RECOGNIZED, AND WE ARE UNDER OBLIGATION TO USE THIS ABILITY IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

There are rules and means. I don't think this can be disputed. I find the weight of a bomb and its volume by examining a single piece of shrapnel with my hands. I can find the center of a circle without any markings. I can measure an inaccessible mountain according to rules that are tested and true.

As means go, drinking and eating are effective means to maintain and preserve life. Upsetting a vase full of water is an effective means of emptying it. Blowing on a moderately large fire is an effective means of making it larger, etc.

And rules and means are aimed at nothing, but rather at existence and its modifications, and since existence and truth are not distinct things, there are, therefore, means and rules to attain the truth.

Popular sentiment tries to divide this universal truth in two. Metaphysical existence, or, properly speaking, the essences, is what it calls the truth, and the existing essences are what it calls beings, but the philosophers recognize all existent and non-existent essences as one truth.

But it is nevertheless true that there are two kinds of truth with respect to us. The first is called primary truth, which presents itself naturally and which all minds, even the weaker ones, can see from the moment they are struck by it. It's a simple idea, and it's clear and easy to see: for example, the shortest path is the straightest one, a hundred thousand numbers paired together will never leave one unpaired, or one and one make two.

The other kind of truth is discovered through a series of arguments derived from the first truths, such as most of the propositions of geometry and arithmetic. But, as thorny as these truths may be, there are rules to find and demonstrate their theorems, and ways to explain any remaining problems after the rules have shown that they are sound.

Is it not an excess of tyranny to exempt religion from having to follow the rules of the pursuit of the truth? Is it not, on the contrary, right and reasonable to recommend them all the more narrowly when their observation is indispensable, in proportion to the misfortune thought to come from error and the happiness which, according to your principles, must come from an attachment to the truth?

It's agreed that religion is the most important thing, since it is the means to salvation. However, nobody wants to pay religion anything like the kind of attention normally given to other things.

Each troop of religious henchmen wants us to shut our eyes, plug our ears, leave our reason and our minds dormant, and let ourselves be led by the nose. They wouldn't say the same thing to a child wearing new shoes: he would say that he needs to check and choose his path carefully so as not to ruin his footwear. Why don't adults do the same thing? They should apply the best rules to find the truth, and the safest means to avoid ambush, deception and prejudice.

The whole question, then, is to know whether there are rules to discover the truth in matters of religion, or whether it is exempt from all rules. I don't care which you choose. If there are no rules

or means to establish it, then we must remain in suspension and disregard all religions as only popular opinions, without any basis; at very least we must take no sides, since there are no better arguments for one than any other.

But if there are rules and means to be assured of the truth in matters of religion, that is how we must think about it.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT

It is as indispensable to follow the rules of the pursuit of truth as it is important to avoid error. It is more important to avoid error in matters of religion than any other. Therefore, it is more indispensable to follow the rules of the pursuit of truth in matters of religion than in any other. Therefore, we must examine religion by the rules of true logic, by common sense, by correct reasoning and with all the precautions given by wisdom and prudence and confirmed by experience.

I can't envision any possible reply to this, except that it is a very sad thing to agree that examination is necessary when one senses that they will discover the falseness and deception in something that brings so many blessings, such fine titles and so much power.

It's dark malice to cry: "We must submit to God. It's not for the mind of man to question the will of the perfect Being, to limit his power, much less to penetrate the secrets of his wisdom; we must blindly obey."

That isn't the issue. Nobody doubts any of that. The doubt doesn't relate to obedience, it relates to the commandment. It's not about knowing whether I must obey God, but knowing whether he ordained certain things, whether a certain book is his handiwork, whether it contains his will and whether he has established certain men to explain and interpret this book. And finally, if it is discovered that God did make such an establishment, even contrary to our pure ideas about his

power, his wisdom and his justice, it's also necessary to figure out which are his true ministers among the large number of those who claim this character for themselves, since all of them are mutually opposed to each other.

A king was forced to leave his estates. He had left the queen with a princess of perfect beauty, the sole heir to his estates. An oaf, a pauper, an utterly disgusting man comes along with a wrinkled scrap of paper, without signature or seal, and informs the queen that the king sent him to marry this beautiful princess and come into possession of all that is due to him. "I'm well aware", he says, "that this doesn't seem reasonable, that it's above your comprehension, but it's not for you to question the king's orders, and you shouldn't resist the will of your husband. Obey, or you will be treated as a rebel and as a wife who doesn't love or respect her husband."

Far from submitting to this speech, and accepting such orders, she says: "I don't refuse to obey the orders of my king and my husband. I am ready to follow his will without question, sure as I am that he does nothing without prudence and good reasons, although I don't always know them; indeed, I am prepared to obey any command I know him to have issued. But, shameless impostor, you give me no indications that you have come from the king. I have a thousand indications that you don't. He is too wise for such a thought to have arisen in his mind, too honest not to have notified me in a secure way, if this were his will, and too powerful to lack the means to do so. You are a madman, a fanatic, a scoundrel, carried away by love and greed." She has him cast into outer darkness, etc.

I don't think the great genius of Father Malebranche could find any disparity here.

No minister of religion bears signs of being sent by God; he's just another man and the same as he was before he joined this militia. Their demands are excessive, entirely to their own benefit and at the expense of others. If there is distinction between him and other men, it's often that which, far from making him known as the bearer of God's orders, shows that he doesn't believe it himself, or that he never thinks about the subject. It is, ultimately, quite often, his shameful libertinism that distinguishes him. "We have the Holy Scriptures, the blood of J.C., that of the martyrs, etc." The man in my parable also cries: "I have the king's writing in my hand, all the

court is the witness that this order is from the king, the courtiers have accompanied me part of my way and they are waiting impatiently to lead me back to the king with the princess.”

There are invincible reasons to believe that God uses no minister, and to reject laws which are ridiculous, and which would be unworthy of lesser men, common sense and probity.

Men have ministers and vicars because they need them. God has no need for them; therefore he has none. Princes have favorites; therefore God has none; this is a human weakness of princes. It is, therefore, proper to treat all the henchmen of factitious religions as this queen treated her impostor.

I’ve been told that the Capuchins [Franciscans] give ridiculous commandments to novices to test their obedience, but I’ve never heard it said that these orders were given in the name of the master.

If it were evident that the laws preached by religions came from God, as absurd as they might seem, every mind should submit to them, and they would have no great merit in doing so, the clearest truth being that God can only do what is good. Our limited mind would receive the blame, which can’t conceive of all the relations between every being and which, failing to see all metaphysical truths, prevents us from making all the combinations and drawing all the conclusions. And we don’t even see all the truths that are within our reach and sight, which is an obstacle to the judgments of the relations that we can see. This produces so many difficulties where we remain short, so many things that we cannot explain, although we are convinced of their truth, like motion, space without vacuum, the infinite divisibility of matter, the acceleration of motion, tides, bouts of fever, how our body obeys our will, etc.; but we clearly see that it happens; we can only blame ourselves for not understanding them, almost as when we see an amazing sleight of hand: we don’t understand how it’s done, but we see it happen, we are convinced, we are sure, there is no doubt.

Let the ministers and henchmen of factitious religions show, then, with the same clarity that they have God’s own orders, and they will be obeyed, no matter how extraordinary they seem. Nobody is incredulous about the scope of God’s power, or the justice of his will, but they justly

deny that such men speak on his behalf, that this or that book is his very own code of laws. Prove it, gentlemen. The king could make me the Marshal of France. If I tell you that's what I am, will you believe me without any evidence? Will the troops obey me? Will the governors of various places deliver their positions, their provisions to me? Will the prince's tax-collectors hand over their money because I tell them: "I am the marshal of France and I have his orders"?

In good faith, M.R.F., does any religion offer the least thing to convince me of the facts on which it's based? If the henchmen of these religions are in good faith, they're like Don Quixote: he based himself on *Amadis*, *The Twelve Peers of France*, *Lancelot of the Lake*, etc. If they aren't in good faith, they are rogues and impostors. Let them choose: the authorities of Don Quixote are as good as theirs.

FIFTH TRUTH: RELIGION MUST BE EXAMINED WITHOUT BIAS OR PARTIALITY.

The most essential and general rule in the pursuit of the truth is to rid oneself of all preconceptions and all partiality.

It is impossible to form a fair judgment on a point of principles and facts when one has already made up one's mind. People naturally see all things from their own angle; that which is furthest away seems nearby, falsehoods seem probable, and that which has any shadow of possibility seems indubitable.

People will reject the stronger arguments when they clash with what their mind has already accepted. They don't even want to hear them. If they do lend an ear to them, it's with caveats that keep them from making an impact. People tolerate them, not to see if they're good, but to fight against them. They keep their opinions. The feeble traces made on the brain during an impatient hearing soon vanish; those which the original prejudice engraved deeply, without any resistance, are the only ones that remain, and harden over time.

It's far worse when there's something real at stake. Generosity is a rare and elevated virtue: nothing seems as just as that which is useful, pleasure always seduces us, this is why everyone canonizes their passions. The greedy man is happy to damn the voluptuary, and the miser, in the lecher's mind, is the most obvious candidate for Hell. A certain peasant who, living with his father, finds the tithe an odious tax and an abominable tyranny, considers it entirely justifiable when, having died his frock black, he is made the parish priest.

To make a sound judgment, therefore, the question would need to be completely new to us and the yea and the nay would have to be a matter of indifference. If Socrates, Lucretius, Seneca, Epicurus were still alive, they could be asked to judge about the infallibility of the Pope, Mass, the Trinity and all the other fables, and we could heed their decisions after having shown them the titles on which these fine ideas are based.

If a man is raised from childhood to regard as venerable a particular religion, the name of which is never pronounced unless paired with magnificent and imposing epithets: *sacred*, *holy*, etc., this man will necessarily find it above question.

The reason why is obvious and the experiment is bound to work. Go tell the Jews that Moses was a political schemer who imposed on unrefined folks, tell the Turks that Mahomet was a man of high ambitions, an impostor, see how they'll react. The ministers of all religions have, aside from prejudice, the keenest possible interests. When you disabuse the masses, they fall from the heights of wealth and honors, back into the muck from which they came. Can a man resign himself to such a fall? He would rather maintain forever that white is black.

When a tomb was found empty which supposedly held the body of a saint, did the canons of Amiens abandon it? Did they say: "Sorry, our mistake"? Did they return the offerings made to the supposed relics? Do they refuse new ones?

Who could be a good judge, then? The pure natural man I've already described. He would also have to be placed on a desert island, sheltered from the Inquisition and the efforts of the bigots against those who try to reveal their schemes, their traps, their acts of subornation.

Since we don't have such a judge, let us rise, then, M.R.F., above prejudice, above self-interest and above all commitments. Let's consider everything with a fair mind to examine everything seriously and in good faith as if were the first time we'd heard it, in an affair that didn't concern us.

Let's give no attention to the authority of those who ask the question, let's drop all stubbornness, let's form a good resolve to submit to clear and self-evident arguments, to accept conclusions drawn properly from first principles, from metaphysical truths, distinct truths that gain our consent in spite of ourselves, and which all men know equally, in all countries and at all times.

The principle that partiality and bias corrupt our judgment is recognized universally. Nowhere is a man allowed to be the judge in a dispute he has with another; nobody wants his son to be educated in opinions that he finds pernicious; a Christian won't let his son be raised by a dervish, or a Turk his son by a Jesuit.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

To soundly judge any question, it must be examined without bias or partiality. The issue of religion is a real question. Therefore, to judge it soundly, it must be examined without bias or partiality.

The issue of religion is a real question, or there never was one. By "question", everyone understands "a question raised about the existence and the quality of something". Is there a city called Paris? Is Paris bigger than London? And so on. Likewise: Is there a religion ordained of God, other than the religion of conscience? Is the Christian, the Turkish, the Brahmin, the Siamese, the Chinese, or the Brazilian religion based on the particular orders of God? This is the question, this is what all men must answer, this is what they must examine without partiality, without bias, in order to submit without stubbornness to the clear and distinct truth, and resist without weakness all imposture and sophistry.

SIXTH TRUTH: THAT REASON IS CAPABLE OF DISCOVERING THE TRUTH.

Everything that an infinitely wise and powerful being does is perfect relative to its ends. Why do men so often fail to reach their goals? Because they lack the wisdom to see all the means that might lead to it, and the power to carry them out, even if they could see them. It cannot be stated that a being wants something, that he knows everything necessary for it to exist, that he is all-powerful, and that this something doesn't exist.

Men are made by God; reason is their essence, their character; it's the light he gave them as their guide. It's a faculty of consulting the truth we perceive in God. It is man's essence to be intelligent and rational, to know and judge, just as a circle's essence is to have equal diameters.

It's absurd, it's blasphemous to say that God created beings made in such a way that they can see things clearly in a way that doesn't correspond to reality, I mean with respect to metaphysical essences, not the shapes and other modes of material beings, which the senses can only grasp imperfectly. This imperfection is necessary for their functioning and is not detrimental to bodily needs.

It's an even greater absurdity and a greater blasphemy to say that God created intelligences to command them to believe the opposite of what they can see distinctly; worse still if he didn't give this ridiculous commandment any clear sign that it comes from him.

The least thing that might be asked is to see clearly that it's the will of God, to counterbalance the clear idea we have that a perfect being couldn't have given such orders. A certain belief might well be required, but is there anything more bizarre than to demand it against the principles that oneself has established?

An astronomer will demand that a peasant believe that the sun is bigger than the earth, but when he is taught the demonstrations on which this knowledge is indubitably based, it would be knavish and insane for him to send a stranger with a message, without the least indication that it comes from the astronomer, to send a message, I say, commanding him to believe that the sun is

no larger than a dinner plate, and then to harass him if he refuses this belief and sticks with the astronomer's demonstrations.

To stultify human reason, to make it seem blind, incapable of discerning truth from illusion: these are two of the crudest forms of extravagance:

1st) It's using reason to prove that there is no reason, it's leaping into a ridiculous circle, since if you argue to prove that reason is faulty, these arguments can be false and consequently prove nothing; if they are demonstrative and probative, then reason can establish certainties and discover the truth.

I've sometimes heard preachers discussing the mysteries point to the errors into which men fall in their reasoning and on those of the senses. "But, you poor man," I said to myself, "why should I listen to your arguments, then? Why shouldn't I just walk off, since I hear you so shamelessly retailing so much nonsense?"

2nd) It means attributing to God either powerlessness or ill-will. Powerlessness, if he made an effort that was unfruitful; ill-will, if he didn't want to succeed. He's a master who sends his valet to the woods with an axe made of glass; he's a general who marches his troops to war with turnip seeds instead of bullets; he's a prince who sends his ships to sea with compasses that aren't magnetized or accurate.

Finally, if our reason is erroneous, then God cannot punish us for any mistakes we make by following it; it's the light that he has given us as our guide. If I give false weights and balances to a servant whom I entrust with receiving certain effects for me, can I punish him for bringing me anything less in weight than what I'm owed? "I made a precise measurement of the weight you gave me", he'll tell me, "and I can prove it". What could I object?

After that, it would be the most extreme Pyrrhonism and exaggeration to maintain that a man who is drunk, insane, epileptic and in the throes of his ailment, is as prepared to receive religion as a man who is wise and sensible. Think about what this means, M.R.F.: it's unavoidable.

This can supposedly be eluded by saying that the mysteries are not contrary to reason, but that they are above it, and by means of this futile distinction, the populace is dazzled and everyone is supposedly silenced. I dare, though, to respond to this proposition.

If these supposed mysteries were up to the level of reason, if they only astonished it without shocking it, establish your proofs: that is what's called for and it's what you can't do. That is what lawyers say in a hopeless case: they advance without being able to prove, they fully expect jeers from the gallery, but ultimately, they can't remain be silent.

I maintain that they are absurdities and positive impossibilities.

Things that are above reason are things we don't understand, but which we don't find impossible. I don't understand how blood circulates in animals, or sap in plants, but I don't find it impossible; this is, if you like, above my reason, but it's not contrary to it; it surpasses it, but it doesn't outrage it. Tell your servant that all possible plays in a game of piquet can be determined with algebra. He will be surprised, astonished, but he won't deny that it's possible; he won't go looking for ways to prove the impossibility of it, as if you had told him that you could arrange things so he'd end up with a *quatorze* of kings and his opponent a *tierce* major.

The Trinity and Transubstantiation are equally impossible. These things repel the mind and outrage one's reason.

I end by daring you, M.R.F., and anyone else, to turn things so as to reject reason. After all the tricks, the subtleties and all the academic games, each religion must come to plead its cause at the bar of reason, both for itself and against the others.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

Everything that an infinitely powerful and infinitely wise being does is perfect with respect to its end.

The infinitely wise and infinitely powerful being gave us reason to distinguish the truth from error.

Therefore, our reason is capable of distinguishing truth from error.

If you deny my minor premise, you're confessing insanity and worse: I would also deny that God gave us eyes to see, a voice to speak, ears to hear, feet to walk, etc.

SEVENTH TRUTH: GOD HAS INSTRUCTED US CLEARLY AS TO HIS
WILL; HE CAN ONLY PUNISH US FOR FREELY COMMITTED CRIMES;
THERE ARE NO MINISTERS; NO BOOK IS OF HIS MAKING.

We must always prefer what is self-evident to what is uncertain, and the clear to the obscure; this is undeniable.

We must not, therefore, say that we are obliged to neglect the correct knowledge given to us by the perfect being about his attributes and give him fantastical ones, manifestly contrary to what we conceive of him according to his intention. We must not forget the lights of his reason in order to follow our fancies, unless those who propose them can prove them clearly, or just as clearly show the orders they have received from the being to whom I must obey, to commit me to follow them.

Is it as clear and evident, as sure, as certain that some book is God's handiwork as it is clear and evident that reason is a gift of his omnipotence? There is no alternative: either we are necessary beings, subsisting from all eternity, or we are creatures who received everything from God, and each thing for a purpose: body parts for action, a memory to represent the past to us, and reason for knowing and judging.

Is it as sure and as certain that some man is a minister of God to pass along his commands concerning things which my reason rejects, as it is that reason is the light God gave me to examine all things and judge them? This reason cries with all its might: "These supposed ministers are

madmen, frauds or miscreants". Aside from this, the number of incidents, doubts, controversies, disputes and distinct opinions is infinite; it is impossible to look into an infinite number and have good knowledge of an infinity of questions; to be able to judge them, God must have given us a general principle, the use of which is infinite.

Tell me that these books and these honest doctors preach nothing contrary to reason, but only things that are above reason:

1st) This loophole is negated by the previously given truth.

2nd) It is irrelevant. We would always need authority, even if what they preach didn't outrage reason.

3rd) I maintain that each thing that is particular to any factitious religion is directly opposed to reason and that we cannot accept said thing without renouncing reason. Everyone accepts this when it comes to other people's religions.

Do we call the mysteries of ancient paganism, that of the Indies and America, as superior to reason? Do the pagans call grace, the Trinity, etc. superior to reason? Don't all the different sects consider each other's views as contrary to common sense and reason?

It follows that any unbiased man will recognize all these mysteries as simple tyrannical or fanatical imposture.

It is therefore evident that we must hearken to our reason above all else. And, by consulting our reason, our conscience and our ideas of the Perfect Being, we see that all other rational beings have the same ideas which, coming to us naturally, can only come from God.

We see that God is just, in our own sense of justice, the justice that makes laws that can be practiced by those who are subject to them, the justice which makes these laws known. Would you rather deny, M.R.F., these opinions of my reason and will you say they're less incontestable than the *Metamorphoses*, the *Pentateuch*, the Gospel or the Koran? Is it more evident that these

books are the immediate workmanship of God than that the views I've just described came from this perfect being?

Give the glory to God, M.R.F. Do you also think you're as sure that God called David a man according to his own heart, as it is sure that a man like David was not according to the heart of God? Is it just as obvious that Jupiter is Hercules' father as it is that God is insensible to carnal pleasures? Is it just as obvious that silly women and vulgar, ignorant fishermen are incapable of lying and being deluded as it is that a man dead on a cross won't speak or act again on the third day? Is it just as obvious that a man hid half of the moon up his sleeve as it is that all the sleeves in the world couldn't hold a fourth of it? The books that are held out as divine contain nothing that anyone couldn't easily say, if they wanted to. We also see that a given man who calls himself God's minister has nothing more to offer than anyone else; the senses and reason tell us all this, while they say nothing about this supposed revelation, this supposed mission. If you claim that, carried by the force of commitment and education they will say something, will you dare say that it's with the same clarity? I don't think you would.

To make up our minds on every occasion, especially in matters of utmost importance, we must weigh the arguments and go with the strongest ones.

I have the strongest imaginable reasons to see God as a perfect being, that he is just and that he is not a tyrant, in the usual sense of the word. Only the worst arguments argue the other way, for nothing could be more frivolous than to claim that such and such a person says it, or that such and such a book claims it. Because these people might be frauds or visionaries, these books might be fables or tall tales. There are similar books and people elsewhere that say the opposite.

Nor is there any crime that is not also authorized by such people and such books.

Between two dangerous propositions, between two opposed parties between which a choice has to be made, nothing less than a demonstration is required to settle the mind of a wise man.

To make God of three distinct pieces, if it's not true that he's composed this way; to worship a crucified man, if it's not true that he is God; to worship a wafer, if it's not true that it is

transubstantiated, etc., is all just as criminal and dangerous as it would be to avoid doing and believing these things if they were true. The difference lies in the pure report provided by the conscience, questioned without prejudice. Which side will weigh heavier in the balance, M.R.F.? But it is certain that, by establishing that our reason leads us to believe neither of the two rather than the other, we must always remain at least undecided, pending the demonstration. Since both sides are equally dangerous, there is a risk, either of idolatry or of not believing the truth and not paying due respect to God.

Those who are committed to factitious religions are doing precisely what an officer in command of a small corps of five or six thousand men would do when, instead of withdrawing under cannon-fire from a place he had command of, waited instead in open countryside for the enemy, a hundred thousand men strong, based on the word of a man who promised him that a legion of angels would come to his aid.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

Self-evidence must be preferred to uncertainty, clarity to obscurity.

It is self-evident and clear that God is just, with the purest sort of justice; that a given book is human; that a given man who preaches to me is only a man. It is very uncertain that God is just in a different sense of the term than the one we know, that a given book is the handiwork of God, that a given man has God's own orders; on the contrary, this seems obviously false to anyone without preconceived notions.

Therefore, we must believe that God is just, in the normal sense of the term, who, if he would punish, can only punish freely committed wickedness, things contrary to his will which he has clearly taught to us. Therefore, we must act on the principle that no book is the work of God, that no man is his minister or his interpreter, and that all those who assume this title are impostors or maniacs.

I've never even thought to define the word *free*; everyone has a clear idea about it; only Christian theological extravagance was ever capable of making distinctions on the subject and dreaming up a *freedom of indifference* and a *freedom of constraint*. By the word *free* I mean the same thing everyone means when they say that nobody is free to be hungry, but that they are free to eat when they have bread; that nobody is free to think of taking a bath, but that they are free not to take one, when alone and nobody stops them.

EIGHTH TRUTH: THAT REASONING IS NECESSARY IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS.

On all subjects and on all occasions, discernment can only come from instinct, the senses, or reasoning.

It has been demonstrated above that a choice is necessary in matters of religion and that we must check whether we've taken the right side.

It is evident that we have no instinct for that, otherwise everyone would have the same religion, just as everyone scratches themselves when their bodies itch: everyone cries out when they're hurt, everyone sits or lies down to rest.

Nor do we have any more means on the side of the senses, which only judge the configuration or motion of matter.

All that remains is the path of reasoning: thus, we must reason, we must philosophize, we must draw conclusions from first principles, apply them to religion, and submit wherever self-evident truth is found.

We must reject everything that reason, consulted dispassionately, without bias and disinterestedly, declares false or unfounded. This whole subject is only an argument, which doesn't need to be supported or boiled down.

NINTH TRUTH: THAT WE ARE OBLIGED TO ABANDON OUR RELIGION WHEN WE FIND IT LACKING.

There is no more right to retain something than there was to take possession of it.

I don't believe that our most strict casuists would quibble about their right to escape from the prisons of Algeria.

However, the factitious religions commit a far greater injustice than the corsairs, since they begin by ambushing people and filling their heads with prejudices from childhood, imposing on them with authority and taking advantage of their weakness. The corsairs fight against full grown men, they run the same risks of slavery and of life as they make others run, and finally those who go to the sea expose themselves to this danger, which they have full knowledge of and the freedom to avoid.

Where is the semblance of any right to seize control of the mind of a child, filling its head with whatever ideas one likes? If the rules are to be observed, they should wait until the age of twenty or twenty-five. Then, without any recourse to authority, the child could be presented with the main religions, the proofs on which they are based and all possible objections to them. In this case, if he abandoned the one he had chosen, he could rightly be called an apostate. However, he would not be absolutely culpable: changing is not a vice in itself; it can also be a virtue. But to change without good reasons is a defective and culpable inconstancy.

The minor is exempted by the public authority when there was an ambush on the part of those with whom he has contracted, although he was not coerced and wasn't dependent on those who took advantage of his weakness, even if he was in a fit state to be able to judge the matter.

A fortiori then, I can be relieved of my religious commitments.

At the age of twenty-five, a young man is no longer exempted from what he can do for himself, since it is right for him to keep his commitments with those who have a stake in his keeping them, and since he should have enough reason by then to avoid being taken by surprise.

But on those occasions when a man is the only concerned party, he is under no obligation to keep his promises, which are then nothing but conditional plans and resolutions. Nobody would complain if I said that I would spend my life in Paris, and then go to live in Languedoc instead, if, say, I find the air healthier there. In the same way I can leave my religion if I find it unsuitable: 1st) because I was thrust into it unawares, 2nd) because it's an affair that only concerns me, in which nobody else has an interest; thus, I cannot be either blamed or punished for this change.

Anyone is cable to return to the state they started with, at birth, when they were initiated into their religion, since they weren't in a fit state to judge or refuse, having no discernment or liberty.

As for adults, they have the same right to abandon the second one they adopt as the first one they left behind. We always have a right to examine the arguments to which we've submitted.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

There is no more right to retain people than there was to capture them.

Religion has seized us without any right.

Therefore it has no right to retain us.

Force and surprise grant no rights.

Religion has seized us by force and by surprise.

Therefore, it has seized without any right, therefore it can be abandoned.

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With respect to adults:

When we haven't been seized by force and ambushed, we have submitted to arguments that are always subject to revision, as we have seen.

Anyone who notices that, in a matter of great importance, he has made the wrong choice, would convert an error into an atrocious crime if he took false pride in sticking with it. Therefore, he has every right to depart from an error when he recognizes it.

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An incontestable dilemma:

We must examine and judge the religion in which we find ourselves, whether by choice or by accident of birth. Or, we must neither examine nor judge it.

If it must not be examined or judged, then everyone will stay in his own. The Jew will stay a Jew; and so on with the pagan, the Mahometan, the Christian, the Papist, the Protestant, whether born into their religion or joined it.

No religion will adopt this necessary conclusion unless in its own favor, which is the height of injustice.

If they should be examined, then consider, after mature reflection, the judgment I bring to bear. I find it insane, absurd, insulting to God, pernicious to men, facilitating and even authorizing theft, seduction, the ambition and scheming of its ministers, the revelation of the mysteries of families. I find it to be a source of murders and torture carried out in His name. To me it looks like a torch of discord, hatred, vengeance, a mask for hypocrites and for all those black-garbed rogues who brag about this religion or its supposed effects. Finally, what I see in its core is idolatry, superstition and pious frauds.

With a notion like this of your religion, aside from the right to abandon it, I have the strictest obligation to renounce and abhor it; to complain or despise those who preach it and anathematize those who sustain it by violent means.

Unless I'm mistaken, then, it's not my fault I see it this way: I have given all my attention and used all my capacity to form a proper judgment about it, in the same good faith and with the same circumspection I reserve for the most important occasions in my life.

TENTH TRUTH: NO RELIGION CAN ESTABLISH ITS FACTS.

Facts can only be established by admissible articles and by conclusive testimony. No factitious religion has either an article or a testimony presented in the form required by reason, experience, and the customs of all nations.

The matter of religion can be regarded as a trial in which each religion is the plaintiff and all the rest are defendants.

Christianity maintains that it has the truth on its side. Paganism, Judaism, Mahometanism deny this. Mahometanism maintains that it is the correct religion. Paganism, Judaism and Christianity deny this. And so on.

Or rather, all of these factitious religions can be regarded as the plaintiffs, and common sense, reason, justice and the liberty of all men as the defendants. That is incontestable. Thus, I might say: some articles are writings, common to various parties, like a contract, or ordinances coming from above, like judgments, decrees.

Where are the articles of this kind? Each religion has at most a legal brief. Have you ever seen a trial judged according to the brief of just one of the parties?

What, then, is the *Gospel*, the Koran, the Pentateuch? A narration which can simply be denied by the opponent.

Peter says that he found me in London, a prisoner of war, naked on the straw, reduced to prisoner's bread. He gives a heart-wrenching description of my supposed misery and his generosity which led him to lend me a hundred gold *pistoles*, as he claims. He demands their return, and his only proof is a letter in his own handwriting, a mere memorial. I deny everything. He would be condemned at his own expense, and I would be released without charge.

It would be even worse if something impossible came up in the facts he states, for example if he said that he smuggled a hundred thousand crowns to me under his mantle, that he traveled by air from France, that he sneaked into the prison by means of invisibility, for, aside from the lack of proof of his loan, I would find its negation in the impossibility of the facts he gave.

It is absurd to claim that impossibility can't be proved against a fact; that is only true to the extent that the fact is assured. Prove the fact incontestably and I'll confess that my argument of impossibility is worthless.

The religions cry out that God spoke to a man, armed him with his omnipotence, that he revealed to him that he is of three parts which are only one, etc. Let them prove their facts. Until then I have the right to deny it, but I go further, I prove my denial, which nobody is obliged to do.

That is not so, since the thing is physically impossible.

As for the testimonies: 1st) the witnesses have to be in a fit state and capable of discerning the things in question. A deaf man will not be a witness to words that are spoken, or a blind man to gestures or colors. What! Who could be a fit witness to miracles? A man of consummate prudence, of infinite experience and wisdom, educated, skilled, a skeptic with a keen mind, with the will and the time to examine things for himself, would still not be able to give a reliable testimony. So what weight could we assign to reports given by men who are ignorant, crude and imbued with tales full of superstition and nonsense, men who are biased and partial, etc.?

People see miracles relative to their ignorance of the secrets of medicine, chemistry, mathematics, etc., relative to their ignorance of sleight of hand, trickery, the virtues of certain things and the effects of certain machines.

The world was full of spirits, demons, demoniacs two centuries ago. The Swiss mountain-folk thought marionettes were magical and miraculous. In America, was it not possible to find ten thousand inhabitants of a country who, at the sight of an effect of gunpowder, thought the Castilians were wonder-workers and the bearers of God's thunder?

2nd) Witnesses should be impartial about the thing in question. All the religions have witnesses on their side: they want to force everyone to believe them, therefore they are not impartial.

3rd) Testimonies should be presented to superiors who are indifferent about the outcome. Is this the case, and is there any proof that can keep me from doubting the truth of the articles, and saying that they are only assumed and attributed falsely to this or that person?

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

Facts can only be established by admissible articles and conclusive testimony.

No religion has admissible articles or conclusive testimony.

Therefore, no religion can establish its facts. By admissible articles, I mean writings that are common to two parties, or orders from superiors.

Conclusive testimonies are those of enlightened and impartial men who have followed and examined, with all necessary learning and care, the facts in question.

No religion has such articles or testimonies. Therefore, no religion has admissible articles or conclusive testimonies.

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So much for the minor premise of the first well-established syllogism. If the major premise of this one is denied, then tell me that I can write whatever documents I like, and they'll be valid for other people, I'll happily inform my creditors of this and make everyone else my debtor, otherwise give me another definition of these admissible articles and conclusive testimony. As for me, I neither know nor can I comprehend any other one.

I am sure that the religions' henchmen will soon come up with another definition, which will be to their advantage, but I'm also sure that they'll deny it the minute they're asked to pay on the basis of writings or testimony according to their definition.

Even if it were said that normal historical records are used as proofs in many important matters, that wouldn't mean anything.

1) These records were created without any connection to the contestation that would be brought, and consequently, are irrelevant to this fact. If they were dated from the beginning of the contention, nobody would care about them any more than if one of the parties had produced them, unless they were supported by the sort of articles we require.

2) A basic, simple historical record never leads to absolute conviction, but is a more or less plausible proof, based on the circumstances. Would anyone stake their eternal salvation on likelihood and plausibility?

3) There is a big difference between normal historical records which haven't been questioned, and which for this reason are recognized in a way, and those of religions which are questioned and accused of falsehood as soon as they appear.

4) Normal historical records contain nothing impossible, nothing above human powers. When they are stuffed full of amazing and fanciful goings-on, this is enough to reject them without further analysis.

To say that religions present their historical records as contested and full of extraordinary facts is to say that they present them as fables, unless they come with proofs stronger than those used for normal records, the strongest of which is unanimous consent, since it's just as easy to write what is false as what is true. The story of John of Paris has no supernatural elements, but it still isn't history. Fairy tales are a tissue of things contrary to nature: they are fables.

ELEVENTH TRUTH: EACH RELIGION WOULD NEED A CONTINUAL AND CURRENT FLUX OF INCONTESTABLE MIRACLES.

Proofs should be proportionate to the objections and to the importance of the things in question.

For easy things, the slightest likelihood is enough. For trifles, people are content with the slightest testimony, a few words are sufficient.

But for a difficult question, great probabilities are called for, powerful testimonies, to make me believe and conform, and the more important the thing is, the more convincing, the more sound and decisive support is required.

This is the difference between criminal and civil procedures: although the latter certainly relate to the property and standing of families, the former touches on life and honor. That is why the judges remain sober; if the votes are equal, the case is referred back, etc.

If a young man tells you that he's twenty-six years old, you believe him, if he seems even a little older than a child. But if he then shows you a voucher and asks for a hundred *pistoles*, you start to check whether he really is an adult. But if he offered to sell you a plot of land for a hundred thousand crowns, hard cash, you would ask to see his baptismal certificate. So much for the conclusion, let's now consider the difficulty.

If, having the honor of seeing you, M.R.F., I complained about having come across a confused scene on the Pont Notre-Dame, you would believe me. If I said that there were twenty people with wounds, you might believe me, but you'd be surprised. If I added that, of these twenty

people, five had their right eyes gouged out, five their left eyes, five an arm broken and five a leg, then you'd begin to doubt the whole thing. But what if I then added that I blew on all those people and they were healed; what if I told you that I laid a hand on a carriage and lifted it up to let others pass, and if I pointed to these facts to demand your respect, consideration and blind obedience to myself and all those who wear a certain uniform? Would you acquiesce to my laws? Would you submit to my testimony simply because you believed me when I told you about the confusion I came across?

You would throw me out straight away, M.R.F., you would call me insane, and if your patience stretched far enough to reply to me, you would inform me that you believed what was believable, and not fabulous; that you believed what you had no reason to suppose was false, and not what was imposed on you without any basis.

This is not a comparison, it's absolutely the same thing as what happens in religions, only the terms have changed. The parish priest, the bonze, the Imam, the minister, the rabbi and the talapoin retail in fables without any shadow of likelihood and then conclude that they are owed respect, obedience, money, that they should be exempted from all public burdens, accused of no crimes, and if any become apparent, they should never be punished, for fear of scandal.

For supernatural facts, supernatural proofs are required, that is, to establish a reported miracle, another one must be established, in the presence of the man you want to convince.

My parish priest tells me that a glass of water poured on the head and a cross made in the air, while muttering something, takes sins away. As proof of this, that with a similar act he heals an epileptic. His masses, the sound of his bells, his processions, etc., bring health, dismiss storms and insects, etc. As proof of this, that with a similar act, let him raise a panel from my wall that has fallen. And so on with the rest: let them prove it or keep silent.

To prove one's power and authority over what isn't susceptible to experimentation, something similar to what would be experimented with must be demonstrated, otherwise, no credence should be expected. The geometer says that he measures the distance between two inaccessible

points with precision; I doubt it; he does it, and I make measurements and find his result to be correct, and I accept that he can in fact do what I'd doubted initially.

I say that my masses bring souls out of Purgatory. Well then, say a Mass that will get a man out of the Bastille!

The empirics, the charlatans, the operators, who are in relation to health as apostles and missionaries are to salvation, perform trials. They don't demand that you take them at their word, they burn themselves, pierce themselves, poison themselves and then heal themselves. They see that, since their interest in convincing others is clear, proofs are necessary to persuade their audience that they're telling the truth.

I've seen this funny argument somewhere: you believe Caesar's *Commentaries*, so why not the Gospel?

Then I should also believe the Koran: the conclusion works this way too.

I believe Caesar's *Commentaries* because they say nothing impossible or beyond comprehension. If Caesar said that he crossed the sea without getting his feet wet, that the waters had moved and stood up on both sides to let him pass right through, and so much other nonsense, then neither you nor I, M.R.F., would believe it. Even less if the bearers of this tale had drawn conclusions useful to themselves and onerous for us.

A thousand monuments strewn everywhere also authorize them, and when we say that we believe Caesar's *Commentaries*, this doesn't mean we would swear or bet our lives that they were absolutely or entirely true. Many parts are dubious, and I am expected not to doubt relations that are a hundred times more bizarre.

For each fact, even a believable one, the self-interest of the witness who reports it entitles everyone to entertain doubts, and any reason we have to want it to be falsified entitles us to examine it thoroughly. If someone came and told me that my son had been killed in the army, I'd believe it,

but if the bearer of this news added that he'd made him his heir, without bringing any evidence, I'd cease to believe both the death and the legacy.

If someone told me the Pyrenees were originally in Japan, but that on the orders of a certain man they leaped three hundred leagues and landed where they are, I wouldn't believe a word of it; but if a voice told me the same thing in the same instant, and looking all around I saw nobody who could have said these words, I'd begin to doubt; but if, raising my eyes, I saw the stars moving into position, forming words, and I read the same thing, then I would believe.

The proof is as bizarre as the fact and is proportionate to it.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

The proofs should be strong in proportion to the difficulty of the question, and obvious in proportion to its importance.

The question of factitious religion is based on impossible things, or at least supernatural ones, and concerns things of the utmost importance.

Therefore, factitious religions require proofs that are above the forces of nature and must be utterly convincing.

Two kinds of miracles are required for supernatural things like resurrection, the gift of tongues, etc. We should be shown a full moon lasting eight days, or public resurrections of the dead.

When it comes to impossible things like the Trinity, let them make a triangle with three rods, one of which is longer than the two others combined. Preaching and catechisms are a very different sort of proof than this.

But, it will be said, factitious religions have an amazing number of miracles. Yes, their books do say so. For me to believe them, show me a very clear one. But you can't, and neither can I.

TWELFTH TRUTH: THERE IS A RISK OF ERROR IN FOLLOWING ANY OF THE FACTITIOUS RELIGIONS.

Facts cannot be established with absolute certainty. Take every measure that prudence and the keenest intelligence might suggest, but all you'll find is likelihoods. They sometimes attain a high degree, a kind of conviction, but it will always be something less than perfect self-evidence and incontestable truth.

The difference between history and fable is not that the first is true and the other false, it's that the first might be true and maybe seems likely to be true, while the second is surely and clearly false.

The criminal lieutenant, who condemned a man with documents and witnesses, can't claim that that he didn't condemn an innocent man, and say so with any certainty. He can claim that he condemned him innocently.

For a fact to be incontestable, with respect to us it must be impossible for our senses to mislead us, for our imagination to be struck only by the objects that are present, and according to their real nature, and finally, for us to be above all illusion.

For a fact to be proved incontestably, it must be impossible for men to lie or to be mistaken.

Therefore, facts cannot be established incontestably. Only metaphysical truths are incontestable, which achieve a perfect and irrevocable consent.

How strange it would be if arithmetic had been based on official reports of accounts and decrees. What manner of nonsense would have been invented to explain these texts like theologians, for whom *Yes* sometimes means No. "It's an allegory, the contradiction is only apparent."

Would it be any harder to find proofs for facts and authorities to affirm that by when you subtract 20 from 100 the result is 90, than to make whole nations believe that a dead man resurrected and rose to heaven, etc.?

We must, therefore, turn to metaphysical truths for absolute certainty.

If, in the business of life, we rely on factual proofs, it's because we have no other choice. Life is made up only of material facts, so we have to judge on the basis of material facts. But while relying on these proofs, nobody claims to be making a judgment that's completely free of error; only the best judgment possible in the situation, although it might ultimately prove mistaken.

But is belief possible without proofs? When only slight ones are available, belief remains feeble: in the presence of stronger ones, conditional consent is gained. On a daily basis, people deny and discover the falseness of certain opinions which are widespread and based on imposing testimonies.

There are great chemists in the world, and very upright men who claim to have personally carried out the experiment of the philosopher's stone. Many people work on their memoirs and believe they can achieve the same thing. However, the philosopher's stone is an unfounded fantasy, a folly, a distraction of the human mind.

Where, then, is the certainty of religions which are based on facts only? It's nonsense to claim that "God himself attests these facts", which are only proved with human speeches and writings. These books still have to be shown to be the immediate handiwork of God; impossible facts can't be proved. Nobody can be convinced of them, no matter what may be said in their favor, since the reasoning that discovers their impossibility is clearer and more obvious than any proof that could ever be given.

Supernatural facts can never have a perfect certainty, even for their supposed witnesses, because it is easier for all their senses to mislead them than for such things to be true. What, then, of things based on nothing but tales and hearsay?

So, let us boldly say: factitious religions claim facts that are impossible and supernatural, therefore, facts that they cannot prove.

With respect to their natural and possible facts, they have no formal proofs.

If a given factitious religion were better grounded than the others, this wouldn't mean that we have to follow it:

1st) Because nobody is sure that they really understand it;

2nd) Because anything that is better than something else can be entirely worthless; otherwise, bad things would be valid for those who knew nothing better.

Thus, the best religion in America was good before we went over there. Who can say that the religion of Terra Australis isn't as good as ours and that its apostles won't come to our continent the way we send ours to China?

In a word, give me a demonstration of the divinity of your books. I consent to submit to it, despite what I've said about the human origin of these books.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

No facts can carry self-evident certainty.

Factitious religions are based on facts.

Therefore, they are uncertain. Therefore, by following them, there is a risk of error.

THIRTEENTH TRUTH: THE FACTITIOUS RELIGIONS ONLY PRESENT THEMSELVES AS UNCERTAIN THINGS.

To believe is not knowing, it's not seeing. To believe presumes uncertainty. I mean: to know demonstratively and to see with the sight of the mind.

I know and I see that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, that the diagonal of a square is longer than one of its sides, and I believe that Alexander defeated Darius and that he conquered Persia.

Metaphysical truths, essential, eternal and necessary truths, are seen with this sight of the mind. They are present to it. They relate to it, no doubt remains, no shadow of uncertainty. One is convinced with the most perfect assurance.

This conviction is not susceptible of any gradation. It is immutable and we're sure that all intelligent beings, that God himself sees the same thing. There is neither fear nor hope of finding out the opposite. Neither the worst threats nor the greatest promises can compel anyone for a single moment to seek a point in a square which is equally distant from all points on its frame. The impossibility of this is seen clearly, since it's obviously a square.

If the King offered a hundred thousand crowns to anyone who could prove that Caesar never visited England, a thousand dissertations would be published on the subject within six months.

We have daily examples of the most common opinions, the most inveterate beliefs being combatted and destroyed.

But what has never been seen, and never will be seen, is anyone abandoning Euclid's demonstrations, or any other truth that the mind sees. Our sight produces the affirmation relative to reality, nothingness is the object of denial, but to believe is not to affirm, just as not to believe is not to deny. When I'm told that a certain man whom I know to be honorable has murdered his friend, I won't believe it, but neither will I deny it. I'd bet ten *pistoles* that it's not true, but I wouldn't wager everything I own.

When I was taught geometry, nobody said that the theorems were true, I was shown their truth. I was taught how to find it [for myself], I was notified of this and nothing more. Over time, I was able to see their truth as clearly as my teacher did. That's what led to my conviction, and not simply faith in my teacher.

A traveler is told that there is a monument in a certain place. He sees it, no matter who it was who told him. But if they added that this monument is the workmanship of so and so, authority alone is what makes an impression; this can be believed or disbelieved.

There is, therefore, a difference between believing and seeing. Believing means not questioning, provisionally acquiescing until better information comes along. This word carries doubt and leaves the door open to a contrary belief.

Belief can grow to infinity without ever attaining the utmost degree of perfection. As for certainty, the sight produces this utmost degree all at once. For perfect certainty, it's impossible to be any more certain than I already am that a bow-string is shorter than the bow itself, but I could always be more and more sure than that the arch in Saintes really dates back to Julius Caesar, even though I've read its inscription. My belief on this point could also be diminished.

No factitious religion has yet promised to demonstrate [its truth], or expected anyone to say that they've seen it, not for lack of good intent, but because it would repel every mind and might bring down the whole edifice.

They are content to demand that we believe, not argue, but submit, and it's all the same to them as long as, on the basis of this simple preconception, we let ourselves be robbed and treated like a slave.

All factitious religions have the same authority, the same domination, wield the same tyranny over the mind, will, conscience, goods and most necessary actions. This doesn't come from their probability or likelihood. It is impossible for them all to have the same degree of this. All their authority, then, comes from the preconceived notions, the trick of raising people with these

beliefs, the stupidity of man, who lets himself be drawn by the current. This little point is quite strong and certainly deserves all the attention of Father Malebranche.

The authority of factitious religions is equal because the power of education is equal, along with the power of example. The head of this child is sullied, his mind is inexperienced; he is, among a nation, just one more slave; he is told loudly that these truths can't even be examined. He grows up, life's necessities keep him preoccupied, his passions divert him, he sees the first man who dares utter a word imprisoned and brought to the gallows; he goes no further.

If solitude, a few reflections, a few warnings, a few occasions lead him to think a little, he doubts, he glimpses the truth with an obscure and ephemeral glance, but the torrent carries him; he is even afraid to see this evasive truth more clearly.

Is it not true, M.R.F., that it's not the truth that makes us believe, but only our preconceptions? If your priest had told you from childhood that there are seven persons in God and three sacraments, would you have contradicted him? You would have received these articles the way you receive those of the catechism telling of three persons in God and seven sacraments.

You would put your talents to use in favor of the seven persons as you do for the three. The priest, the mufti and the brahmin are no less convinced than you are. Is it because they're right? You won't say that. So much for your equality of belief without an equality of reason. It is, then, the mere force of education which is equal in all religions. Unequal causes can't equalize their objects, and the force of the truth plays no role here.

It might be said: "But some missionaries convert entire nations." If you could see, as I've seen, how this is accomplished: the plots, the Machiavellian aspects, the force, violence when possible, this objection wouldn't be made, which each religion can make, since people are converted to all of them.

I've already said, M.R.F., that I don't want to enter into the discussion of any fact. But here are two thoughts that will make an impact.

Most conversions happen among savage nations that are deceived by the authority and advantage given to us over them by our weapons, sciences and arts: they are easily convinced of the existence of a single God; they are dazzled by the spectacle of our ceremonies, they are charmed by the beauty of our songs, they are given presents of certain trinkets, their minds are seized upon, they are told some things about a religion that they don't understand and don't dare question, and they hand over their children to be taught anything.

I was shown someone who was given brandy in exchange for their child's baptism. They brought the child back again the next day, hoping for the same reward.

The others are idolatrous nations. They're shown the absurdity of their religion while that of our own is concealed; our scientific superiority is exploited; the unity of God is proved to them, they're shown the less repellent dogmas and the less onerous parts of the catechism, carefully selecting the parts closest to their own reveries, so that only a change of names is required.

They don't mention the effects of this doctrine: nothing about tithing, excommunications, bans, fees for marriages and burials.

Here you have it, the gift of God, souls won for Jesus Christ. I'm not talking on the basis of what I've read: I've seen it for myself.

By proceeding this way, what couldn't be inserted into the human brain? The fact is, black men who go to Turkey become Mahometans, those who are raised in Protestant colonies are Lutherans, Calvinists, etc., just as ours are Roman Catholics.

In the end, we can only convert by means of miracles, grace or reasoning. I've done enough to destroy grace in the first part, I'll finish it off in the following one. Nobody performs miracles; if those from past ages are cited, these nations can cite as many in their own favor, which are equally well attested. Therefore, we must return to conviction through reasoning. We must therefore leave each individual to judge for himself, with no obligation if his reason doesn't judge that a change is necessary.

Take, M.R.F., this point about the conversions as a digression. Everyone loves talking about their travels. I will hazard a few lines more, but I won't take similar detour again.

Here are the strongest arguments of these new apostles: "We are more learned than you, more skilled, more intelligent. We believe this and that, you must believe it too. We come with disinterested motives. Do you believe that we are impostors who, facing a thousand perils, for no benefit to ourselves, would cross the seas only to trick you?"

These are the sophisms of traveling preachers, since one part of the audience doesn't have time to look into things, another part lacks the capacity, and since nobody dares open their mouth to contradict them. Let's look into their solidity, M.R.F.

The first of these arguments proves nothing. A man can be capable in a thousand things and mistaken in one. Would the Chinese, far more learned than black people, teach the latter the right religion? Archimedes, Euclid, Plato, etc., were idolaters.

The second argument is a manifest falsehood. It is not true that these missionaries march disinterestedly. Many of them make great fortunes. Besides, curiosity, a desire to travel, the pleasure of getting out of the monastery, libertinism, are all powerful motivations!

I don't deny that there may be some whose only motive is religion, which is only a pure effect of opinion. They would do the same for any other religion if they had been raised in it. But even if all were guided by this motive, they are simple souls whom the community takes advantage of, and then creates large establishments, and the monkish republic grows ever larger.

I've seen the Jesuits in Goa. What opulence! How they truly reap the rewards from the efforts of their missionaries! The governor lives in a wood cabin in Quebec. The intendant there has very limited means. The munitions necessary to preserve the colony remain out of doors, or badly sheltered, while new reverends enjoy three-story buildings, made with fine, dressed stones, covered with slate shipped from France, with an enclosed grove in the midst of three gardens. They bring the savages to a plot of land, make them clear it; then, on some pretext or other, they

lead them somewhere else. The land remains for them and becomes a nice smallholding. This is how the seminary of St. Sulpice obtained the property of the Isle of Montreal.

It's the zeal for the house of God that consumes them and leads them to the ends of the Earth.

The same disinterestedness leads them to abuse the authority and credit that they hold with the King to introduce themselves where they are not wanted. They forced the denizens of Nantes to accept them, Troyes will see them established within its walls, despite the resistance of its citizens, the zeal of these good fathers guarantees this for me.

It seems obvious to me that the same success could be expected everywhere, even if Aesop's fables were preached. Everything can be obtained from men if you hit them where they're weak; and pestering, force, ruse, rewards, threats, punishments, are effective means used to make these poor folks think like them.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT

All factitious religions are content with simple belief, they don't dare ask for more.

To believe is only a conditional acquiescence, which assumes uncertainty, carries doubt and leaves room for change.

Therefore, all factitious religions require only conditional acquiescence, assume uncertainty and leave room for change. Therefore, every man who is committed to a factitious religion has no perfect certainty about his religion and even assumes that he can't have any, since he is reduced to belief only.

FOURTEENTH TRUTH: NO FACTITIOUS RELIGION CAN DEMAND
TRUE BELIEF.

To believe is not a free thing, belief is necessarily proportionate to the reasons for belief.

It's the same with truth as with good. Good is something you necessarily love, and people give in to the truth internally despite themselves.

There is much disputation in the universities on this point of "the good". It can be resolved, I think, in two words: the good is nothing other than what one loves. To dispute whether you can love evil is to dispute whether you can presently love what you do not love. Good is the general name of what is loveable, good is what one loves, what one loves is the good.

With respect to us, truth is nothing other than that of which we are convinced internally. To dispute whether we can refuse to consent internally to the truth is to argue whether we can fail to be convinced of what we are convinced. "True" is the general name for that which convinces; that which convinces is the truth; the truth is that which convinces.

The truth is the object of the affirmation of the judgment, just like the good is the object of the choice of the will.

Nearly the same thing could be said about opinions.

There is no freedom as concerns a certain degree of belief. It necessarily follows from the degree of likelihood and arguments, so that it's impossible not to accept a certain opinion internally, even when acting as if we didn't accept it; and without hearing certain arguments that persuade us, we cannot have a certain belief, although we may act as if we accepted it.

By taking the trouble to examine these degrees, we find that there are four of them.

When the arguments for belief are inferior to the objections, there is no belief at all. When they are only partially above them, they produce doubt and suspicion. When they are equal to the objections, mere opinion results. And when they surpass the objections, they produce a belief, which can grow to infinity, without ever reaching a perfect certainty, as we've noted.

Someone tells me they've just returned from a collector's house, who had a painting by Apelles. I don't believe a word of it. Someone else says that it's a Raphael and that a hundred thousand francs were paid for it; I remain somewhat skeptical, since it is easier for him to lie or be mistaken than for the thing to be true. A third man tells me that he's seen it and that only two thousand crowns were paid; I acquiesce and don't deny it, since it's easy for this to be true. But if fifty people tell me the same thing, if the painting's owner assures me of it, if its seller confirms it to me, I will believe him entirely. Even more so if I go to visit the collector and find the painting beautiful. Even more so if experts value it at this price, since it seems more likely to be true than that so many people would lie and be mistaken. But, after all, I am still not absolutely sure. A very slight detail could make me doubt and deny it – if, for example, after all that, the collector wanted me to buy it and those who have assured me of its value were his friends or co-conspirators.

But if a hundred thousand people and a hundred million books assured me that the Louvre was built in an hour, I would categorically deny it, since it's easier for everyone to be mistaken than for this to be true. No matter what expense were made, no matter how many workers were on the job, there is a near physical impossibility in it, and I would deny it all the more completely if those who wanted to convince me had reasons for this, and if I had one in refusing their testimony.

The application of all this to the subject of factitious religions goes without saying.

The henchmen of these religions have no proof equal to the objections against the facts they propose. Far from it, the tales they tell are more impossible than the construction of the Louvre in an hour, let alone in a minute. It is therefore more certain that they're lying or mistaken than it is easy, or possible, for these things to be realities. Aside from that, by winning belief they make themselves kings, while my belief makes me a slave.

You may well find, M.R.F., that I'm repeating myself and that I'm too disorderly, but since belief is the first stone of the edifice, I think it my duty to argue matters in depth, at the risk of some repetition.

I expect the reply that these incredible things are given as supernatural, that indeed in the order of nature they can be denied. That it is therefore agreed that it's insane to believe them without proof, since they are detrimental to us and don't produce inner conviction.

If all the proofs offered were as good as they are absurd, they would only have merit for those who witnessed them. If I had seen miracles, I would draw a conclusion between these and the others. I would agree as to the power of their performer; my senses, by their authority, would overcome my rationality as to supernatural things, but not metaphysical impossibilities such as the Trinity, transubstantiation and its effects, original sin, necessary grace, the mediation of the saints, or the vicariate of the Deity, etc. since it is easier for my senses to mislead me than for all these to be true.

With all of that properly examined, it's clear and obvious that nobody can make a commandment concerning belief. All that can be required is to act as if one believed.

A man who says he believes might be mistaken. Even more so he who says that he believes firmly, since when it comes to factitious religions, there are no proofs that bring absolute conviction.

Most of those who are well educated don't believe, those who are somewhat enlightened have their doubts, the peasant and the dimwit say they believe but they don't know what they mean by the word "believe".

What, then, is the religion of the common man? An intoxication, a blindness, it's a man in a crowd. He goes right or left as the ambient motion guides him, he is a man who follows fashion, however annoying it is to common sense, without paying attention; he is attached to it precisely because it is the fashion.

What is the religion of a bigoted theologian who reads the Bible, the Church Fathers, St. Thomas, etc.? It's the prejudice of a conceited man who has heard a simple fact so often in his education that he makes it his opinion. He gets worked up about this opinion until he becomes so stubborn that he makes a sort of conviction of it, like a man born blind who, having heard some jokers tell him that blue weighs more than yellow, has formed an idea of colors on this basis, and like

braggarts who end up believing the stories they made up, or like headstrong people who, having accepted something stupid, devise ways of convincing themselves that they're right and end up convincing themselves.

The greatness of the rewards promised by the religions are truly dazzling; the horror of the punishments they threaten is piercing, which deprives men of liberty and judgment, for lack of examining the basis and the likelihood of the whole thing. Nobody realizes that, by obeying one, they're disobeying the rest, which hold out the very same promises and threats.

Whatever religion people belonged to, according to temperament and the circumstances of their life, they would have ended up devout, hypocrites, zealots. It's not, therefore, the power of the truth, but stubbornness and prejudice that are decisive.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

Nobody is free to believe.

There can be no commandment where there is no freedom.

Therefore, there can be no commandment to believe, therefore the religions cannot require belief.

SECOND ARGUMENT.

Belief is necessarily proportionate to the arguments to believe and the proofs.

No religion has precise and solid arguments, or convincing proofs.

Therefore, no religion has precise and solid belief.

THIRD ARGUMENT.

Only reasons to believe or the biases of education can attract the belief, or rather the consent, given to factitious religions.

It isn't the reasons.

Therefore, it's only education.

I prove the minor premise: if it were the reasons to believe, since all the religions aren't equally good, the beliefs wouldn't be equal. This belief is the same, and equally intense in all religions. Therefore, it isn't the reasons.

I prove the major premise: the conclusions are proportional to the reasons to believe. The reasons to believe as offered by factitious religions are not equal. Therefore, the beliefs wouldn't be equal.

The proof of the minor premise is obvious, otherwise religions are indifferent, and all of them are good.

Christians will say that grace leads people, but each religion can use a similar trick, each can say: "all the wretches who follow other religions can clearly see their falseness, but malice or partiality make them stubborn, or grace fails them, or their fate binds them, etc."

FIFTEENTH TRUTH: BOOKS AND WORDS ARE NOT THE MEANS GOD USES TO INSTRUCT MANKIND.

Means used are proportionate to the qualities of the one who uses them.

God wished to make his will known to men; he is infinitely wise, he saw the best means; he is infinitely powerful, he was able to apply them; he is infinitely just, therefore, he did indeed apply them.

Let's see if the books, the words, the speeches and the decisions pronounced by men are the best means and whether these means have a proper relationship with the divine attributes.

Infinite wisdom can only use infallible means. It is obvious to reason that a book can't come into every person's hands, that it can be lost or corrupted, that every nation can't understand it, that not every individual is able to read, that some people are born blind, deaf and mute who can't be taught. This is not, therefore, a general or reliable means of instruction.

The translations, interpretations, the preaching of certain men without any indication of mission or ministry, some more capable and more faithful than others, some ruled more directly by their passions: all this is even less infallible. Those who want to pick a fight with reason might not want to refute experience: they only need to lend an ear to the disputes of all these ministers and interpreters. They will hear them criticizing each other's faithlessness, their ignorance. If they simply open their eyes, they will see the disorders caused by these disputes.

If God had ministers, they would all be equally capable. The consecrations, the ordinations, etc., would educate them and make them morally upright. We do say that every priest is equally a priest as concerns transubstantiating bread into J.C., baptizing, absolving, marrying, etc. Why wouldn't they also be equal in explaining the Gospel? That is also part of their ministry. I'll tell you why they don't make this claim: because experience would disprove it. I can say what's in the center of the Earth, I can give a detailed account on the subject, but I wouldn't be mad enough to say what's in my neighbor's pocket. Books, speeches are not a reliable means. God could take other, better means, so why wouldn't He have done so?

God is infinitely just; that is, he can only demand what is possible and reasonable and he treats everyone according to his merits. The merit of actions comes from conformity to the law, and their malice the reverse.

The law is the will of the lawgiver, given to be understood by those for whom it was made, to the extent of their ability. The will of God is not given to be understood by men to the extent of God's

ability, if it's only expressed by books that can be questioned and by the mouth of men who might be mistaken or swayed by their passions.

As for a book, it would have to land immediately in the hands of each individual, in his own language, each individual would naturally have to be able to read it, this book would have to be clear, without ambiguity, so that no interpretation would be necessary. It would be necessary, in the end, to prove that this book comes from God, for every individual to receive it by a miracle, or that it should appear naturally, like fruit²⁵.

As for the ministers, the vicars of God, they would need to be superior to the rest of men and everything they are not.

If the King could fashion his own ministers and ambassadors, he would make them perfect and lacking nothing they need to completely fulfill their duties.

Kings, finally, who are only men, explain their edicts and their wishes are declared clearly. I have never heard that they've ever failed to have them posted, to bring to their decrees all the necessary formalities, and to provide those who are entrusted to execute them with authentic powers.

God can demand nothing from us which is not possible. He is powerful enough to enable us to fulfill his orders, whatever these may be. Will a sensible man send his servant to the market on the pretext that he might find there one of his farmers who will give him money to do his shopping, and won't he give him money to do it when he has plenty to give?

The comparison would be more accurate on every point if we said that factitious religions represent God as a man who sends his steward to pay a debt without telling him who is his creditor.

²⁵ Manuscript 1192 adds here: "As for the organ of men, the translations, explanations, interpretations, it would be necessary for the translators to have a perfect understanding of the language of their book, and of all others, and for all the preachers to speak incessantly to each individual; finally, they would have to all be instructed by the Deity, to speak with clarity and uniformity."

What would you think, M.R.F., of a prince who gave ambiguous edicts and set up people to interpret them, and charging the masses with feeding and maintaining them? But this is what the Christians impose on God.

God has given no law to men, or he has given them one that is intelligible, and not material, a law which is always present, which speaks to the mind and the will, a law which is understood and known by the deaf and the blind, which leaves no room for ignorance, a law which is published and intimated to every man.

What? Would a wise man give an order that nobody could understand unless they knew Chinese and had read a thousand books?

Our Holy Father the Pope is more reasonable than this. He doesn't speak Greek to the ministers of his diversions, to his Mercury, his mistress, his Ganymede.

What would you say, M.R.F., of a man who told you this story:

"I have ten children. Having resolved to disappear for a while, I told them nothing about how I want them to act while I'm gone.

"At my departure I left with Peter, a paper written in Greek, containing my wishes. It was written in obscure terms; part of it was meant figuratively, part naturally; it was full of hyperboles, allegories, parables; some of it was contrary to nature and reason; it was neither written, nor signed by me, nor does it have my stamp on it.

"When I was gone, Peter showed the writing to his brothers, and said that he was carrying out my orders and that he had the power to explain it, that he would take up residence in the finest apartment, that it was their job to keep him fed. He added that he was supposed to be in charge of his brothers, to live in repose, and they should see to business, working late, running errands, etc.

“With that done, he wrote something in French saying: ‘Here is its translation’. James read it without seeing what Peter claimed to find in it. Paul interpreted it differently. Francis asked to see the original where, seeing nothing that indicated me as its author, and finding it ridiculous, he ridiculed it and did what he thought best according to himself and the intentions he thought I must have, given what he knew about me. John took Peter's side. As for other five, who didn't know how to read, three followed Francis, one Paul and the other James. There has been nothing but killing, fighting, divisions in my family.

“I returned. After greeting Peter and John warmly, I disinherited, beat and drove out the eight others.

“They can protest that I only had to say a word to them, and they would have obeyed me respectfully and submissively, but that, since they didn't understand Greek and could see no indication that the writing came from me, they didn't think they were obliged to recognize or obey it; that, in addition, this text offered many conflicting senses, had no relation with the character I'd shown them, and was even opposite the ideas they ought to have about me, such that they thought that Peter was setting himself up as a tyrant, etc.

“I wouldn't hear a word of it. I was relentless. They all died in despair, poverty and from the wounds they received.”

Would you not, M.R.F., consider this man a monster a thousand times worse than Denys, Nero and Phalaris? But this is the frank portrait of the God of factitious religions. This is what makes atheists. They can't believe in such a God, they deny there is one, instead of imagining another one.

This section is a somewhat diffuse. I know that I'm speaking with Father Malebranche, but I'm not a Father Malebranche.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

The means are proportionate to the qualities of the one who uses them.

Human books and speeches are not means of instruction worthy or proportionate to the wisdom, power, and justice of God.

Therefore, books and speeches are not means God uses to instruct men in his will.

SIXTEENTH TRUTH: HUMAN BOOKS AND WORDS ARE NOT MEANS GOD COULD USE TO INSTRUCT MEN.

The aptness of the means must be proportionate to the importance of the end. Precautions taken are relative to the importance of the object²⁶.

It cannot be denied, when one is committed to a factitious religion, that the preservation of animal life and the propagation of the species are less important than spiritual life. Therefore, the means of living this spiritual life must be at least as sure and as easy as maintaining animal life and perpetuating the species.

Let's compare these means, M.R.F. Those concerning the animal life are simple, clear, obvious, easy; pleasure even attracts us to them. They are infallible, unmistakable; everyone has them within themselves, free or slave, unlearned, without eyes, without ears, without needing to hire any interpreter. They are seen, they are known, people are inclined to them and use them.

The means proposed by all factitious religions are discouraging, hard to acquire, uncertain, subject to eternal dispute, with a thousand contradictory decisions that must be purchased at high cost, only to remain uncertain.

²⁶ Manuscript 1192 adds here: "Even a madman takes more care of his health than his hand. A three-year-old child pays more attention to a biscuit than a morsel of bread. A large mirror is carried more carefully than a glazed frame."

If the infinite wisdom had acted with respect to the means of preserving animal life as the henchmen of the factitious religions say it acted with the spiritual life, the human species wouldn't have lasted three weeks.

It would have been a fine thing if, to learn how to sustain our life and perpetuate it, there had been a book written in a foreign language, full of contradictions, turgid and ridiculous speeches.

God has given us clear and easy means to sustain our life, which is a less important affair than the eternal life which you expect, M.R.F. Therefore, God has given us clear means for the most important affair of all, since he did the same for the less essential one.

That's not all: experience could have taught us what is necessary for the sustenance and reproduction of the species. A single man out of a hundred thousand could have discovered it, and all the rest would soon have come around to his views. Experience would have convinced them.

But in matters of religion, there is no experience to be had; everyone has the same right to maintain his own eccentricities; everyone has his own visions, revelations, apparitions, according to their own fantasies.

Palinurus being dead, Aeneas must bury him; food must be placed on the tomb of a Siamese girl; the papist requires Masses; Roman ships perish at the same place where the sacred hens of the augurs had been drowned; the earth opens under those who rebelled against the laws of Moses; J.C. resurrects three days after his death, he rises to heaven; Mahomet is declared the prophet by a subterranean voice, he splits the Moon in half.

In all these suppositions which are all equally established and true, men should have been given a sure guide, clear means of knowing, means which were inherent in men, and would enlighten them even in spite of themselves.

Therefore, God didn't act this way. Conscience is for morality as instinct is for animal life, or to put it better, we have two instincts, one for the body and what relates to it, the other which

instructs us at every moment in our duties to God and to other men. It speaks immediately to the soul. The deprivation of all the senses doesn't interrupt its functions for a single moment and doesn't silence its voice. There is no need to call on it. It speaks clearly, this voice, and everyone hears it.

If God had wished to augment or change anything in such a fine disposition, or give us new orders, he would have done so by equally beautiful, equally easy, and equally reliable means.

It's God himself who told me and engraved in my mind that he is equally everywhere, that he is one, that he is just, that he cannot be swayed by gifts. If he wants me to think otherwise, he will say so in my mind just as clearly as he said all the rest.

Would anyone have the temerity to say that God cannot make his wishes known, especially in the way he makes them known to me with my conscience? Could he not inspire in all men that they are obliged to do or believe this or that, as he gave them the idea that he is perfect and that they should treat others as they would like others to treat themselves? If God wanted me to believe the articles of our catechism, he could make all brains with the same traces that the reading of this catechism and exhortations leave in a child's brain, and there you are: all men would be instructed in a way that is clear, reliable and worthy of his power. There would be no fear, in this case, of being misled or mistaken.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

The aptness of the means should be proportionate to the importance of the goal.

Religion is a more important goal than the preservation of life and reproduction, therefore the means of religion should be of a greater aptness than those of life and reproduction, or at least as apt.

SECOND ARGUMENT.

The means of religion should be as appropriate as those of animal life.

The means of animal life are given by instinct.

Therefore, the means of religion should be as appropriate as instinct.

THIRD ARGUMENT.

The means of religion should be as appropriate as instinct.

Human books and speeches are not as appropriate as instinct.

Therefore, human books and speeches are not means for religion.

FOURTH ARGUMENT.

The means of religion should be as appropriate as instinct.

Only conscience is as appropriate as instinct.

Therefore, only conscience is a means for religion.

Conscience is another, more perfect instinct with a nobler purpose.

SEVENTEENTH TRUTH: THE RELIGIONS THAT ARE BASED ON BOOKS AND WORDS DON'T COME FROM GOD.

God always uses the simplest and shortest way. It requires no commentary or clarification. It would be madness to take a roundabout route on the way to a point when a straight line would suffice.

And the way of speaking to men by instinct and by internal feeling is shorter than that of making a book and sending other men to read, translate, explain it. And even assuming that God intended to use material things, it would be simpler to make a book so that it needed no explanation or interpretation, and he would have instituted men capable of announcing his laws if he wanted ministers, and these men would have had visible and plain marks of their mission.

If we could positively know that a certain book comes from God and contains his laws, and that a certain man is the interpreter of these laws, the precepts of the book would be enacted and the man in question would be consulted to resolve all doubts.

But if a man said: "A certain book comes from God, I'm its interpreter", you would have to be as stupid as he is brazen to take him at his word. Would you pay a tax that someone demanded on the spot, unless you were certain that the man is authorized with the King's orders and by an edict that ordains the payment of what he is requesting?

Establish, my dear ministers, the principle of the divinity of the book and of your mission. If I doubt the book, the book cannot establish the minister. If I doubt the minister, he can't say anything to establish the book.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

God always takes the shortest and simplest paths.

Human books and speeches are not the shortest and simplest paths.

Therefore, the religions based on human books and speeches haven't come via God's paths, therefore they don't come from God.

The justice and wisdom of God prove my major premise. I don't think any sensible man would deny the minor one.

EIGHTEENTH TRUTH: ALL FACTITIOUS RELIGIONS ARE FALSE OR AT LEAST UNCERTAIN.

The truth cannot be seen without being recognized, nor recognized without being accepted.

If a proposition containing a truth is sincerely refused, this is because the refuser doesn't understand the proposition, and because it doesn't contain a truth with respect to him.

I've seen people arguing in good faith against truths. I've seen, at the siege of²⁷, an officer insisting that, no matter what the shape of any terrain that could hold four hundred men, it would take no more effort to fortify it than if it were round or square; and when I said that this terrain might be shaped so that it would take a hundred times more yards of trenches than if it were round, I was jeered by some other officers who listening in, and regarded me as too fussy and as someone who enjoyed bizarre and false notions.

What were these people fighting against? It wasn't the truth: this was masked for them. They were very brave men, but they had no knowledge of geometry. As soon as I'd made them measure the circumference of a map with a thread, and having cut this map into five or six pieces and set them end to end, they stopped questioning me. They were shocked to see the truth and submitted at once.

It is beyond doubt that what is denied and disputed seriously by anyone is either false or obscure.

²⁷ Manuscript 1192 has: "...at the siege of Luxembourg in 1684 a major maintaining that..."

The truth in itself is that which is, with respect to us; it's what we know exists. It's what we see clearly without being able to doubt and which we conceive as being seen by all intelligences just as we see it.

God alone sees all the truths and all their combinations, their relationships and consequences, and all this in a single view. Limited beings see only a few truths, one after the other; they see certain connections between them; they draw a few conclusions with time and application. But finally, what they see clearly is a truth which they are not free to deny, what they see clearly is not a void of which they are not free to deny the existence.

It is, therefore, only with their mouths that men affirm the articles of faith of factitious religions. They don't see them, either with the body's eyes, or with the sight of the mind. Far from it, they see the opposite with their senses and their reason. It is certain that they have heard it preached, but the fact remains uncertain and subject to contestation.

The truth is supported, seen and shown of its own accord. The more it is examined, the more it is known; the more it is attacked, the more light is cast on it; the deeper one goes with it, the more incontestable it is shown to be. It has no need to be smuggled in by craft and surprise, nor supported by violence. It has no fear of daylight. It doesn't need to be taught to children as if they were parrots, so that, filling their imagination, its fatal power over reason will be profitable.

There are only too many scoundrels who fight against the consequences of truth with their actions, but they are no less inwardly convinced of them. It's not to proclaim the truth that the laws use force, but to gain obedience, it's to enforce the practice of the consequences, so that the fear of punishment counterbalances the passions of men which make them act against their conscience. And the conscience is nothing other than a perpetual sight of certain truths.

A highway robber whom the judges condemn to be broken on the wheel doesn't get angry at them. He wishes them no harm. He knows the truth of the position they're in and the right this gives them to do as they do. What a powerful conviction!

There is no need for violence to make everyone agree on a truth, although it is necessary to make them live according to this truth. The sight of the truth, and the inner acquiescence that follows it, costs nothing. The practice of the orders issued by the truth is the only thing that concerns our passions.

Everyone agrees that there is such a thing as justice, that everyone should enjoy the fruit of their labor in peace, that one must perform what one has freely promised to do, but not everyone lives according to this justice and their interests or passions lead people to fall short of these things which they recognize as right.

There will always be thieves, but there won't always be someone who believes that it's right to steal and that it's unjust to set up tribunals to govern the punishment of theft and murder.

If someone were eccentric enough to write against justice, he surely wouldn't make much progress. What could he say? This may seem unrelated, M.R.F.; but it naturally follows that if factitious religions were true, it wouldn't be necessary to establish and maintain them as is done. You can make laws to force people into whatever religion you want, but if it were a truth, the facts would not be questioned. When murderers are condemned to death, the lawgiver makes no effort to prove that murder is a crime: everyone is convinced of this.

If there are so many bizarre religions, it's not because the masses act directly against the real truth, but because they've drawn false conclusions from it.

All nations have seen in the past, and see clearly and distinctly, with an unambiguous and incontestable insight, that there is a first principle which made all that we see, but instead of drawing the conclusion that, since it's infinite, it doesn't behave like limited beings, men have related to it as they would to other men. They have hoped to win its favor through grimaces, vain ceremonies, gifts, soliciting its friends, etc. Then pride, greed, a thirst for domination and ambition have led people to call themselves the ministers of God, who has nothing to do with such people. They have multiplied the Deity since everyone has one of his own, and as a way to multiply the offerings. They have then advanced all the eccentricities that their chaotic

imaginations and their passions inspired in them; they have heaped up folly upon folly and tax upon tax.

With respect to the Deity, it's permissible to draw conclusions from more to less, and not from less to more. It's perfectly acceptable to make a comparison between God and men, by their virtues, by their good and fine qualities, but not their defects, weaknesses and vices.

Humans can be corrupted with presents. This is completely inapplicable to the Deity. Aside from the fact that God is incorruptible, gifts could never bring him any pleasure or profit.

If unhappy mortals had envisaged the clear ideas that God gave them, they would simply have laughed at factitious religions and would have punished their inventors as thieves and robbers of the public.

Geometry and arithmetic will never cause either debate or war; they require no Inquisition to support them; they are more easily taught to a grown man than a child, to a great genius than a dimwit; everyone is left free to examine them; there is no fear that the ideas of one nation will corrupt others or that certain people will spread their venom and infect the minds of others; there's no need for councils or synods; no mind contests its propositions once it understands them; there will never be any plot to support or overthrow the least part of these sciences; they have no need to be supported, nor is there any fear of their being overthrown; this is because they are truths.

What can we say about factitious religions, which produce irreconcilable hatred among whole nations, which arm them, which lead them to mutual destruction by steel and fire and to become enraged, forgetting all right and reason, turning to treasonous and murderous means? This is because these are falsehoods.

The truth produces acquiescence and harmony. What produces war and disputes must therefore be falsehood, at least obscurity, uncertainty which is blindly supported by passion and partiality.

That is all the more evident as the zeal of each religion is the same, although they all differ infinitely and mutually anathematize each other.

It takes a year to learn the summary of religion, and ten years to gain a certain mastery of the subject. It requires reading and writing foreign languages, spending one's life leafing through ridiculous books and being prejudiced enough to consider them venerable and find reason in them in spite of all good sense, and making a serious study of fables, subtleties, impossible concordances, and losing one's mind reconciling so many contradictions.

You can't deny that, M.R.F. So don't go after me, saying I want to make a science of religion. On the contrary, I beg for it not to be [regarded as] one: all factitious religions have the difficulties of science without any of its truthfulness.

I want [religion] to be an instinct, an innate idea, an understanding within reach of all people. It is not a dubious light, it's a natural science. Just as the knowledge of how to move our feet in front of each other to walk comes from one's naturally acquired knowledge that we can go forward by successively crossing contiguous spaces: everyone can be an expert in this field without any fees or expenditure of time.

Let us return, M.R.F., more precisely to our aim. It is certain that, when anything is sincerely questioned by a large number of people, it's either false or badly understood.

What might you think when you see that even the most universally accepted religion has at least three quarters of humanity against it and that each of them is considered false, diabolical and abominable by the others?

We are certainly forced to confess that we are following, with brutish stubbornness, a falsehood, or at least something dubious, of which we understand nothing, about which we can't show that we're right, and about which three fourths of humanity think they can clearly see that we're wrong.

The eyes of each religion can freely see the absurdities and impossibilities of the others.

It's the same as with love. He who is struck by this passion can't see the flaws in the object of his love; but everyone else can. Can you not see clearly, M.R.F., the supposition of the revelation of the Koran? The Jews and pagans see that of the Gospel, while scholars see it even better. Fr. Malebranche would know and could easily highlight the absurdity of Christianity if the biases and prejudices of education hadn't placed a blindfold over his eyes, or if he had simply decided to take this blindfold off and think for himself.

But, besides, do we see clearly that, unless a glass of water is poured over our heads, accompanied by a few words said by another, we will be the eternal victims of the vengeance of an infinitely just being?

All the rest of men see clearly that an infinitely just being can only punish those who freely choose to contravene a known law. Do Jews and Turks see clearly that the excision of a part of their skin is a holy act? All the rest of mankind sees this as an absurdity. Do Indians see clearly that by burning themselves alive after the death of their husbands they will be reborn happier, and that after doing this eight times they will gain a thousand years' felicity? All the rest of humanity sees clearly that this is insane and stupid.

Give the glory to God, M.R.F. You also see clearly that J.C. is in the host, body, soul and blood, and that this same body is in a hundred thousand places at once, just as everyone who isn't a Roman Catholic sees that this is absurd and impossible?

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

The truth can't be seen without being recognized, nor recognized without obtaining our assent.

No factitious religion obtains our assent.

Therefore, no factitious religion is a truth which is seen and recognized.

As for the minor premise, the matter is clear: all men would submit to it, and there would be no need to bias children's minds, nor to muddle their imaginations. It would be like geometry and the laws against thieves and murderers.

SECOND ARGUMENT.

All that is contested sincerely and in good conscience is either false, obscure or uncertain.

All factitious religions are contested sincerely and in good conscience.

Therefore, all factitious religions are false, or at least obscure and uncertain.

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It might be retorted that a natural religion will also be contested. It's easy to respond to this.

1st) It will only be contested by biased people, for it will surely be received by all those who have no contrary prejudices or those who are capable of thought and judgment.

2nd) A natural religion won't be contested. It might be called insufficient. All the factitious religions contain the natural religion, but they disfigure its principles by covering them with false conclusions. All men profess the natural religion. The problem is that they haven't found it sufficient.

3rd) If the objection based on the inner feelings that everyone brings into the world with them has any effect against me, it would work even more powerfully against you and against all factitious religions, full as they are of ridiculous and strange fantasies, contrary to common sense. I might not have built anything, but at least I will have destroyed the monstrous edifice of religions based on facts.

NINETEENTH TRUTH: NOBODY IS OBLIGED BY CONSCIENCE TO EMBRACE ANY FACTITIOUS RELIGION.

Nobody is conscience-bound to read, to hear or believe any fact at all. I defy all the theologians in the universe to bring me the least argument obligating me to hear them preach, even less to believe them when they tell of certain things, still less if these things are impossible or against the laws of nature. I'm referring to an initial sermon, or an apostolic sermon. The same applies to a book, to believing the facts it contains.

If a child finds itself in a desert, is it possible for it commit a crime? If he wishes to stay in his room without seeing or hearing anyone, will we call him God's enemy? If someone is born deaf, can he hear the preacher, can he know these holy books and these mysteries, will they be shared with him by signs? If he is born blind, can he read these books? Will these natural defects damn them?

Is he who is neither blind nor deaf duty-bound to know that such a book exists? Is he under some obligation to be literate? Is he obliged to understand the language it's written in? Is he obliged to trust a certain translation? Is he, finally, required to read it?

As for facts, we might well call a man insane if he refused to believe certain things, such as the existence of a city called Rome or Paris. But surely nobody will find him culpable or liable to the slightest penalty, since it's obvious that belief is not a free act.

If I were under any obligation to listen to a particular man who came to preach to me, I would also be required to listen to anyone else who might come to preach to me. There is no more reason to listen to the first sermon made by the mufti than that of the priest, the mullah, the brahmin, the minister, etc. If I am required to read a book, then I have to read them all, the Koran, the Gospel, the Bible, and all the rest.

A multitude of men call themselves the minister of the Deity. A multitude of books bear the epithet of holy. Until they're examined, everything remains equal, and how can we know which

one is true? How can we know it, without reading every last one of those that claim to be the work of God?

Here is a demonstration against all factitious religions. None of them, offering only simple allegations, without formal proofs, can produce anything but a semblance, not total conviction.

When the Apostles and Mahomet preached, by what rule was anyone required to leave their house and go and listen to them?

By what rule was anyone required to leave their house, hoping to meet them? How could those who were ill, enslaved, prisoners, do this? Why go and hear one in preference to another?

This single thought, profoundly considered, and pushed as far as it can go, is enough to rescue anyone from the blindness and prejudices of those who follow any factitious religion at all.

For ultimately, before I knew that there was such a book, dictated by God, containing his laws, and a certain man to interpret this book, preaching what I must believe, I didn't have the least suspicion of this idea. I could not, therefore, have any obligation to seek them out.

If I am obliged to run and buy this book and listen to this person, when rumors about either finally reach me, then I am also required to chase any rumor that might spread. I have no better reason in the first case than in the second.

In this way, never at peace, never certain, I will always be in doubt about which is the right one. They all start the same way; all of them say they are God's code; they are all stuffed full of miracles, fables, with many promises and threats; the same applies to the apostles: I am obliged to listen to all of them, if I am obliged to listen to any; and the same uncertainty remains.

To whom will a nation listen when a Rabbi, a Dervish, a Talapoin, a Christian monk, and Lutheran and Calvinist ministers all show up at the same time? The way of miracles is no longer available, all of them equally cite their own. If facts are pointed to, the debate becomes impossible. Even if

the people had all the necessary knowledge, a man's lifespan wouldn't be enough to end the debate.

If arguments and reasons predominate, *ergo* no more faith. If likelihoods have their way, *ergo* uncertainty. They will go back where they came from, unless the most crafty, brazen and harrassing ones don't win the day.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

Nobody is obliged by conscience to hear, read, or believe any fact at all.

People only join factitious religions by hearing, reading and believing certain facts.

Therefore, nobody is obliged by conscience to join any factitious religion.

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Far from any obligation by conscience to believe the facts, nobody has to accept even the most obvious truths suggested by another, whether they refuse to listen or fail to understand.

Can you prove the divinity of your books and your mission as well as you prove that equiangular triangles are proportional to each other? If someone refuses to believe you or listen to you, or if, while listening, they don't understand the demonstration, are they culpable? Why would they be under a greater obligation to believe that which is not [true] and cannot be demonstrated than that which is?

TWENTIETH TRUTH: ALL THE FACTITIOUS RELIGIONS ARE FALSE.

Bad arguments, however many you may pile up, will never make a good one, and a hundred thousand semblances can never destroy an unfailing truth.

It is true that, given the need to make a decision, we have to deal with semblances or bad arguments, but only when there are no good opposing arguments or when the other side has nothing to offer. But then we see clearly the risk of being mistaken.

Whereas, when there is a good argument, an incontestable proof, all likelihoods, all false and equivocal arguments vanish. We walk safely, we see clearly that we've done the right thing when we follow a metaphysical truth. We only stumble and come close to falling over, when our only guide is facts, books and discourses.

It is clear and obvious that a circular shape contains more liquid than all others of equal size. Invent any imaginable argument, posit any likelihood you please, produce a million texts and witnesses who testify that in a certain place there is a triangular dish, one foot tall and two in circumference, that contains as much water as a round dish of the same circumference, of the same height and the same depth, and what will you have advanced? Will you convince anyone?

What are factitious religions saying when they shout that they have such a great quantity of proofs that, even if they are subject to doubt, taken as a whole, they form a demonstration?

They're saying the same thing as a man who maintains that perpetual motion will soon be discovered since he saw a clock that lasted a whole year without being wound up.

A demonstration establishes a perfect certainty, leaves no doubt, nor change, nor opinion. On the contrary, a hundred million preacher's proofs, a hundred million semblances go up in smoke the moment a contradictory demonstration appears. And there are demonstrations against all factitious religions.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

Bad arguments, no matter how many there are, can't make a good one and a thousand semblances can't destroy a contrary truth.

All factitious religions have only appearances and bad arguments against unfailing truths.

Therefore, all factitious religions together can't destroy even one of the unfailing truths that are against them.

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To prove the minor premise, we only need to go into details. Anything that harmonizes with the first eternal truths will be received. What will come of this? There will only be one religion; we will all have the same one, which will amount to the same thing that I've read and heard about.

If men remove from religions what they have added to them, they will all agree on this point.

SECOND ARGUMENT.

Everything based on mere semblances and on likelihoods are false or ill-founded, if they are contrary to the first truths.

All factitious religions are based on mere semblances and on likelihoods contrary to the first truths.

Therefore, all factitious religions are false or ill-founded.

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I don't believe, M.R.F., that you will deny my minor premise. This is the best I can say in favor of factitious religions and Christianity in particular. If I set out to do this, I would prove well beyond doubt that they are not even based on semblances and likelihoods, but I will save that for the following part.

TWENTY-FIRST TRUTH: THE PROFESSION OF ANY FACTITIOUS RELIGION IS CRIMINAL.

It's a crime to risk committing a crime without some obvious need.

Our pulpits proclaim the obligation to flee anything close to an occasion for sin. And so, this point is recognized by those against whom I will use it. And what is such an occasion in comparison with the alternative in question, in professing a factitious religion?

As great as any temptation may be, as urgent as any occasion may be, we can promise ourselves that we'll get away with it, but by submitting to a factitious religion we will necessarily worship idols, if this religion is false. And, according to you, God is jealous of worship. Therefore, according to you there is a risk, an alternative risk where there is only a yes and a no, of becoming abominable before God by embracing any factitious religion at all, since they are false, uncertain and ill-founded.

He who thoughtfully follows a factitious religion is like a man who shoots a gun into a doorway, behind which he knows with certainty that a man is hiding. This man only occupies half of the doorway; thus, he might or might not hit him; chance will decide the matter.

Chance has dropped us, M.R.F., you and me, into the Roman Catholic religion, without choice, without prior examination, without judgment. We may have been born idolaters, just as our man who fired a shot might have committed homicide. If he didn't actually commit it, he ran the risk of committing it. He can't but be very criminal.

It would be vain to claim that it's necessary to belong to one factitious religion or another. All men have the natural religion to which they can hold until they have been shown another one, which came from God.

And we have just seen a dozen properly termed demonstrations proving the opposite.

The man in Siam, therefore, risks worshiping a mere man or a meaningless name; the Jew, risks attributing to God bizarre thoughts, weakness, injustice, ridiculous laws and passions; the Muslim risks taking an impostor for God's envoy and seeing barbaric laws as divine; Christians, generally speaking, risk seeing God as a tyrant and giving him companions and equals; the Papists risk worshiping a wafer and wine, placing his confidence in rotten bones, praying to rocks and wood. Oh! What greater crime could be committed? If God can indeed be offended by us, what sort of punishments must he have in store for such crimes as these, if he takes no account of our prejudices nor of our stupidity? Prudence forbids our submitting to false appearances; justice and indispensable duty require us to hold to what is clearest and most sound in matters of importance. What can we say, then, of someone who neglects his reason and his conscience, and the clearest light he has received from God, and turns to wicked, ambitious and self-seeking men, who assign him practices that are impertinent, insulting to God, shameful and ruinous for humanity, which prostitute to bodies and vile matter the respect which should be saved for the creator only?

What can we say about a man who attributes to the Supreme Being flaws and vices that nobody would dare accuse a common man of? Or someone who gives companions to God, who makes him tripartite, etc.? And this on the basis of books and hearsay, and against the reason and light he received from God, against his conscience which cries out to him from the bottom of his heart that these things are impossible?

One might well risk an action which is criminal in itself, when this action diminishes an evil that is certain *per se* and which is greater than the consequences of the action.

In a desperate birth, for example, where the child and the mother will definitely die, the child is killed to save the mother, or an operation is performed on the mother that puts her in obvious danger, but the child is saved. One of these two possible homicides is rendered innocent, since otherwise both people would definitely have died. Thus, one of them is benefited while the other is not wronged.

Nothing like this can be said of factitious religions. It is beyond question that the natural religion is innocent and good; there isn't the slightest rational and apparent proof that God expects anything else; there are a thousand obvious proofs of the opposite, it's impossible to disagree that the rites of all factitious religions are criminal *per se* and that only the positive order of God can remove the crime which they entail.

The risk is, at most, equal in embracing a factitious religion or not embracing any of them. If this religion is established by God, I am a rebel if I refuse to follow it; if it is only an invention of human pride, avarice and ambition, I am an idolater. Everything remains in a balance thus far, but reason presses down on the scales.

I have no proof that this religion is divine; I have a thousand proofs that it is not even worthy of a wise man. If I abstain from all these beliefs and all these rites, if God truly ordained them, I fail to see this; I see or think I see the opposite. My conscience and my reason won't bother me, they won't rise up before God against me. I'll have a very legitimate excuse, and a good excuse affects even the hardest of hearts. If, on the contrary, despite my intellect, I follow this religion and participate in idolatry by following it, my conscience and my reason will rise up against me before God. There is no compensation as in the case of a birth; uncertainty and inaction can't be as culpable as a wrong choice, and natural religion cannot be criminal.

DEMONSTRATIVE ARGUMENT.

It is criminal to risk committing a crime, without a clear and indispensable need.

We risk committing a crime without any clear and indispensable need if we follow any factitious religion.

Therefore, we will commit a crime if we follow any factitious religion.

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I prove the first part of the minor premise, that we risk committing a crime when we embrace any factitious religion.

SECOND ARGUMENT.

It's a crime to prostitute our worship to creatures and attribute to God any flaws, passions and vices.

We run the risk of prostituting our worship to creatures, attributing to God flaws, passions and vices by following any factitious religion.

Therefore, we run the risk of committing a crime by following any factitious religion.

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The minor premise of this syllogism is undeniable. It's quite sure and clear that, since the cult of factitious religion consists in worship, it is idolatrous when addressed to things that are only matter, such as a wafer, if this wafer is not God.

It is clear that the Trinity implies an imperfection. It is sure that Mahometanism attributes a weakness to God with the belief that circumcision pleases Him and that ablution washes away sins. Judaism depicts God as subject to anger, with a thirst for vengeance. The Gospel shows J.C. the son of God, and God, as being so vengeful against the Jews that he's afraid of speaking clearly to them, for fear that they might convert if they understood the meaning of his words. Original sin, predestination depict him as unjust and consequently flawed.

As for the second part of the minor premise of the first syllogism, that it's without a clear and indispensable need, this goes without saying until I've been shown this need, which can only result from a commandment of God. Produce your documents, dear priests, bonzes, talapoins, rabbis, mullahs, muftis, ministers; show us God's orders.

This point is disputed, turned a hundred different ways and reduced to impossibility throughout this part [of my text].

I believe, M.R.F., that in all that I've just said, I am not mistaken. Nobody can call all of this a bunch of "supposed demonstrations".

All that I've offered as real and incontestable truth and as the first principle, truly is such. Offer them to passersby, distribute them to lawyers, use them with businessmen, with artisans, with peasants, argue them in the scientific academies, nobody will cry foul. They aren't arbitrary or unintelligible; I fail to see any that leave room for the least doubt.

I would bet my life that there is no intelligent, disinterested and unbiased man who wouldn't receive them all without objection or the least quibble, when they are explained to him as I've striven to do.

The twenty-one propositions that I've just assembled are the conclusions drawn from formal syllogisms, of which these first truths, properly explained, comprise the major premise. Therefore, they are true demonstrations.

The creation of my syllogisms has occurred, as I think, within all the rules, except that some of them are a bit complicated, but their lack of simplicity doesn't mean they aren't conclusive. It is easy to go into detail and develop the argument; I've avoided this to keep from lapsing into an entire chain of tiresome quibbling.

Following the usual method, I would have had to give so many theorems of all these propositions and provide their formal demonstrations. But I've thought it better to begin by offering the incontestable truths and then drawing the conclusions from them and applying them to the question, than to begin with the propositions which are great paradoxes and which wouldn't fail to shock Fr. Malebranche, imbued with his religion as he is, and who has taken a different approach than subjecting it to a proper examination.

For in fine, M.R.F., you assume it without proving it. Moreover, I haven't strung together my propositions from one to the next, as is usually done. It's not any fear of causing puzzlement to the R.F. Malebranche, it's the fear of losing myself in a labyrinth of my own making. I've preferred to restrict myself to each truth without linking it to the others, in order to examine it from all sides, without distraction, without difficulty and without danger.

I've collected all these conclusions so that, appearing as a single point of view, they can make an impression together and strike harshly enough to show you, M.R.F., that they indeed merit a reply.

A REFUTATION OF FAITH

I have only one monster left to fight, a monster that's more bizarre and more inconceivable than the fabled chimera: a creature of the mind which was forged by human folly, proposed by the impudence of vanity, pride, and greed, supported by the pleasure of dominating the heads of men, and received by laziness and stupidity; finally, a monster that example and custom continue to tolerate.

I'm referring to *faith*, an airy word which signifies absolutely nothing, or which means the least acceptable thing you can imagine, if not the slightest of trifles.

If you simply think for a minute, you'll find that there is no business, no matter how insignificant, which isn't presented as a fact in religion. Ten *pistoles* are a trifle for a tax-collector: but would he give them to some stranger who asked for them, saying that he's leaving tomorrow for the South Sea, and that he'll give him ten thousand *louis* when he returns in two years?

This stranger is at least a hundred thousand times more credible than the ministers of any of the factitious religions. What this man says is at least possible, and his promise is within the bounds of natural laws. Our religion pronounces this word "faith" loudly, as if it were the only one which preached it, which needed it, and which found a gold mine, with an inexhaustible source of honor, in these five letters and in a vain sound.

All factitious religions demand the same thing. Greek and Roman paganism demanded that people believe that Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto had divided up the universe; that the smoke of incense, the blood of butchered animals, put one in favor with these Gods; that they united with the statues consecrated to them; that they were more present in the statues and temples dedicated to them than elsewhere; that they performed daily miracles, etc. Even though all of these things were contrary to reason and were offered without proof, men were required to profess to believe in them, on penalty of atheism and heresy.

The paganism of today demands nearly the same thing. Judaism requires the belief that removing a part of the body is God's seal, that God dwells in a temple, that his main residence is in heaven, that the Hebrews are his people, and that he hates all other nations, that certain animals are not to be eaten, that touching a cadaver causes impurity, etc., all of which is contrary to reason and lacking proof, but which we must nevertheless believe on penalty of atheism and heresy. Mahometanism also wants us to believe that circumcision is necessary, that water poured on the face and arms cleans sin away, that the angel Gabriel came bringing the Koran, which is written on an emerald table in heaven, that women have no part in the true paradise, etc., all of which is against reason and without proof, but which you have to believe nevertheless, on penalty of atheism and heresy.

Christianity requires nothing different, and offers no more proofs or reason that we must believe that God is made of three pieces; that he punishes the sin of a single man in an infinite number of others; that nature is corrupt; that one of the three pieces of the Deity had to be sacrificed to the other to satisfy all three; that this satisfaction will only be applied to a small number chosen by whim, without the least visible sign of this supposed satisfaction, pacification and reparation; or that death, disease and errors are any less evident for all that, even though they are ascribed to the sin that is supposed to be atoned for and to this corruption of nature which is supposed to be remedied; that we must believe that books which aren't up to the level of a man of mediocre virtue, intelligence and conscience were dictated by God, etc.

The Roman catechism has brought together all the articles of faith of Judaism and of all the pagan sects. It has added some which even the most extravagant pagans never dreamed of, and these in a prodigious amount: all of which are without proof, against reason and the senses, but which men must nevertheless profess to believe on penalty of being burned or suffering a loss of honor and property and the dissipation of their family.

Something else that is common to all factitious religions and which demands no less faith, being similarly contrary to reason and lacking proof, is the ministry. They all have priests, pontiffs, doctors and interpreters, i.e., men who, free from the cares of life, live at their ease from the abuses they have introduced and the absurdities which they laugh at when they see a whole people tranquilized, or rather, spellbound. They treat this people as a slave, they constantly add to its

yoke, heaping precepts upon precepts, ceremonies upon ceremonies, creeds upon creeds, and always for their benefit, their interest and their pride. A glance, a moment's attention reveals that true religion has no ministers, that the true God has nothing to do with them, that they are to other men as wolves are to sheep and that they are the ones who have made the natural religion, dictated by God himself, into a factitious religion, full of fables, impertinence, and crimes against nature.

Pride and their interest are the foundations of the whole edifice. Take away these two articles, let the pontiffs, priests and doctors lose their prestige and wages and they'll care no more about their own religion than their neighbors'. If those folks oppose the least trifle and maintain the tiniest detail in which they don't seem to have a direct stake, it's because they are afraid that the whole might be tainted by iniquity. They know well that the least crack can ruin a poorly constructed building.

Every day, lawyers, magistrates, and all the formalities of the Palace are depicted on the stage. The judges, who hold authority in their hands and who might directly put an end to this, allow it and laugh like everyone else. It's because, knowing that justice is a real virtue, and that its tribunals are an absolute necessity, they aren't afraid that its falseness and futility might be discovered. They themselves boldly criticize the abuses and those who commit them. Soldiers don't suffer cowards. They are delighted to see them mocked: when an officer has allowed an insult, he has to leave the corps. Churchmen assume the protection of the most horrid crimes, they never let themselves be punished in any of their order; they don't even want people talking about such things.

Nobody would dare expose to the public the least vice peculiar to priests, not even the ones that are unrelated to religion *per se*. What would the whole sacred order of the clergy say if someone showed them the softness, the silkiness of the Bishops, the abbots and of all their rich men, if they were depicted with their mistresses, celebrating Lent with heaps of game, etc.? If a parish priest were depicted refusing absolution to a bailiff who confesses to having been paid for riding on horseback, when he only went on foot [to govern his community], and the bailiff profiting from burials where the Priest demands payment for his presence, besides his upkeep and his rights, even though he was forty leagues away from the place: meanwhile, the poet, the actors and the

audience would be excommunicated and the King would have no peace until he'd forbidden all theater for a long time.

What a storm would be stirred up by the fearsome order of monks if anyone performed a farce about their plots to gobble up inheritances, to be introduced to rich widows, to steer young girls in their direction, and everything that goes on in this holy trade, if their brutish drunkenness, their gluttony were shown, if the people were confronted with all they say about religion and their own institution when wine loosens their tongues. At bottom, they are right: faith! faith! They must be thought saints, people beyond time, beyond the world, detached from all the passions, who are devoted to God, who have renounced all creatures. Without faith, they are lost.

We mustn't attack the least practice of these holy persons; their clothes must not be used, or even their terms. It would take so little to awaken the people; the people, once awakened, might so easily think certain things, and the least thought would tear all these rogues to shreds.

Finally, let's examine what this faith is which leads to so many fine things; which takes subjects away from their sovereigns; which makes kings of so many unworthy subjects; kings, louts, and nefarious types; saints of the most abominable, immoral men; which arms sons against fathers, wives against husbands, which takes bread from the sick, from the elderly, from the crippled and from children to stuff the gullets of young able-bodied, lazy monks.

Sure, *bella cosa* and *bene trovata* is the thing that gives such a lifestyle to so many people, *omni genere*: forgive this burlesque language, M.R.F.; but it fits in so naturally here. Ultimately, what is called having faith *a parte Dei*, is nothing other than allowing oneself to be led by the nose, to generally do whatever pleases certain men, against all reason, for their interest and against one's own, to be stripped of common sense, of freedom, of one's goods in favor of certain proud and lazy men, without these gentlemen being worthy in the slightest of such deference and sacrifices. That is the sincere definition of faith, or, if you prefer, faith is a voluntary blindness, or an acquiescence extorted by craft and cunning on the fine airy pretext of God's commands.

Taking this path, all you have to do is invent; go as far as the imagination can reach, without exempting the utter heights of extravagance, people will take pride in them as is common in

matters of religion. The experiment is easy to make: stuff the catechism with all you like, see whether it isn't all accepted equally by your children and the grown men who are converted.

The Turks have made faster and more extensive progress than the Christians. The English and Dutch do the same as ministers: if they aren't as elevated, it's because their ministers don't exert themselves as much, since there's little in it for them and since they aren't members of a community which never says "that's enough".

Conversions cause rivers of gold, pearls and gemstones to flow to Rome and into society. The Pope, who has the means to pay for their services in a thousand ways, might, for example, get six million from China, catholicized without honor or glory. Besides, I think the Protestant ministers are in better faith, more humane, less capable of certain gymnastic feats common among our missionaries. The Dutch are too far away from the Barbary and the Spanish.

In passing, tell me, M.R.F.: wouldn't the gift of miracles be as necessary and essential for our missionaries in America — especially the gift of tongues — as it was for the Apostles? I see no excuse, but a good answer, which is that they all have it just as much as the Apostles did. I'm quite sure that in a few centuries one will be able to read a fine *Legend* and a beautiful *Acts of the Apostles of Rome*. They will be reported to have brought springs and great rivers up from the earth; the dead will have been resurrected, all sorts of diseases will have been healed; they will have crossed the sea dry-shod, flown across huge lakes. These books may have already been written, complete with images and stamps. Blissful men will be depicted in the arms of angels carrying them to and fro: it will appear in good time, written by these blessed fathers, by these holy personages; crosses, engraved blades will be buried only to be discovered by chance afterwards.

Here it will be said that a venerable man, in a fit of ecstasy, saw God who showed him all of America wallowing in idolatry, with a compass the invention of which will be a miracle and a revelation due to the holiness of the personage, and to the need to go and put so many nations under the power of J.C. He will have a good go at it. This is how religion and its henchmen seize control of a thousand things and glory in things in which they play no more of a role than I had in the conquests of Alexander. Don't the Franciscans and the Jacobins depict their founder as wrenching lightning from God's hands, when he was about to exterminate the entire human

species in the year 1200? Don't the latter attribute to themselves all the glory of the battle of Lepanto, on the solid grounds that it was won on the same day they held a certain procession? Faith sees all of this distinctly; none of the Confraternity of the Rosary doubts it. Reason cries out: "O rogues! Upright and brave people suffer hunger and thirst, the sun's heat, wounds, death; but such people aren't thanked, only those reprobates who put on an act while the spit is turning, the casseroles are smoking on the stove and the delicious iced wine awaits them". Ah, infamous impostors, impudent seducers, how gladly would I leave you to the Algerians, drop you off at the Republic of Salé, etc. to see if, by force of your processions, you could escape a thrashing at their hands.

But this is the definition of faith that I learned in the catechism, it's a gift of God by which we believe in him and in all that he has revealed to his Church.

What will remain of the anatomy of this excellent description, of the analysis of this apt definition? Smoke, nothing at all, the same thing as a shadow at the approach of light: it should be more striking, but since it's nothing but a deprivation, it vanishes; however, the shadow looks real to the ignorant, to crude minds, to unreflective men; they say that it goes, that it moves, etc.

It's a gift of God. What can this mean? Everything is a gift of God: a river is a gift of God, by which water continually flows in a certain place; the sun is a gift of God, by which a huge part of the universe is granted light. If this is how it's meant, even if faith were something, it has no content of its own. Everything can be defined as a gift of God.

If a miracle, a particular act of God is meant, something finite and determinate, in favor of a certain individual, for [a certain purpose]²⁸ and at a specified time, an extraordinary act of his power, at the end of which this individual will have a change of mind? In this case, then, show me any signs of this amazing deed. He who truly possesses it ought to sense it; if it's truly real, it ought to be perceptible. Any enthusiast, any mystic, any fanatic could simply say that he feels it.

²⁸ Ms. 1192: "For a certain purpose..."

But: 1st) These can be found in all the religions; consequently, no profit comes from their disposition. All of them tell the truth, or they're all raving mad; at very least, they have the same reason to believe it.

2nd) All the followers of the different religions are equally taken, retained and stubborn, and we must either allow that they all received this gift from God, or that nobody does. If the gift from God was only had by one party, it would make a stronger impact than any other kind of conviction.

3rd) The same thing could be said generally of all kinds of conviction. People are only convinced of religion as they are of the power of the Roman Empire, as a peasant is of the craft of a charlatan who swindles a few coins from him, promising to heal his gout. Find me a hundred atoms of difference between this conviction and what the priest has to offer, or the imam, the rabbi, the talapoin, in matters of religion in the mind of the same peasant. If there is any, it's a fluke. He might be more convinced by the power of a charlatan than by any article in his catechism. Probabilities are the same in the speeches of the charlatan and the preacher; the villagers fall for both of them.

When the same man were converted by a missionary and swindled by a crook or a charlatan, he would feel the same thing without any difference. He would be taken in by the semblance of good faith, the semblance of reason, human expressions, gestures, tones of voice, a certain authority emanating from their boldness, finally, the talents of each. Constantine felt nothing different when he was led to become a Christian than when his wife persuaded him to kill his son. We only believe in religion because we're told in a certain manner that it's the truth. We're told this authoritatively, without giving us time to examine it and in a time when we were incapable of doing so.

It is certain that we believed before we examined whether what we were told was true or false. Truth, then, plays no part in our belief. In the same way, other people end up believing the opposite; we would believe the same thing if we were in their place. The truth is said to be what one believes, without being able to say that one believes because it's the truth.

Oh! Providence places the elect in the spot where it sees they will be educated according to its wishes. I might, for my whole reply, point out the impossibility of such elections in relation to the justice of God. I will go further and give a demonstration on the fact itself, to rebut all these vain loopholes.

All I need to do is apply the principle that chance is not uniform and all the arguments I'll make in the 3rd notebook about foreknowledge in relation to prophecy, of which here is an early sample. Give me a hundred thousand black men twenty years old, standing in a line. I'll make the first a Roman Catholic, the second a Calvinist, the 3rd a Lutheran, the 4th a Turk, the 5th a pagan, the 6th a Socinian, and so on to the end, or, if you prefer, I'll make ten of them pagans, ten Socinians, followed by four Protestants, and so on with all the mummeries you can imagine. I can't read the supposed predestination of things; therefore, I must act by chance, but I act with certainty and uniformity, therefore not randomly, therefore there is no predestination, therefore there is neither election nor any elect. Add that, if God causes the elect to be born in those places where they will be educated in his religion, he must cause the reprobate to be born in the places where they will be educated in false doctrines. And by what sign should I recognize that I was born one of the elect in France, where I'm given a Christian catechism, and not as a reprobate? All men must be perpetually uncertain about the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of their country, without any hope of solving the problem. Here again, M.R.F., is one of these little lines that can strike you dead. We are, you and I, in this situation and we abandon common sense when we indulge in election and predestination. There is nothing to be said. At bottom, faith is impossible, as it's thought of with regard to what they call the mysteries. Understanding is required for belief, and you can't say that you believe what you don't understand.

A peasant will readily believe that squaring the longest side of a triangle by one of its corners is equal to the two squares made on the two other sides, although he can't grasp either the reason behind it or the demonstration, since he understands each part of the proposition. He knows what a square is, what a square's corner is, what a triangle and what equality mean; but tell him the same proposition in Latin, and you can no longer say that he believes it; at most you could say that he believes that his interlocutor is telling the truth. Thus, it is superfluous to give him any explanation. It must therefore suffice the apostles to say: "We are the sort who never lie"; nothing more need be said. All the rest would be the same as if they preached in Chinese in Paris and in

French at Peking, or, if you like, as if they said a series of words made up at random or, perhaps, as if they had said nothing at all.

Finally, a nothing is not a gift of God and faith is a nothing. If it's not a nothing, then it's a substance or an accident. If it's a substance, then it's one of these *entitula* which the Peripatetics add to the soul, like the substantial forms to matter, and, consequently, a chimera. The same applies if it's an absolute accident, like the qualities of these same philosophers.

It remains, then, to be said that it's a modification of the soul, that God turns the soul in such a way that it believes certain things. This supposition is easy to destroy: 1st) If it were the case, this action of God on the soul would be sufficient without apostles or missionaries or any priests. But nobody ever ends up believing in this way, therefore suggestion alone has an effect, as in the other affairs of the world, where God acts out of the ordinary no more than when fire heats those who approach it; 2nd) the soul never believes anything without certain arguments, good or bad, without which neither books nor preachers make any progress. Insist that God acts along with the preachers and these books by giving them the gift of believing in them. Is this not patently ridiculous, M.R.F.? Would God do with two what he could do with one? The gift of faith would suffice by itself, at least for the deaf, but no deaf man would ever have faith, if this gift alone were relied upon. Why, then, so many reasonings at the loss of sight, so many motions, so many crimes and plots? 3rd) Finally, anyone might equally boast of this miracle in his own case. What special sign does the Jesuit have that the Rabbi, the Dervish and the Talapoin lack, that God acts with him? What sign does he who becomes a Roman Catholic have that God acts for and in him, that is absent with those who become a Jew, a Turk, a pagan? This is so clear that people have the very same opinion about the faith of the followers of all the other religions as of their own: we make Turks swear on the Koran, as we swear on the Gospel; the Turks make Christians swear on the Gospel.

Let's come to the second member of the definition by which we believe in him. Nothing in particular is required to believe in God: the universal gift made to all men, reason, is more than sufficient for that. The moment you realize that something comes from God, you believe it even despite yourself. There will be neither miracle nor merit in this, any more than in believing that it's daytime at noon.

It's a very misplaced term here, this word "believe". Nobody believes in God, they know Him; nobody "believes God", or "in God"; they know that what comes from God is his pure truth; it's only a case of drawing the right conclusions. There is no need for instruction in this science, it's a sight acquired without external support, by paying attention only, or at most with a little reflection.

If a gift of God were necessary, a particular act of the Creator in men in matters of religion, it would be a gift to know that a certain thing comes from his hand, not a gift of believing that which comes from his hand. When a general sends an order to an officer, it's not an order of obedience, which is never in doubt; it's only to make his wishes known; this is why the general signs this order or sends it with a known *aide de camp*.

What is required is not, therefore, to believe what God has said, but to believe that God actually said certain things. But this can only be believed by a faith that is human, and consequently dubious and uncertain, which must be examined and which can even be denied a hearing.

The third member, "and in that which he has revealed to his Church", is of the same nature. There is no need for any extraordinary gift to believe what the Church says about God. The issue is believing that God has the necessary ministers, vicars and interpreters; it's believing that a certain number of men who have nothing to offer but impudence, pride and avarice, are the Church of God; it's to recognize that certain books full of fables, follies, puerilities, contradictions, pernicious and abominable things, are divine revelations.

This definition, as a whole, is therefore false, factually false. It should be: "It's a gift of God by which we believe that he gave a revelation in writing and that certain men compose his Church, which is the depositary and interpreter thereof." It would then be correct in the religious henchmen's sense, but just as correct as any chimera or nothingness you could name. This gift is no less real, as we've seen in the discussion of the first member of the false definition.

I've seen other definitions of faith somewhere: it's a consent that is not evident, therefore uncertain and liable to error; it's a persuasion based on the testimony of sincere and enlightened

people; and on what basis can these people be considered sincere and enlightened? Their interest excludes any hope of sincerity; and how can their enlightenment be estimated? Most of the ministers of factitious religions are crass and ignorant men, brutish imbeciles; if there are any capable ones among them, if there are any men of science and learning, that is also the case with all factitious religions, which are all the antipodes of each other; aside from that, the scheming and violence employed shows quite well that they have no good arguments.

When they say that God wanted faith to be a merit, and that there would be none if things were clearly known, is equally well grounded: 1st) I deny that God finds impertinence meritorious, and I maintain that it is impertinent to act without reason, to believe the incredible without any basis, to accept impossible things without a manifestly infallible testimony. The merit is not in believing, but in acting according to one's belief, just as the merit of a soldier is not in having a sword, but in putting it to use.

God has given us the knowledge of our duty, as the prince gave the sword to the soldier. This sword isn't what glorifies the soldier, but what he does with it; and to the complete contrary, in factitious religions, all the merit resides in belief and faith, which is the same as congratulating the soldier for his sword.

2nd) Nor would there be more merit if faith were a gift of God, if things were known and believed by ordinary means, by the senses and through reason, since these are equally the gifts of God. The gift of faith will be only another type of gift, which won't be any more meritorious: the merit of a soldier lies in killing his prince's enemies; if he does it with a sword, a pike or a musket with which this prince armed him, that doesn't affect his merits. There can be merit only in what is free and what belongs to us; I would have no more merit in believing by this gift than by seeing with my eyes. We can leave this argument here.

People believe religions just like other things in the world, or by a gift of God. If it's in the normal way, this belief is subject to the same drawbacks, to error and the misfortunes that come with it; if it's a gift of God, there is no merit in it, any more than in feeling pain or pleasure in certain circumstances.

3rd) It would then become necessary to believe everything indiscriminately, and to belong to all the religions. They all demand faith with the same arguments for demanding it. If someone boasts of no longer having any, or of having a better one, the discussion is interminable; even if, by racking one's brain for a whole lifetime, greater likelihood was found in one than another, this wouldn't prove anything, since all of these likelihoods put together can't form a solid foundation, while the opposite is demonstrated. Besides, you aren't proving that something is good when you say that it's less bad than something else; a punch to the head isn't a good thing, although it is less bad than a bullet to the head. You might say in a way that a grown man is more capable of lifting a thousand pounds than a child is; it's still false to say he can lift it. And in this sense, it is indeed possible to find one factitious religion that's better grounded than another: it remains true that it's not true at all.

Here, to be sure, is enough to destroy the word "faith", a heap of impossibilities, futilities, contradictions and absurdities, to demolish its definition and all that might be imagined about it. But I won't stop there. Here, M.R.F., are even more reflections that might produce more light and dissipate the shadows more fully.

The faith of those who take part in a factitious religion, even if it were divine, is a purely human faith, as in the way I believe that Pharamond is the founder of the French monarchy. It's only on the basis of human testimonies that these people believe their books are divine and their ministers and interpreters are divinely instituted. If some idiot tells me that a wise man said something, I believe it on the basis of the faith of that same idiot. If some Roman had gone to tell Brutus that Cato was publicly declaring that the party of Caesar was in the right, Brutus, dropping his weapons, wouldn't have acted on the basis of Cato's faith.

2nd) Respond to this dilemma, M.R.F.: either there is a reason to believe, or there is not. If there is, then faith has nothing to do with it, there is no use for this particular or extraordinary gift. If there is not, then all religions have the same right; they are all equally built in the air, on fanaticism and blindness.

3rd) If faith is a gift of God, then I only have it when He gives it to me. It's not my fault if He doesn't give it to me. The king doesn't punish anyone for not being a nobleman. I am no more criminal for failing to believe than for failing to fly; God needs to give me wings first.

If you say that we must ask for faith, how can I know when I've obtained it? And by what signs can I know it came from God?

We must either ask for faith in a particular religion, or for the right one in general. By asking for it in a particular religion, I don't know what I'm doing; it might be the worst one of all. By asking for faith in the right one, should I then have faith in a particular one? How will I know this was God's gift, and not my own weakness, succumbing under the weight of education or craftiness, deception or scheming? There would need to be a clear miracle showing that my consent is the effect of a particular act of God, and not that of men, who impose on us by authority, knowledge or finesse. Until this miracle happens, I must go on asking for faith, whatever religion I may be in, never having a legitimate reason to believe that I'm in the true one. What do we have, M.R.F., on this subject beyond what the Jews, the Mahometans, the pagans, etc. could claim?

4th) If faith is believing in bizarre things, then the most bizarre religion is the best one; it takes more faith, it will have more merit, each can stake a claim to being the best one by simply adding further follies to their original fantasies, and brutalities to these follies.

5th) Any impertinence you can imagine, and the most horrid of crimes, can be objects of faith. We have no less right to say that augurs, prophetic dreams tell us the future, as that chanting certain words will bring victory in battle or produce fertility. Any given scoundrel dressed in purple has no less of a right to give a panegyric on sodomy than the priests of Tauris [Crimea] and Mexico had to count among the divine honors they offered their gods the massacre their own citizens or foreigners; or than anyone has for the cruel persecution of so many good people for the sake of religion; or for these extraordinary perjurers, or murders against the common faith, or these massacres depicted on medallions and to which monuments are erected. Our ancestors had equally good reasons to enclose some of their children in burning statues where they were soon suffocated and reduced to ashes, than we have to slowly burn to death these miserable victims of pride and greed who are cloistered from childhood, where they are forcibly deprived of all their

natural rights, without leaving them anything to devour but their own heart, if they aren't brave enough to jump off the roof, as I've seen happen more than once. The people of Candia and the Egyptians would have equally good reasons to add the prostitution of their wives and daughters to their holy rites; and certain peoples of the Indies have just as many good ones favoring certain practices that are even more ridiculous, as we have to prostitute our worship to gold, silver, wood, to prayers, to bread and wine. I have just as much right to give whatever I want to atone for my sins as there is for the waters of baptism and circumcision, or for a cross on the forehead with charcoal. I have just as much right to claim that there is holiness in whatever deed I like, as anyone has to prevent poor souls from making a living on certain days and eating what they have available, as anyone has to force them to make certain offerings. All it takes, therefore, is to activate the big word "faith", and demand whatever you want.

6th) Say or do whatever you wish, only the clear sight of the truth can lead to absolute certainty; only the self-evidence of a first principle, or a demonstration drawn from conclusion to conclusion, without any offense against common sense. The henchmen of religion, all the priestly horde, the blissful crowd, the bigots, the fanatics, the illuminated ones and the mystics can say as much as they like that they believe firmly in this fact, in that mystery, but they don't understand what they're saying. They believe strongly, but not firmly, they are not as unshakeable in their belief, this hogwash shrouded with the name of mystery, as they believe that 12 can be divided into $1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$ and that 13 can't. Do they want a more incontestable proof of this, despite all they might say while raising their eyes to heaven and taking a sweetened tone?

We can see now and will always see people who lose their belief and dismiss these mysteries. What we don't see and never will see is people changing their opinion about the aliquots of 12 and 13. These Pharisees are therefore mistaken, these stubborn heads refuse all self-reflection; they don't do what they say, even though they might believe it; it isn't absolutely certain that they'll never change; they themselves can't answer for it; thousands upon thousands of people have had the same opinion, who have abandoned it. It's credible that Sozzini, Bemar, Luther, Calvin, Ochino and Beza were all very good Papists at the age of 26. I can answer for myself, and I don't think anyone surpassed me on this point.

They will charge me again, saying that if there were any greater certainty, there would be no more faith and no merit at all. Common sense would also intervene, saying that such faith and merit are impossible; that people only believe according to their reasons for believing, that preconceptions, authority and example are bad reasons; that such arguments can't bring certainty, but only bedazzlement, and acquiescence at best. In this way, whole nations believe they descend from the gods; in this way many cities believe they are unique, in this way, people have believed in substantial forms, the abhorrence of a vacuum, etc.

[They can] also say that these people who have changed were not the elect, that grace was lacking in their case. I will ask you which of the two lacks grace: the Protestant who becomes a Papist, or the Papist who turns Protestant; he who was a Jew and becomes a Christian, or the Christian who becomes a Jew; the Mahometan who takes to the Gospel, or the Christian who takes to the Koran? Everyone equally blesses God for the grace he favored them with; each party equally says that God abandoned the apostate, but this grace will be examined and dealt with, just as we are examining faith here, in the following notebook.

Present us once again this gift of God, ruined as it is, and I will prove once more that it's a phantom. Content yourself with telling savages that they should ask for faith, pray day and night, whip themselves, say thousands of Masses, discover relics, get them down, parade them around; and have these savages baptized, confirmed; let the Jews and Mahometans circumcise them; let some make pilgrimages to Mecca, others to Jerusalem; let the pagans burn hecatombs, tauroboliums, etc.; and the savages will never know a single article of the catechism of any religion. I who scoff at such things and know what to do, I will teach them and make many of them believe.

All of this can only be denied with the lips. Those who deny it that way are immediately refuted: you only have to take their children and give them to the doctors of another religion, you'll see what use they make of the gift of God.

7th) Before I can be obliged to believe any factitious religion, even assuming its truth, there would have to be a prior obligation to believe such truths, for me to see this obligation naturally with my reason, just as I see that nothing can't produce anything, or for me to feel it instinctively, the

way I believe that one should treat others as one wants to be treated. No man sees, or knows, or feels any such thing.

Really! To cast from heaven to hell St. Augustine and a great number of bishops who denied the antipodes and damn the majority of men for believing the Earth to be larger than the Sun and the Moon larger than the fixed stars. Go on and condemn the whole world, for there isn't a single man who believes everything that's true, not even the truths that have been presented to him. There isn't one man on earth who doesn't die a heretic in this way, and in a final state of impenitence.

We are, therefore, obliged to believe only certain truths, at most. Really, which ones? Only those that appear credible. Then, if I'm told something that doesn't seem worthy of belief, I have no obligation; I'm not required to assume the yoke of any factitious religion at all. All of them appear baseless to me, even if it's true that one of them actually has a good foundation, just as nobody is required to hear any given sound that is made. This sound is either within our reach, or it isn't. If it is, we'll hear it; if it isn't, it's impossible for us to hear it, no matter what sort of commandment we may have been given and despite our own wishes. In religion we are therefore like those who claim they hear thunder all Winter long, or who, living in Paris, claim they hear cannons firing in China. Since this thought is decisive all by itself, allow me, M.R.F., to turn it one more way.

Either nobody is required to believe any truths, or people are required to believe all of them, or nobody is even required to believe certain ones.

If nobody is required to believe any, then everyone is free, and anyone would be quite insane to burden themselves with any factitious religion at all. If we are obliged to believe all of them, then everyone would be damned immediately without exception; nobody has ever managed to believe every truth, even the most obvious ones.

If we are obliged to believe some truths, who will say which ones? Everyone will point to the ones they believe in, without regard to why they believe them, whether it's for good reasons or simple prejudice, bias and education. Who will decide among so many pretenders? We must necessarily be limited to what is credible. Therefore, nobody can judge except for themselves.

It's up to each individual to sense the force of the arguments and the degree of their force, just as they feel the impression made on their eyes by lighted objects, and on their ears by vibrating bodies, and how they feel the varying degrees of this impression, which cause a sight or a sound to be more or less powerful, more or less sure or doubtful. Nobody else can judge this, i.e., nobody else can judge how I see or hear, whether I see clearly or obscurely. It is, therefore, up to each individual to pronounce and definitively declare for himself which truths he finds credible, which ones he is bound to believe, and according to which he must act, i.e., the ones he is convinced of.

It is, then, one of the most basic truths, that a mortar would take many years to fall from a fixed star. Is this truth credible for a peasant? If he believes it, it's on the basis on the authority of those from whom he learns it; it's also up to him to judge whether this authority is sufficient. Will you say that he should consult someone else? I ask again, who would he ask? And this is an infinite source of trouble, which only he can resolve in matters of religion. Some turn to men, others to books, some to the Gospel and to the Pope, others to the Pope only, others to the Gospel only, others to the Koran and to the Mufti, others to the Rabbis, others to the bonzes, the talapoins, etc. We would also have to ask someone else to find out who's telling the truth, and whom we should consult? We must always consult ourselves as to the principle, the source and the root of our conviction.

Since I must judge for myself about the foundation on which I can base my conviction, judging without passion or partiality, taking all possible precautions and in good faith, I am not guilty before God if I'm mistaken. And, when I judge in this way, I find all factitious religions false, ridiculous, for the most part abominable, and all of them insulting to God and pernicious to men, as I've already said.

Having consulted the theologians, I find them all to be scoundrels who offer arguments of which they can see the absurdity, and which they wouldn't rely on in any other area of life, where an ounce of their self-interest is involved. I see that all these personalities who present themselves as venerable figures are public tyrants and that all these merchants of spiritual goods would soon have closed their shops if they only paid in spiritual currency.

I am therefore right and even obliged to keep to the natural religion that God himself has dictated to me, that he engraved on my heart, that I see as clearly as the light at noon, as sensibly as I hear a cannon while in the battery, that is, without any difficulty, without looking for it, and without ambiguity.

Factitious religions are not only pernicious to men by the way they pillage men's goods and liberty, they are also the negation of morality and of the true virtues.

We must certainly make a distinction between virtue *per se*, moral good, and Christian virtues, Muslim virtues, Jewish virtues, Brahmin virtues, etc. It's devious the way the ministers of all religions give these epithets to actions that are good in themselves. There is only one conscience and one probity, there is only one kind of virtue which is always the same, and which cannot change. If probity, conscience and virtue were dependent on religion, then there would be as many different kinds of probity, conscience and virtue as there are religions, since these are all opposed to each other.

If by way of excuse it's replied that all the religions agree on probity, conscience and virtue, if this is true, then don't praise any of them on this point. Everyone agrees on arithmetic and geometry; all nations boast of being more rational than others on this point. Nobody says German, English, Spanish, Italian arithmetic; nobody says French, Spanish, Russian geometry, — I mean at bottom, although this might be said about their various methods. These sciences are the same in all nations.

Virtue is all that is according to reason and conscience.

The virtues of religion are all that is according to the precepts particular to each of them. When I send my newborn child, through cold and heat, two or three leagues away for some water to be poured over its head, for someone to spit in its eyes and put salt in its mouth, this is a Christian virtue; when Jews or Turks have theirs circumcised, this is a Mahometan virtue; when an Indian woman leaps onto the pyre where her husband's corpse is being burned, this is a Brahmin virtue, etc.

But when I keep my word, whatever the cost, when I generously face danger to preserve the liberty of my father, my brothers, my family and my citizens, when I take the last dollar from my wallet to pay my debts, when I live in poverty rather than enrich myself by means of deception, boasting and flattery, etc., these are true virtues.

It is therefore gross malice and fraud, or detestable foolishness to confuse moral virtues, true virtues, with the sort of impertinence found in the factitious religions and apply to these true virtues names derived from religious virtues.

Let this serve as a prelude, M.R.F.: kindly hear me without passion or prejudice. I hope to prove clearly what I've said: that factitious religions completely annihilate morality.

I mean by morality that which relates to free acts, to the extent that these can be good or bad, rational or brutish, just or unjust, compatible with or contrary to society and the intentions of nature, i.e., the eternal will of the creator. Virtue or vice consist in this, it's what makes men good or wicked and it's what makes them worthy of rewards or punishments before God.

But it is quite obvious that the more laws there are, the harder it is to observe all of them. Nobody keeps more than a certain number of them, the selection of which usually has to do with how easy they are, or the most urged upon them, those on which others most insist. People are also led, by a secret inclination, to observe those that lead most to public approbation, and this is why so many wicked people fast, say their set prayers, light candles, build chapels, pay for gilding images, etc.

In other cases, the choice falls on certain of these laws where there is a real facility among some apparent and specious difficulties, like keeping one's virginity, although it's a thousand times more difficult to be a good father or a good husband than to be neither and retire into a desert or a convent, although it's a thousand times harder to be a good man amid the difficulties of everyday life than to be a good monk or a good hermit, and consequently that there are a thousand times more virtues in it.

However, virginity and the life of a monk are given as the summit of virtue and perfection because of a few pleasures one deprives oneself of, which are only a trifle in comparison with the troubles one avoids. If this were the right place for it, I would spare nothing to prove that these virtues of factitious religions are true vices according to reason, and even according to the Gospel.

It's far worse when these kinds of imaginary virtues are incessantly repeated and preached, and only those to whom they are attributed are divinized, except when this is delivered as payment for some great service given, or attempted, in favor of the one who hands out these apotheoses, Our Holy Father the Pope. It's far worse when transgressing these fanatical laws is more severely criticized than breaking natural laws, and when the latter goes unpunished.

That is why so few peasants skip Mass, the sermons, the Muslim prayers, etc., although they have a thousand good reasons not to go, such as foul weather, distance between home and temple. Very few Papists are seen eating eggs on Lent, very few Turks drink wine, very few Jews eat pork, very few Brahmins kill animals for food: nearly all of them are no better in their dealings, deceptive, negligent in their work, abusive to their wives, etc.

This is why you don't find a single Christian judge who fails to have his children baptized, no Jew who fails to circumcise his own, no Roman Catholics who skip Mass and fail to attend the Easter service, etc.; nearly all are in the habit of accepting gifts and solicitation; of letting poor beggars languish while they sleep or enjoy themselves, of neglecting the studies necessary for them, of not examining things sufficiently, etc., not counting the obvious unjust deeds.

That is why so many religious officers and soldiers are never absent at Mass, keep their books of hours and their rosaries in their pockets, which they say constantly; who, when wounded in battle, want to see their confessor more than the medic, etc.

However, those who don't rob the King, their hosts and the soldier are quite rare. None of them fulfills his duties as much as he attends Mass. The mischief of a purveyor of munitions is tolerated when he bears the gift of a few bottles of champagne.

The captain promotes the soldier who serves as a lackey; the colonel the subaltern officer who grovels the most; the officer general the captain who plays a good game of trictrac or handball, etc.

This is the reason why devotion is so rightly and so strenuously decried. It can be defined as an attachment to the particular precepts of one's religion. Those who pride themselves on this precepts make a plan of certain practices: as long as they perform them, they believe themselves holy and can already see their own faces painted, gilded and shining on the altars, they imagine their bones presented for the adoration of the people. Natural laws, conscience and probity are thought worthless. Candor, good faith, uprightness don't even figure in their mind.

Such people see in the legends, hear in the sermons no attribution of holiness to anything but such nonsense, fasting, mortifications, retreats to the desert and the cloister, reading, chanting, celibacy, etc. All the preaching relates only to things proper to religion; if they sometimes talk about morality, it's only in passing, they don't dwell on such things. Most of the time it's only some lame joke or some bad satire of current fashions and manners, they never preach against the misdeeds and extortions of the religious ministers; they never use this as their text: *Gratis accepistis, gratis date*.

Without any scruples, these fanatics are greedy, deceitful, disloyal, harsh, cowardly, unfeeling, proud, contemptuous, arrogant, vain, bad at paying, brazen in borrowing, taking leisure at the expense of others, ruthless, merciless, granting no quarter. They require payment on the due date or in advance, and as much as they can get; they don't tolerate any failings, not a single moment more or less. Ask them about their fasting, readings, illuminations, the ornamentation of images, etc., they will respond with a soft tone and with composure: "Mustn't something be done for our good God?" Yes, no doubt, you miserable hypocrite! Yes, we must indeed do something for God, but not such follies as these: we must make some sacrifices to our Creator, and people are content to fulfil only certain rites and make certain expenses, to keep up certain annoying but useless practices because that's far easier than to resist the passions contrary to their duties.

Thus, the number of virtuous people is minute, that of the devout is huge; nothing is more common than this. Moral virtues are virtues, religious virtues are vices and follies.

I once heard a sermon about laziness. Two or three words were said about the disorders it causes when judges don't attend their trials, and fathers neglect their business, but then it came suddenly to those who miss Mass, vespers and salvation, and this is where all these rare talents were deployed, where eloquence and zeal came out in full force.

It's natural that three quarters of the audience would conclude that it's a far greater crime to be content to pray to God at home, without going out, than to give credence to a man who is in the wrong on an important matter, and where one is an agent paid to dispense justice, or to give in to debauchery when one should be busy in domestic tasks and leave one's family indigent and obliged to clash with those who bring its bread. Indeed, those who have much experience in the world never trust those who rush to Mass, indulgences, obeisance and sermons, who go regularly to confession three or four times a week, who have a *prie-Dieu* and a religious painting on their bedside table, a crucifix with lit candles, who say certain prayers every day without fail, no matter what, etc. Such a person who is honest, who keeps his word, who is sincere, brave, generous and upright is truly an unusual creature.

True morality is, therefore, crushed under a heap of ridiculous laws in which each factitious religion consists. Conscience can talk all it likes; the noise of catechisms, sermons, preaching, exhortations at confessional, and reading from ancient books will drown it out.

What a difference there is between the reprimand given by a true confessor to a man who beats his wife on a weak pretext until she miscarries, and the hassle he gives the man who ate two eggs on Lent, and the man who disputes the theft of tithing, the fees for burials and marriages. Oh! the jaws of Hell gape wide; for these wretches, there is no absolution.

A slight consideration presents itself here too, which won't be entirely out of place, since it confirms what I've said, that factitious religions are insulting to God. They make God dependent on men, they make him beholden to them; nothing is more common than to hear it said that such a prince retains his rights and his altars, he grows his power and that God's glory is in supporting this prince. People even dare to adulterate the prayers addressed directly to God with all these blasphemies, trying to subject him to their own interests, such that it only remains to be said in

formal terms that God is conscience-bound to give a long and happy life to his protector, failing which he would show ingratitude.

After that, he who has built temples, founded monasteries, who has forced people by steel and fire, massacres and desolation, to profess his religion, sees himself as the tutelary angel of the Divinity, who cannot fail to strike down his enemies and all those who might dare offer resistance, whatever their rights may be. They always cry out “miracle!” at every event favorable to him: which can’t fail to happen, God is too good a politician. When this prince is defeated or beaten on all sides, eaten alive by worms, the hypocrites lower their faces and say nothing.

These, M.R.F., are real, incontestable truths. Whoever denies them will be pronouncing words with no relation to their thoughts. These truths will be received by all minds, whether they’re spoken to crude peasants, women, children or savages, to the most sublime geniuses, to savants, philosophers, at whatever time and in whatever clime. Nobody who is free of partiality and bias can contradict them. I’ve carried out experiments, M.R.F.; I’ve taught my principles on various pretexts and in different forms to children and to professors.

“God said it, so it’s true!” This is the argument of all the henchmen of factitious religions. But sensible and impartial men argue: “It’s false, therefore God didn’t say it”. Each party only needs to prove its antecedent.

Would you really maintain, M.R.F., that you will prove, with the books of the Jews, that the Gospel, the Koran, etc., were dictated by God himself, as I will prove that God is not composed of three pieces, that he doesn’t punish anyone for the faults of another, that it’s folly to cut off a part of one’s body, etc.?

Would you really deny that I will instead prove that God is one, and a simple being, that it’s unjust to punish Peter for the crime of James, that shortening oneself is more a vice than a virtue, that you won’t prove to me that God revealed the Trinity, original sin and the holiness of circumcision, etc.?

I enter Marseille, I send word to the governor that I'm the Marshall of France, that he should come to receive me and bring me the keys of the city. He replies: "You're no Marshall of France, and your imposture will be punished with the keys to the prison." How will my claim fare? I don't have the least indication of my dignity, patents, guards, or a baton; and there are signs pointing the other direction. All factitious religions are just as well grounded in their claims as I am in mine.

Even if I had only this natural ray of light showing me that God is infinitely wise, powerful and just, and consequently that he saw the shortest possible path to instructing me in his will, and that he did in fact take it, since otherwise he would have acted against justice, I would be as well grounded in demonstrations as any geometer. Euclid never proved anything with notions that are any clearer, nor did he more logically draw his conclusions [from his principles].

And God has told me nothing except by a good means, nothing but what my conscience and my reason dictate to me. To speak to me by books and by the mouths of men would be the worst of means with respect to me and the one least worthy of his greatness. He therefore wants nothing from me other than what this reason declares my duty and what this conscience demands of me. God will not make me accountable for anything else. If he had wanted to impose any other obligations on me, he would have made them known to me in the same way, and by equally sure and easy means.

I won't be more easily detached from this principle, M.R.F., than you from those on which you have made such fine discoveries in algebra and geometry. It would therefore be futile to examine anything the factitious religions present as their foundation. I am quite sure that you will never take the trouble to examine all the tales that might be told to persuade you that there is a triangle somewhere, in which one of the sides is longer than the other two together. A hundred million books, a hundred million testimonies, authorities, witnesses who would even die in your presence rather than deny what they've said about the existence of such a triangle, would certainly do nothing to move you, aside from making you lament their folly. If an Inquisition forced you to declare that you believe this fine fact, it would be no less true that you wouldn't believe a word of it.

However, since prejudice and education make a cruel impression, we must neglect nothing to erase it. It's a kind of mass to be dissolved and dissipated, it's a weight so crushing that it leaves no strength to shrug it off if one isn't powerfully shaken. So let us see, M.R.F., what is the religion in which we were born, in which we were raised and in which we have lived up to the present.

[AN] E[XAMINATION OF RELIGION]²⁹

They begin by maintaining that reason and conscience are insufficient and that a revelation was necessary. Is this because God didn't see all that was required, and that, having subsequently recognized a failure of human intelligence, he made up for it by this splendid means, as when the King issues a declaration after his edict? It's evident that this argument is a pure invention, the daughter of the necessity felt when someone absolutely wants to be the bearer of a revelation.

Reason and conscience are perfectly adequate for human behavior. God saw to that and we feel it strongly; he would have done more if it had been necessary. In order to repair the evils and disorders caused by this supposed revelation, this second one would have been necessary as an interpretation; that is of an absolute and obvious necessity, I have no doubt that one will be found at some future point. Certain Reverend Fathers have already fabricated one, entitled The Eternal Gospel.

We ridicule the pagans for the plurality of their gods. We have three main ones, without counting the subordinate ones. In truth, we claim to have only one, but these are empty words. The Greeks could simply say that Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto were only one god in three persons, and this would be less absurd than in our case, since none of these persons was the stem or stock and principle of the other two. They said nothing of these three gods that distinguishes them more than what we say of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: one begot the other, one sent the other, one became man through the operation of the other, one was sacrificed to the other, etc.

With regard to the inferior Gods, don't we call our angels the children of God, which is how they referred to Apollo, Mercury, Pallas and the rest? Couldn't they say that some were the creatures of a great excellence and that others were virtuous men like our saints? In the same way, we build them temples and altars, we address our vows to them, we make them sacrifices, we attribute miracles to them, we may even exceed the pagans in all these follies. If we claim any difference,

²⁹ This heading is proposed by the Mortier edition; the manuscript only has an E here.

it's only in distinctions and subtleties. One can well believe that their priests and mythologians made the same distinctions to explain all these filiations, these adulteries and love affairs. It would have been easy to escape through allegory: "Saturn is eternity"; thus, to say that the three great gods were the sons of Saturn, also meant that they were eternal. The commentators of the Song of Songs would find a thousand fine things in the scythe, the dethronement and imprisonment of Saturn; such things are no harder to dig up than that the profound mysteries they discover in the love song.

We criticize the pagans for the vices of their gods: drunkenness, indecency, impulsiveness, etc. Aside from the figurative explanation, these bear no comparison with those we attribute to our God by making him an abominable tyrant who imputes to us a crime in which we played no part, casts us by sheer caprice into horrible and eternal torments, who makes laws which nobody understands, and treats as transgressors of these laws a multitude of people who have never understood them, or who never even heard of them.

A great professor has dared to say that God wished to mix light with darkness to set traps for impure spirits and to humble even the faithful.

Are all the vices of the gods of the fable comparable to such dark malice? Can anything more horrid be imagined? Such a God, if he existed, far from deserving our respect, would deserve our execration, we would be furious to find ourselves unable to attack him.

I know full well that some try to justify all these horrors, but what do they actually say? A pile of nonsense. We must come down to reality. Things are as St. Paul and St. Augustine say, or they're otherwise. If otherwise, St. Paul and St. Augustine and their commentators are ridiculous madmen, whose writings should be burnt by hand of the public executioner.

You cry blasphemy; I also cry it, M.R.F. The difference is that you're blaspheming God, the Supreme Being, your Creator, who has so perfectly instructed you in his justice. I'm only blaspheming against men who might not be worth much anyway.

All the pagans, the Jews, the Mahometans, are damned, and our children too, if they aren't baptized, and all that: Treasures of Wisdom! Who kept the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, who keeps all the pagans of our own times from saying the same thing about all the most ridiculous and abominable things we criticize in them?

As for the idols and the cult they pay to the images, which leads us to call them idolaters, there is no difference between them and us. We valorize pieces of sculpture and painting; we prefer some to others; we think they should be sought after, that we should touch them, we give them a sphere of activity.

What reply could the Christians have given to the pagans if they had told them that their gods are hypostatically united with their simulacra? That is no less possible than to unite with the human body. What could the Christians have replied if the Egyptians, absurd even among pagans, had maintained that rats, onions, crocodiles, etc. are truly gods hidden under the appearances of these animals or these legends? That is no more impossible than to be hidden under the accidents of the bread and wine.

This might be too much of a prelude. I will discuss the proofs of the Christian religion in general, without considering the particular manias of each sect, which all the others condemn. All these proofs come down to twelve articles, according to my knowledge of the subject. At least these are the ones they hold the highest. If there are a few others, they won't bother me, and I can easily raise their powers to the same level as these.

1st) The books of the Jews called the Old Testament, inspired and dictated by God himself: they contain the history of the creation of the world, the sin of the first man, the universal flood, the prophecies, the promises of someone to repair corrupt human nature, and of a liberator to save us from the eternal damnation incurred by all mankind, past, present and future;

2nd) The Gospel, or New Testament, also dictated by God himself: it contains the history of this repairer and liberator, his miraculous conception, his illustrious birth, his incomparable doctrine, his death, his resurrection, the revelation of the Trinity, that of the Resurrection and of the Last

Judgment, that of the empire of Satan and the temptations, the whole confirmed by a million miracles;

3rd) The fulfillment of the prophecies, contained in the books of the Jews;

4th) The astonishing way in which Christianity was established;

5th) The witness of the martyrs;

6th) Tradition;

7th) The Fathers, the councils, antiquity, the consent of men famous for their learning and lives;

8th) The dispersion of the Jews;

9th) The marvelous effect of Christianity;

10th) The amazing discoveries made by the Christian philosophers by the light of the Gospel, in the light of which they have found that the corruption of nature required a repairer to merit grace, without which the weakness of man would not allow him to act in the right way, and that the enormity of the first man's sin could only be atoned for by a victim of infinite worth;

11th) Finally, the sanctity of the rites of this religion.

FIRST SECTION: ON THE BOOKS OF THE JEWS

FIRST ARTICLE: WHETHER THESE BOOKS ARE DIVINE.

Such a high opinion is held of them that it is forbidden to read them. The Russians have completely suppressed them and the most judicious only see them as allegorical, i.e., as fables. Origen used that very word.

If there were good reasons and good proofs to convince anyone that these books are divine, then pitiful ones wouldn't be cited, and people wouldn't cast about in all directions for such miserable ones. Look for example at this fine argument: *Scripture tells us nothing but what conscience dictates and the idea of the perfect being confirms.*

That is false: conscience doesn't dictate that we should sacrifice animals, even less that we should butcher our own children; but if that were so, the effect of this sentence is that these books are useless, since every man is capable of thinking, saying and writing what they contain, therefore they have no character of the divinity. Far from these books having a character of the divinity, what they offer is that of the lowest humanity. But, it's said, we need the grace of the Holy Spirit to feel [it correctly].

When we are reduced to that, this favors the opponent's cause: this grace of the Holy Spirit is nothing other than the fraudulent biases and the trick of trapping the young. A great demonstration that this is only nonsense is that there is no passage of Scripture that isn't contested and interpreted differently.

Assemble all the sects and all the opinions of the different theologians, you will find. M.R.F., that this is true to the letter. It's a fine expedient to sing in so many keys: "We must not look upon the letter or the surface, we must consider the hidden sense!" This invention is as worthy of God as it would be for a woman who gave a child of two some pine-cones, some nuts, some coconuts, some chestnuts with their spiny shells, and told him: "Eat, my son, but don't stop at the shell, look for the nut inside". — "Yes, but I'll die of hunger before I've managed to open this shell at

all; I'll bite a thousand places that will ruin my teeth and poison my mouth when I think I've bit into the nut," etc.

These books are so dubious that a famous writer said in two very clear words, although without compromising himself too much, that it's necessary to know the religion before reading it. This needs no commentary: the best way to express it is to say that it's a potpourri where, naturally, nobody understands anything, but where people can find everything, according to their prejudices.

They boast of how old it is. The books of Hermes are even older, as everyone agrees. The pyramids of Egypt, covered in hieroglyphs, were the books of the Egyptians, even Jacob encountered some of these; but even if these books were the first of all those we have, what would that prove? Do those who have no knowledge of the books of Moses have a right to believe the Iliad or the Odyssey to be the work of God himself?

Even Judaism, although it preaches the unity of a God, falls into paganism in its beliefs about angels, sacrifices, the presents of gold and riches given to the deity, oracles, dreams, pledges, the drawing of lots carried out with promises of rewards, the detestable deeds acknowledged as religious acts, the localization of God, soothsayers, talismans, the wonders, the two principles, the good and the bad, fate, fatality, and everything the Rabbis have added to their holy books.

Finally, they universally behave with their God as the pagans do with theirs: they also talk of him in the same way. The first monuments of their fabulous history have, in every line, doings and conversations with Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Apollo, Minerva, Ceres, etc. Among men, people were not shocked to have seen a god. The books of Moses are full of apparitions: God and the angels were on familiar terms with men; there isn't the least surprise shown by those with whom God spoke in secret.

In truth, the Christians have purified some of these things; but it wasn't by means of the books and theology of the Jews and the Gospel, it was with philosophy and the other sciences. It seems very likely that the books attributed to Moses came much later than him and are the pure product of the Rabbis. This crass people, of a mind given to fables and superstition, to miraculous tales,

to hyperbolic and extreme expressions, finally reduced the normal language of vain ignoramuses to gibberish, set down its fantasies and traditions in writing under a name that carried authority.

If Moses is their author, he fashioned a rhapsody from the tales circulating in his times, as one might do from those that circulated in Mexico and Peru when the Europeans first arrived; similar ones could be made in our continent, which would be equally sensible, true and worthy of the perfect Being.

We see that all the writers of all religions have been regarded in their day as tellers of fables and wonders, and their writings show us how much they deserved this title: why would we distinguish the Jewish writers from all the rest?

But without going into these discussions or claiming that nobody knows where we got these books from, or how they were preserved, without saying that these books have been falsified or presumed to be what they claim, that some have been lost and that those who claim to have rediscovered them can be suspected as their authors – without noting that it is evident in a hundred passages that Moses cannot have been their author.

Let's assume that these books are, as we have them, the uncorrupted originals. What do they contain? Useless and absurd histories, pernicious examples, detestable deeds praised and attributed to inspiration, contradictions, anachronisms, countless absurdities obliging the most capable commenters to jump into allegories or spin off yards of nonsense.

Who are the authors of these books? Men who are very flawed, ignorant, crude, about whom we are given grand ideas and of whom even the Jews said the worst sorts of things: Moses was vainglorious, ambitious; David was greedy, a libertine, a political schemer who added to the religious rites anything he thought useful to his family, a hypocrite, who punished without great necessity those who had killed Saul and one of his sons, for the sake of pride in something that cost him nothing; then he delivered to the enemies of this prince seven other children of his, on a ridiculous pretext, because they annoyed him. He was, ultimately, a man without humanity, without integrity.

The narratives in these very books show the vanity of it all³⁰, as well as the history of the other nations³¹.

What, indeed, could be imagined that would be more horrible than³² the sacrifices of Jephthah and Abraham, more childish than the tale of Samson, more impertinent than the book of Job, more pernicious and unworthy than the deeds of Judith, of Jael and Ehud, than the brigandry of David, his massacres and inhuman vengeance?

It's not much to praise these horrors: they were done on God's orders or under his inspiration; it was God who called for these barbarities, it was he who commanded the usurpation of the land of Canaan and all the execrable deeds by which this was achieved. It's very easy to justify all that makes nature shudder, if we can simply blame the deity, while assuming that one is acting on His orders. In this way the Greeks pillaged Libya and seized control of it, and today³³ it's in these books that one can read the command to cross the seas and enslave entire nations; not only do they elude any blame for this, they also canonize themselves, glorying in it, presenting themselves as God's ministers and the executors of his orders.

If the human species were reduced to a single republic, the wisest precaution that could ever be taken would be to exterminate even the memory of such a code. The Protestants criticize the Papists for their legends, their visions, their revelations, etc., while they make it their holiest occupation to leaf through the books of the Jews, which are a thousand times worse.

It is true that among a heap of ridiculous and impertinent laws, worthy of the eternal father of the madhouse, a few rational ones can be found, but do they rise above the level of mediocrity? It is true that among so many detestable facts which give a pernicious example, some are beautiful, and worthy of imitation, but are they at all superior to the heroic actions of the ancient pagans?

³⁰ Ms. 1192 has: "the non-truth"

³¹ Ibid.: "Along with the way the world presently goes"

³² Ibid.: "Than the action of the twelve Patriarchs to their brother Joseph? They would deserve in all justice to be broken on the wheel in the public square."

³³ Ms. 1192 adds "it's the Turks."

If God wanted to destroy the Amorites and the Philistines, if he wished to put Holofernes, Sisera and Eglon to death, couldn't he do it without giving such horrid pretexts to cowardly, ambitious and cruel men, and finally without it costing, at the very least, the innocence of those he employed in such tasks?

When anything singular and extraordinary is found, before it can be thought to have a divine character, these parts must be shown to contain the sort of sublime things that no human could attain: for example, true prophecies. A prediction of the day and the hour of the earthquake that ruined Antioch, the day and the hour when a certain island would disappear, the day and hour when a new one would emerge from the sea³⁴, the day of the destruction of Jerusalem, along with the names, the circumstances, the details, all of these plainly, without allegory or any ambiguity.

Then people would have acknowledged [such prophecies] and could claim that God had a hand in these books, but the fables, the miraculous suppositions they're filled with can only bring contempt on them.

The ancient histories of all the nations are of the same character, and if the Americans had possessed the art of writing, we would have found equally beautiful and equally solid ones there; the collection of their traditions is nearly the same.

It is true that Moses knew only one God and that he sometimes speaks of him in very suitable ways, but aside from the obvious fact that he was educated by the Egyptians, the sages of which didn't participate in the popular waves of excess, only the natural lights of a good mind are capable of that. A thousand philosophers have spoken of this better and we can't refuse the palm to Plato, who, it's said, managed to grasp even our Trinity; however, he boasted of no revelation or any face to face interviews with the deity, nor did his disciples or followers ever attribute any such things to him.

To go into some detail, it would be necessary, M.R.F., to submit these books to examination, then ask what one thinks about them. Would they say any more about their divinity than that of the

³⁴ Ms. 1192 adds: "predict the year, the month and the day when America would be discovered, and give a dictionary of the true language of these peoples, along with a map of the country."

most amazing Roman? No! But the prejudice is initiated by saying: "These are divine books. You must believe them or burn. Read them now and see if that isn't obvious."

Secondly, things are recognized as divine when they contain something that is absent in what is not divine, when they have something that only an infinite power can provide; for example, a living, growing, reproducing body is a divine product: human effort, all their industriousness put together can't do anything similar. Is it the same with this book? A schoolboy in third grade could write a better one on vacation, in almost all its parts, and the bits I'm excluding are infinitely beneath the writings of the philosophers. Add something to these books and give them to someone who has never read them, to see if he can find your addition; take a few scraps of them, stuff them into another book, so see if anything divine would be seen in them and whether this part didn't come from the head of a man like any other. Many of these books were apocryphal a few centuries ago, some still remain so among the Jews and Protestants. Where, then, was and where is now their divine stamp?

In third place, God has no idiom or letters. God is a pure spirit, his language is purely spiritual and his letters are purely spiritual; he speaks immediately to minds, and minds hear him; no knowledge comes from God but what comes to minds without the intervention of artificial things. Only metaphysical truths are God's true instructions: these principles are what he has given us, the faculty of drawing conclusions from them, to which we must add conscience and instinct. That's why all men agree on these truths, on conscience and instinct, they are all taught by the same master. Geometry, arithmetic, the principles of morality and equity are the same in all nations; the most savage and the most barbaric don't differ in any way from the most civilized, whereas on other matters, and especially with respect to religion, as many heads as there are, so many opinions will there be. What argument might be offered, but that these are human fantasies, that everyone has his own?

This axiom is incontestable: anything that most of humanity denies is not a truth, even less is it a declaration of God. Each religion is denied by all those who profess others: draw your conclusion.

Fourthly, if this book were divine, if it weren't completely perfect, at least it would be as perfect as could be made by men; it would be clear, straightforward, without errors, without any

obscurities, without absurdities, without contradictions, without useless repetitions, there would be no need for interpretation or explanation; and even if it were true that these contradictions and absurdities were only apparent ones, this would still be a terrible flaw that wouldn't be overlooked in a normal person.

These books are pitiful, ill-digested, written in the least well-known and the most imperfect language; books without vowels, so that, by sheer whim, one can make whatever words one likes from the same letters: F-R with different marks could mean FoR, FeaR, as one prefers; the imperative and the future are one and the same, which is very much to the benefit of the prophecies: all the commandments are taken as predictions. I tell my servant to put a letter in the mail, he goes and does it; I've prophesied. They are written without making distinctions in the words, without commas, which gives sincere readers insurmountable difficulties.

Those who added the marks that serve as vowels, which take the same inflection, sometimes for the future, sometimes for the imperative, who distinguished the words, established the periods with dots and commas, who made choices in a double sense, who take one expression ironically, another in the interrogative or the affirmative: did these men also have conversations with God?

Fifthly, these books contain an infinity of things that are contrary to the factual truth about the composition of the universe. The usual reply to this is that God never meant to teach cosmography to men. So be it, people don't always say all that they know, but when a man talks, he doesn't portray things as different from the way they are, he speaks accurately when he can. This response would work in the case of silence, but this is a case of positive falsehoods: people don't tend to contradict known truths. Although the main goal is not educational, if I were to talk³⁵ about a shipwreck in the Mediterranean, I won't say that the storm began with the tides, although my aim isn't to teach about the difference between this sea and other ones.

In sixth place: divine or not divine, we must necessarily submit this book to reason. In it I find an ill-tempered God who is angered, offended, repentant, appeased like a child for trifles. He assumes human form, going here and there, etc. It's like entering an impossible labyrinth; all

³⁵ Ms. 1192 continues: "Of a story that took place at sea, I won't say that an officer emerging from his chambers and wishing to embrace the large mast, was kept from doing so when he ran into the bowsprit, although my aim is not to educate about how ships are made, or the names and arrangement of masts."

these mystical senses, all these types, all these prophecies vanish. There is no declaring that reason is the servant; it is the queen, it establishes the power, the intention and the meaning of this work of God.

You wouldn't dare, M.R.F., to call it what it is by nature, as you would Epictetus' *Manual* or Cicero's *Offices*. It's the bow of Hercules in the hands of the Pygmies, any arrows it shoots are only fired with a Pygmy's strength. Your divine book is only an enigma explained by men, and the sense of an enigma is only a "perhaps" without any sound assurance. The author only has to say the words; he provides a canvas upon which everyone can work as they please.

The foundation of the entire Jewish religion is Abraham's calling; the proof of it can be found just like that of the judgment of Paris and the abduction of Ganymede. But at bottom, is this not an impertinence? This idea that God hates all men, save the posterity of one individual because of his merits, is an unworthy one. What a fine kind of merit for Abraham to believe in God! He knew with certainty that it was God who called him; if he didn't know this, then he was a madman to go and butcher his son on the basis of a bizarre vision; whereas if he knew it, where is the merit, and where is the faith?

If a peasant was commanded by the King to toss a dollar, his only one, into the river, on the promise of a good reward, would he be the best and worthiest of Frenchmen if he carried out this order? But, it will be replied, this was an only child, ardently wished for, obtained after long wishing, tenderly loved. Well! What conclusion is drawn and what am I supposed to conclude from this? That if Abraham had a proper idea of the Supreme Being, he couldn't accept that a commandment so far from the views he placed in our hearts and which are a duty of humanity, could come from God, and that in this way he had a false idea of deity and didn't deserve to be called a worshiper of the true God, since it's necessary to have a distinct idea of the object that one worships.

As I've had the honor of telling you, M.R.F., I don't want to enter into a discussion of facts that would entail great difficulties and lead no nothing decisive; let's only consider the amazing number of different versions and interpretations, the thousands of mutually opposed sects that are equally based on these books and agree on their divinity, if you still dare to do so.

The factual errors, the falsehoods, the boasting, the flaws that contradict common sense, the first principles, the exact sciences, that clash with the pure ideas of the deity and the truth; multitudes of bad maxims, abominable examples, contradictions and mistakes are on display here, and thousands of commentaries can't palliate, explain or harmonize them; they are christened as "apparent contradictions", obscurities to be worshiped. What fine objects for worship!

Is it really possible to obtain God's blessing, his love and grace by a deception maintained by lies and base falsehoods? Doesn't common sense dictate that the wishes of the father should fall on the one on whom he wants them to fall, and for whom he makes them, not on the person on whom he materially bestows them? If, when a holy personage finishes his confession, a libertine comes along and stealthily takes his place, would the priest's absolution apply to the libertine? Would the religious person be deprived of it? I don't think the Sorbonne would decide things this way. In that case, M.R.F., you have to rank the story of Jacob and Esau, which composes the second piece in the sack, among the worst puerilities³⁶.

God is in heaven, these books say. Is he there more than elsewhere? And what is heaven? I'm waiting for these prophets to reply.

The children of a priest do all manner of foolishness with women at the doors of the temple; the punishment for this is that the enemies of this people, who are also the enemies of God, will come and kill three thousand men and steal the most venerable of all the holy furnishings. What an appropriate vengeance!

Feasts are ordained for the new and the full moons, and nobody thinks to change the course of the moon. This means sentinels must be placed on the mountaintops to send word; all is in combustion when the weather is cloudy. The God of the Jews turns out to be less able than we are, since we give almanacs to our ship's captains, along with accurate tables of its declines and ascents.

³⁶ Ms. 1197: "The tales of the Ass's Skin and the good woman."

The truth is that poor Moses thought it was impossible for there to be any science on the subject; he would have bowed at the feet of anyone who predicted an eclipse, or he would have had him punished as a magician.

I once saw a book entitled: *Politics, Taken from the Holy Scriptures* [by Bossuet]. This must be far worse than Machiavelli: there we find the people belonging to the kings, like dogs to their masters, that it is permissible to sacrifice everything to one's ambition, including one's promises and one's faith; that betrayal, lies, imposture can be employed; that a king with whom one is at peace can be assassinated; that an individual can butcher his neighbor when he infringes a religious law; that a king can deprive his legitimate children of the crown and place it on a bastard's head, and a bastard fathered with a woman who was taken from her husband by force; there we find not only polygamy, but the legitimate use of concubines in any quality you want; kings can find many passages on which to base their right to usurp and exercise their tyranny. And since God punishes David's crime with the death of thirty thousand of his subjects, these subjects must be a very different sort of people than the king.

Cromwell characterized his tyranny on the basis of these books; he covered all his injustices with their decisions and their authority.

Other impertinent things: the bizarre opinion on the reality of evil spirits, maleficent demons, who mistreat men, employ crass finesse like the waters of jealousy to heal the leper, or at least supposedly; if good Moses had known the power of mercury, he would have succeeded without so much wasted effort.

What could be more ridiculous than the distinction of animals into pure and impure, than the idea of incurring impurity by touching a cadaver, by suffering infirmities that are completely natural³⁷, than circumcision as a God-given law? I can think of a thousand others that would take too long to enumerate.

Let's put this book into the hands of an unbiased man; at most he will rank it alongside [Ovid's] *Metamorphoses*. The Jews, more infatuated by their stories than any other nation, or who act as if

³⁷ Ms. 1197: "to women".

they aim to satisfy their vanity and be a compensation for the scorn thrown on them by other nations.

Principal among these arrogant follies was that of attributing to the particular acts of God or his angels everything, good and bad, that happened to them, and finding its cause in their own behavior. This gave ample material for their imagination to ruminate!

David had his people numbered. What a great crime! To punish David, God killed off thirty³⁸ thousand men who had played no role in his supposed crime. What a judgment, how worthy of an infinitely just Being! But what to do? The plague was a great scourge; nobody wanted to relinquish the prejudice that God kept this august nation under his own protection. Such a terrible plague was a bad proof of this; therefore it was necessary to imagine something that might have attracted this punishment. Where could the blame lie? Religion was on a sure footing, everyone did what they could.

Which nation, which individual couldn't do the same thing, and claim that their family is governed directly by God, by explaining all events this way?

This book would have to be followed line by line, to gather all its defects. This would try my patience. This is enough to open the eyes of poor, abused mortals.

When I first read the Bible, I was as biased as could be; I expected the finest things on Earth and I was burning with impatience to see them. My expectation was badly repaid; when I saw all the unhappy kings accused of a lack of devotion, I was suspicious: "Good luck," I thought, "is imputed to devotion and bad luck to irreligion." The priests and the other men of the law were at once both censors and historians, they pointed to the slightest signs of deference for themselves and attributed the rulers' good fortune to this.

Christians haven't forgotten this trick: the emperor Heraclius was pious and devout, he defeated Khosrow, he captured the true cross. God's blessings! Mahomet stole half his empire and planted his own religion there. Oh! That's because he favors monotheists! Good argument, so worthy of

³⁸ Ms. 1192: "fifty"

God! As if the King brought the Turks in, who seized Provence and Languedoc, after having pillaged these provinces, all because the chancellor had misinterpreted one of his edicts. This is the way of all the religions: Cambyses wounds himself in the leg with his own sword, his wound is incurable: it's because he wounded a bull which happened to be the god Apis. And without looking more deeply into antiquity, we see the whole clergy following the same route.

However, it will be objected, there are holidays that still remain and which the Jews celebrate scrupulously, which are perpetual monuments, historical facts. Tell me then too, that the holidays of the pagans, that the infamous processions in honor of Ceres were monuments of historical facts, and don't question a single part of Ovid's *Fastes*. Say then, dear Protestants, that the feasts of the Assumption, of Our Lady of the Snows, of Our Lady of Lorette, of St. Pierre-aux-Liens, the appearance of St. Michael, the Portiuncula, the scapular, the stigmata, etc., say that all these things are also based on truths, of which these feasts are the irreproachable monuments.

People certainly are arrogant enough to boast of the power of blessed water against lightning: on this subject a thousand miracle tales are told, paintings and books are made, poor cloistered girls are indoctrinated with these things, who believe it all word for word. However, the churches which are its storehouses, which are blessed top to bottom by it, often personally by a Monseigneur, are struck by lightning every day, they are burnt up, and the very holy sacrament along with them, despite being the fount of all blessings. In our own day they set up a painting to St. Genevieve in the name of all the city of Paris and the whole kingdom as thanks for the aid received by the intercession of this good patroness in the year 1709. Oh, eternal truth, where then was this aid? Will the wheat, lying spoiled in the fields, turn green again? Maybe a crop will fall from the sky? Weren't all the poor in dire straits? Didn't a third of them die of hunger? Never mind, in two hundred years, on the faith of this painting, people will tell of a miracle that nobody will dare deny since it's so well attested.

But the Jews, an entire people dispersed across the planet, believe these books which imposed such harsh laws and duties on them, which are nearly impossible to fulfill; they keep them with such care and respect for so many centuries. This people also maintains the Talmud, which is full of bizarre and monstrous follies. In the same way, all the other nations on earth keep both their books and their traditions, which are stuffed full of onerous commandments.

The frequent revolts of the Jews against Moses is a clear sign that they were far from convinced of his mission, and however obedient they might have been, this only means that they were idiots, groveling slaves who would believe anything, provided that they had bread to eat.

Submission, belief, veneration only proves human gullibility: the Candiot submitted to Minos, the Romans to Numa, the Peruvians to Inca. Weren't the idolaters subjected to inhuman laws to the point of massacring their children and themselves? Don't the kalandars, the dervishes, the fakirs among the Mahometans, make laws ordaining that, on certain processions, they must slash their own arms and legs with knives, and don't they persist even though some of them die from it? Aren't the Christians trampled on by the Pope, don't they endure his arrogance, don't they pay the taxes that he levies even on their sacraments?

But the divinity of this book is manifest, its unction is evident, it speaks directly to the heart. Yes, to those who are already in love with it! Ask a random person to read it alongside the works of Cicero; which of the two will speak more to his heart? I accept the trial and I pass my sentence of condemnation. Don't the apocryphal books have the same effect as the ones we call canonical? Things were this way before; I'm well aware that they contain some parts that are quite moving; but don't novels, don't Ovid's *Epistles* and *Metamorphoses*, contain far more? The description of a fact, whether false or true, has the same effect: why do people feel so much emotion when watching a tragedy that they can't hold back their tears?

I know that there are fine precepts and beautiful sentences in it, but can't the same be found in Epictetus, in Juvenal, in Horace?

Give me a hundred children; I'll let some of them hear reason only, without prejudicing them in any way: they'll disregard your holy Scriptures. Don't we see this every day? Our children laugh at the Koran and the children of the Turks laugh at our holy Scriptures. But, to return to my project, I'll indoctrinate the rest of the children with revelations, with holy books, with the will of God declared to men by scriptures entrusted to venerable persons, and then I'll give them as these marvelous books whatever you want: *Jean de Paris*, *Mélusine*, *Robert le Diable*, and all the rest of

popular literature. I maintain that they would feel the same way for these books as we do the Jewish books. You can sense, M.R.F., in spite of yourself, that I'm telling the truth.

The Mahometans can't read the Koran without sighing at every verse, they find the spirit of God in it, and as many miracles as there are verses. All the religions affect their followers in the same way: the exhortation of a talapoin has the same effect on the heart of a devout Siamese as the sermons of a parish priest, of a monk or of a minister on that of a European.

But even if it were agreed that God dictated these books, if this revelation were necessary for all men, then it would have to be given in all the dialects on Earth, and according to all the changes that have happened there. Could this book in Hebrew be regarded as a book destined for all men? One in ten million understands it, and when the king of Peru was presented with this book as holy and as the way to salvation, so rightly declared that it said nothing at all.

If you say, M.R.F., that God compensates for this problem by establishing ministers, that the Pope and Bishops are the guardians and interpreters and explainers of these books: the Pope and the bishops ought, therefore, to understand all dialects from the moment they become bishops or popes, or at least they should at that moment understand Hebrew and Greek, which are the original languages of these charming books, and they should give us an explanation of them which is completely uniform. But it's a misfortune that an ignoramus who's made a Bishop doesn't understand a word of it; he is obliged to refer to another, and a scholar, without being either a Jew or a Christian, gives lessons to all the popes and bishops. It is, therefore, only in proportion to genius and hard striving that any of it is understood, and it remains very dubious. In the same way, certain visionaries claim to read things in the arrangement of the stars and think they see a thousand fine things in this way.

Strictly speaking, nobody is sure they know a dead language; no metaphysical explanation can make me accept explanations of particular words, even less so the inflections of certain verbs. You wouldn't bet your eternal salvation that our explanations about these points are correct. Therefore, M.R.F., a religion based on books written in a dead language is only a hypothesis that is apparent and more or less probable, but problematic and ultimately uncertain, on which men

stake their eternal salvation. How they ought to tremble at this thought, forming an idea of such a pernicky God, whom they believe is constantly about to strike them down.

What good, then, is the affection of those who don't understand any of it? Who can tell this peasant, this French, German, Swedish, Spanish, English, etc. artisan, that this book he's browsing is neither truncated, corrupted, falsified or degraded, that there have been neither additions nor omissions, after passing through so many hands? Who can tell them that their translations are good and that partiality, ignorance or stubbornness haven't led anyone to alter the text? They have every reason to suspect so, since we see theologians attacking each other every day for suppositions, falsifications, alterations, truncations and additions.

There is no translation in which party loyalty isn't obvious, and which doesn't immediately betray which sect produced it: the Jansenists have found, or implanted, into the homilies of St. John Chrysostom, the absolute necessity of their grace, even though this bishop positively fought against that idea. I have a copy of Valerius Maximus where he entrusts certain regions to Metellus: after this, I defy anyone to trust any translation.

Everyone who knows two languages, even Provençal and French, knows that a perfect translation is impossible. Vulgar errors are imputed to a famous author when a book is translated in a living language, composed nearly in our own times, in our vicinity and where he resided for a long time. What success might be expected, then, for a book in a barbaric, imperfect tongue, extinct for almost thirty centuries, unknown to nearly all other nations and which was only ever used a thousand leagues beyond our borders?

I'd like to see the King to pay the lease for his farms and the tariff of his taxes in the Muscovite tongue, and grant the tax-collectors and their agents the authority and task of translating these documents; they would find triple their dues in it, they would tax every hair, before long people would have to purchase the right to eat and drink; these functions would be prohibited otherwise.

These prejudices are adopted without ignorance or malice, which should make us even less trustful of the translations. It is certain that, however little it may seem, people find in this book all that they want to. I've never been content with any of its versions and I've always found them

different from the original. So, even if it were true that the books of the Jews were a divine creation and not that of very clumsy men, as they clearly are, these holy books would offer no guarantees against their corruption, due to expressions peculiar to Hebrew, due to the customs to which they were related, which are now forgotten, especially since nobody can find out the true meaning of the words from other books, since this is the only one we have in this tongue, and due to the huge quantity of such words, the other languages having a thousand times fewer, and since perfect translations are impossible, even if any shadow of deceit were absent. Do all these reasons seem trivial to you, M.R.F.? I refuse to believe it.

I've seen a fine emblem of what I'm dealing with here, in one of the famous churches of Paris; on a certain holiday, someone had set tapestries representing the New Testament on one side, and on the other Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

After all this, both Protestants and Catholics swear and believe that their Bible is uncorrupted and is the word of God himself.

SECOND ARTICLE: WHETHER THESE BOOKS CONTAIN THE HISTORY OF THE CREATION OF THE WORLD AND OF THE FLOOD.

Even if everything these books contain were recognized, this wouldn't prove anything about their divinity, or about Moses' mission, — he could have taken his system from the Egyptians or other peoples, — but they contain, on the origin of the world and a thousand other facts, reveries that are contrary to common sense, to the power and wisdom of God, like the traditions of Mexico and the other American nations.

The pyramids of the Egyptians, covered with all their hieroglyphs, and their other monuments were their history. Many were far more ancient than Moses; most likely, that's where he got some of his ideas.

No doubt, God created the world in a single instant, not in seven days. What need is there for an infinite number of instants, where only one is enough? Why seven days, rather than six or eight?

God didn't wait for the existence of the world to see that the world was good. Moses speaks of him like some man who, afraid he's mistaken in his plans, is delighted to see them turn out successfully. There was no need for rest since he is never fatigued. He doesn't cease to act, his action is in himself, without extraordinary motion, and always equal.

This precious, highly speculative history only gives the world six thousand years. The Egyptians and the Chaldeans had astronomical speculations and histories of many thousands of centuries, they had traditions going back from eighteen to twenty thousand years; the city of Sais had memories from eight thousand years ago. The Chinese presently count, in highly consistent and authentic chronicles, nearly nine thousand years of their empire. It is very shameless to deny all of that, not because you've disproved it, but because you find it unsuitable. Moses' imagination was too limited for a storyteller; since he wasn't able to find enough events to fill up a longer space of time, he abridged matters, and still the poor fellow had to make his heroes live eight to nine hundred years. It is more apparent that the world is very ancient than that it's very new. The memories, the traditions and the histories of nations famous for their grandeur, their arts, their sciences and their weapons, are more credible than those of these wretched, crude, ignorant fugitives, who have only ever occupied a miserable plot of land, from which they have been driven many times, as the plaything of their neighbors. They are the only ones with these opinions; all the other contemporary nations had a different idea; so why believe them?

This impertinence of the small age of the world has led to a second one; from this, they concluded on the shortness of its duration.

Jesus Christ and his apostles only spoke of their centuries the way one speaks of Autumn with respect to the year, they always expressed themselves with words like "lately, over these last years", the "consummation of time". The Fathers did worse, they fixed the duration of the world at six thousand years, which will soon expire. I, for my part, would claim a million centuries for it. We are equally well grounded in our claims. Posterity will soon see who, between these fine doctors, accomplished in physics, or myself, a poor ignorant layman, is more correct; if they were ever mistaken, and the world lasts more than the six thousand years which they have fixed, it is only right to believe me and regard them as liars or imbeciles.

This argument could be made, which will be incontestable in a few centuries. We shouldn't consider a place on anything as its end, if this spot isn't at least past its midpoint. Jesus Christ and his apostles talked of their day as the end of time, therefore they spoke of it as being past the midpoint of time, i.e., of the world's duration.

The major premise isn't the whole thing. Nobody would say, on their way from Paris to Rome, that they were in the last days of their journey when they reach Lyon, or even Marseille; but since it could be said when they're halfway, in three hundred years at most it will be obvious that Jesus Christ or Moses didn't know what they were talking about. If Christianity is still around, forced explanations will be discovered and they'll cry out: "O wonderful obscurity!"

The world had traits of newness, America also had them. Maybe in a hundred thousand years further discoveries will be made which would, on the same basis, make you give only three thousand years to lands or peoples who, according to your own calculations, would be a hundred and five thousand, seven hundred (105,700) and a handful years old.

By examining the story of the Flood we find something far clearer and less susceptible to subtlety and finesse. Almost no nation has any idea about it, and despite all the efforts of our missionaries, nobody has found the least trace of it in America.

1st) Nothing is so badly described; there are a thousand useless repetitions, contradictions; it's a stream of gibberish, of which it is nearly impossible to give an extract of it which distinctly contains the facts in question.

2nd) Where could the quantity of water necessary to cover the globe of the Earth have come from — nearly two leagues in height, and maybe more, since some mountains are even higher than this? And these cataracts of the sky that God opened, what a fine reservoir we see there! At least three times more water must have been there than is now in the sea. Moses should have said that God raised the sea's floor, so that the water spread across the whole globe, but there certainly isn't enough water to go fourteen cubits higher than the tallest mountains; at least there would have had a certain logic in this, but this idea, as simple as it is, was far out of reach for poor Moses.

A recent college graduate with even a basic level of intelligence could have easily explained this to a man who had had many personal interviews with God! It could have been said, to give even the slightest semblance of likelihood, that God changed the air into water up to a certain height, whether all at once or gradually, and that he changed this water back to air afterwards. But by all appearances, Moses was an ignoramus who found himself in a position to impose on fools, according to the rule that, in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

3rd) What a rare invention this boat was, to preserve the race of all men and of all animals! You really must have a simple mind, or have only very simple minds to convince, to retail in such reveries. Why couldn't God preserve the animals under the water, or reanimate their drowned corpses, or simply create new ones? Such miracles would have at least saved the trouble of gathering them from the extremities of the earth by crossing the oceans. And a perfect being, for whom all things are equally possible, will always reach its goals by the simplest paths.

4th) The foundations and the keel of this ship should have rotted before the first bridge was built, since it took a hundred years to make it completely. Nobody ever used a ship that spent even ten years in the shipyard.

5th) What did the terrestrial animals do to deserve to be punished with destruction, and why were the fish exempted from this? Did they live better lives? The waters should have been completely dried up afterwards.

6th) How did a hundred thousand species of small animals come from America and the islands to which they're unique? How did they find their way back? It's no good saying that America touches our continent up North, for the animals of warm countries can't endure the cold of the glacial zone, and besides, they wouldn't have found anything to eat there.

7th) Why did no elephants, horses, camels, etc., find their way to America? How was it possible to gather into the Ark suitable food for all these kinds of animals? Noah would also have needed a revelation to make them known to him and a miracle to deliver them to him. What was eaten by the hummingbirds, these birds small as a nut which eat only the juice they suck from flowers and green trees?

8th) How did eight or thirteen people manage to feed so many animals, clean them, carry water for them all to drink? How would they dispose of the water taken on by this ship, however well-made it might be assumed to have been? It surpassed by four yards, at least, our hundred-cannon vessels; eight strong seamen with no other job still wouldn't be enough for the pumps, if they were only at sea for six months, and not fifteen days if it were raining continually, and what a prodigious multitude of animals were continually urinating in it. It would be far worse if they had to use buckets, since water pumps were yet unknown. I won't say anything about the possibility of where to put all this stuff: it's very obvious, it has been pointed out a thousand times and has led to the creation of wonderful castles in Spain [dreams].

9) Why wasn't the art of writing, and so many others possessed by Noah, handed down to his posterity, especially in America? This point deserves attention.

10th) Therefore, they would have had to transport nearly all species of trees; the ground was flooded for ten to eleven months; there might not be a single species of tree that doesn't die when it's submerged for even a single month. The seeds could be brought aboard, so be it:

11th) But where would the pigeon have found a green olive branch? Put an olive tree in a tub, or even in a flooded valley; not three months would pass before it lost its leaves and bark, but at the end of ten months imagine what a sorry state it would be in. The little leaves of the olive tree that come to us in barrels, aside from not being green any longer, have been washed and preserved in salt.

12th) There are no olive trees in the country where the Ark is supposed to have settled. Moses has fallen into the trap of all yarn-spinners. A fellow from Paris who wants you to believe he's been to Ireland will say that he saw people tending vineyards there.

13th) The Earth must have been covered with silt and clay, the leaves and fruits should have been rotten. What did the animals live on when they exited the Ark, at least during the first year, assuming that the trees hadn't actually died? As for men, it will be said that they brought provisions out of their ship.

THIRD ARTICLE: ON THE SIN OF THE FIRST MAN

Please find me, my reverend father, in any fable or novel, anything more burlesque than the temptation of Eve. This serpent who was the craftiest of all the animals, who could speak, who was condemned to eat the ground and to walk on its chest, all that is so grotesque that these are ordinary objections. Now here is what has occurred to me on this subject, and I don't know whether they has been suggested by others, and consequently I don't expect to find any reply to it.

Do you understand, M.R.F., that man, coming from the hands of God, who could only be as perfect as possible, could have lacked all ideas of good and evil? This is a great problem of metaphysics.

Here is one of physics: explain, I beg you, how this idea could come from any part of a fruit falling into the stomach after being crushed by the teeth. Such a thing would seem to affect only the material powers, the memory or the passions, but it wouldn't reach one's pure ideas.

Another absurdity: Adam was like the animals. If he didn't know moral good and evil, he would have beaten or killed his wife in a moment of passionate frenzy, etc.

Another, worse one, for which I can discern no reply. If Adam had no knowledge of moral good and evil, then what was his crime? This is why we don't punish children or madmen. If Adam had no idea of moral good and evil, then he didn't know that it was a crime to transgress the commandment of God. God in this sense had warned him of a misfortune that was looming, the loss of immortality, but he didn't deserve any more punishment than when one warns a child not to run so they don't slip and fall. If he were to be put into a state of merit or demerit, then he should have been given a prohibition or a positive commandment only after his eyes were opened. Here, certainly, the alleged sinner is completely justified, and the impossibility of sin *a priori*. Now, please open your eyes, M.R.F., on five or six related things which are presently disproven by facts which everyone can see for themselves.

1st) It's said that there was only a single man from whom the whole human species came. I'll pass over the insurmountable difficulty of the transportation of the posterity of this man to America and so many islands, the languages of which are totally different from those of our continent, I maintain that there are completely different races. The Indians, under the same climate as the Europeans, are totally different, the Caribbeans completely different from the blacks, despite their same climate. The Caribbeans under the torrid zone are fat and white, the Iroquois in a country covered with snow are black and dry, like the Eskimos in an even colder country. These blacks are utterly different from the rest of those with their color, their hair, their eyes, by the form of their face, which is hardly affected by emotion and age; they have lips, cheekbones, cheeks, nipples of the same color: all black. We have a white body and these parts are red on us, the same goes with the extremities of the genitalia. I'm only discussing the peoples that I've seen in their own lands. The Hottentots also differ from the Lapps; the inhabitants of the southern lands might be even more different. Among all these races there is the same difference as there is between the races of dogs: greyhounds, mastiffs, pointers and barbets surely don't come from the same animal, they are separate species, although similar in many ways which constitute the nature of dogs. A male and a female greyhound will have greyhound puppies; a greyhound and a barbet will have puppies with features of each; the same applies with white and black people: the black people who come from our islands have black babies, the Caribbeans have Caribbean babies in Angola. If God had only put one male and one female barbet dog on the planet, we would only have barbets, that's obvious.

2nd) The woman was condemned to give birth in pain. Since its cause was common, this pain should be equal for all women; but savage women hardly notice it. But did the female animals participate in this fine sentence? They all similarly suffer while giving birth, to the point of death, as happens every day. Which is a manifest sign that these drawbacks are a necessary effect of how the machine is built, for which there is no remedy by a general path; it seems quite likely that the pains of childbirth are only so immense by accident. Blame for the excess thereof should only be laid at the door of nature itself. Wild animals suffer less and deliver more cleanly than those we have domesticated. Our peasant women are through with it far more easily than duchesses, and ultimately, savage women, as I've already mentioned, hardly suffer at all.

Moses should also have given a similar reason for the periodical discomforts of women, and even more so the other problem that happens with their milk, which becomes poisonous to children when they become pregnant, and why man is the only animal that doesn't swim naturally.

3) That the knowledge and the shame about nakedness are also an effect of Adam's sin: many great peoples are completely ignorant of this shame: blacks, Caribbeans, Canadians laugh at it. Indeed, raise children of either sex without any talk of it, and you'll see how false this assumption is. And without such an experiment, we see quite readily that our children are only aware of it after they've been told. I've seen a girl of fourteen or fifteen years, deaf from birth, who had been put in a convent which was looted in Piedmont³⁹; I did whatever I wanted to her, I turned her around, touched her as I pleased without startling her at all, whereas she first thought I was going to whip her. She did far more, for, when I was wearing just a shirt in front of her, she approached me, lifted it and examined me with astonishment and handled me without any shame. This, M.R.F., is the pure truth, which is what led me to this idea.

What would you say to the Caribbeans, M.R.F., and the savage Canadians, if they replied to your sermons in this way: "Adam was completely naked before his sin, without noticing it; his sin is what opened his eyes. You, whose eyes are already open, descend from him and participate in his sin, as you agree. Therefore, we have neither this opening of our eyes, nor this shame, we know of no 'shameful parts', we descend from another man who never sinned. When you came into these lands, you found them already inhabited. The descendants of Adam were unable to reach these parts: we are a holy race, the posterity of a man faithful to the orders of God, we are in a state of innocence and pure nature, where you would be if Adam had resisted temptation. We have no need of liberators or mediators, we have no need for your baptism, your sacraments or your mysteries; you are of a cursed and criminal race, go away, interacting with you would bring upon us the wrath of God, whom you would offend, and whom we have always worshiped faithfully and in all purity."

I don't think there could be anything more brazen or insane than to go and say to people: "You should be ashamed of your nudity, because of a certain sin, of which we've just brought you the forgiveness, and apply to you the merit of a victim who has satisfied on your behalf; however,

³⁹ Ms. 1192: "and who was dishonored in Piedmont without any rebellion on her part."

you must cover up, you can't stay naked, for as punishment for this sin, God imprinted on all hearts a shame for nudity; get down to work, assume a thousand new worries about what you will wear." What a contradiction on all points!

4th) There is also a sentence of eating bread by the sweat of one's brow, of working the land which will only produce the desired fruits with great effort, along with many undesired plants. The Iroquois, the Hottentots, the Caribbeans, the Tartars, and perhaps many others don't work anything, don't plow anywhere, and they live better than we do; many nations of blacks are the same way. Behold your sentence overturned, or these people are of a different race than us.

Moses wasn't widely traveled, he had only seen men dressed, laboring, sowing and ploughing; he couldn't imagine that things could be different elsewhere. A terrible physicist, a bad cosmographer, a historian so poor in knowledge: the Massagetae, of his time, and in a country not far from his own, also lived without laboring.

5th) This rare history also says that this sin produced death. But if we pay even the slightest attention to the matter, we see that dissolution is a necessary and inevitable accident for all material machines: don't animals, trees, exempt from participation⁴⁰, also die? Stones, diamonds die; our body is a material machine: God was pleased to unite it with an intelligent being. This union introduces no change to it. Was Adam exempt from violent death; could he have taken a cannonball to the belly, was his neck too strong to be cut, or would he have survived decapitation? Wouldn't many men be drowned, crushed, etc.?

But to put an end to all dispute on the matter, reproduction was instituted before the sin. If men had multiplied without dying, the earth would have been covered in less than three thousand years, like the auditorium of an Opera on its opening day. Far from having fields to grow their food, men and beasts wouldn't have had anywhere to set themselves at the end of a hundred centuries.

Since supposition costs nothing, people will say that at a certain age God would have raised them alive into heaven. But these are mere words. If true, what a fine invention! For what purpose

⁴⁰ Ms. 1192: "in this sin".

would God have made men? This material machine is useless in heaven. Why even put them on earth for a certain period? Who would have established the length of this period if they hadn't sinned?

At this point I hear a certain venerable hooded man cry: "Who are you, vile atom, to examine the purposes of God? Humble yourself and worship the profundity of his judgements, respect the obscurity that he placed over many things. Is it your job to interrogate him?" No, if he spoke to me; but you're the one I'm questioning, you who have an interest in taking advantage of me, you who would not live at ease if this monster of fables you're selling had been destroyed, which makes you respectable among the weak, you, finally who, for the most part, would be busy tilling the earth if these miserable things hadn't captured the mind of the masses. Answer if you can; you're debasing God, making him a tissue of imperfections. I have a higher idea of him, and I'm far from failing the Supreme Being when I see your deceptions or nonsense and despise you, as despicable as you are; but you are making God's cause your own, this custom is ancient and unsurprising.

I hope, My Reverend Father, that you will agree that the creation of the world would have been futile if man had been sinless, since the mere sight of the possibility is equal, for God, and since he had no need to create to know the effect of his workmanship.

To these five articles we might add the promise of a long life to those who respect their parents, the falseness of which is no less evident, and the famous description of the land of Canaan, of this Promised Land which is transformed into a land of plenty and which is actually one of the worst countries on earth, or at least inferior to many others.

Then God ordains the destruction of this people, to the last one. Are we really supposed to believe that, won't we reply: "even if God ordered a massacre, it's impossible that at least one of the defeated people didn't survive by resistance and submission." Maybe in two thousand years from now, the massacre of St. Bartholomew will be regarded as an execution of God's orders, and Henri III and his favorites will be thought of as the pious ministers used by God to destroy the Protestants.

FOURTH ARTICLE: WHETHER THERE ARE PROPHECIES IN THESE BOOKS

A thousand passages in these books tell us that God doesn't foresee free actions. If he foresaw them, what would be the point of tempting Adam? All that needed to be done was to suddenly put him in the state he was later in, since he surely knew that he deserved it. What was the point of tempting Abraham, if he knew the effect of his faith? But there is more: after his act of obedience, God told him: "I now know that you fear the Lord." He therefore knew nothing about it previously, otherwise we have a right to complain of the writer's crudeness or lack of precision in a book of such importance.

Therefore, according to this book, God doesn't see the present thoughts of men and has need of external actions to form judgments about them. This is how men behave.

For my part, I maintain that prophecies about human actions are impossible. We are free. If a prophet comes and says that I will dress in red tomorrow, no doubt, he will have told a lie; I am neither a clock nor a marionette, I have in me a principle of choice and determination for my actions. God foresees absolutely the acts that necessarily follow from a concatenation of causes, an eclipse of the sun for example, the duration of the world, a flood, etc., but it is absurd to say that he absolutely foresees free actions.

With respect to free acts, God sees all the cases, all the possible circumstances, all the degrees of probability working in any direction, all the possible effects of the actions in all possible circumstances, and all the possible combinations from all that, which is an infinite knowledge: a trifling circumstance, the action of a free being ruins everything. God saw this possible action, but he did not know which of all the possibilities present to him would upset this order; however, he saw what seemed more or less likely to happen.

A false idea is put forward, that that God wouldn't be infinite and that his power would be limited if he didn't foresee the actions of all beings. One might also say that he is not infinite because he doesn't foresee impossible things, and that if he can't make a rod without two ends, a part greater

than the whole, a square with one side longer than its diagonal, then we must also say that his power is limited.

God can do anything, his power, his knowledge, his foresight are unlimited, there is no difficulty in this, but this doesn't mean that he can do the impossible.

It means that he sees all things as they are and as they can be: necessities as necessary, with an "assuredly", the contingents as contingent, with a "perhaps", and as things that can happen or not happen, according to the free determination of the agents to whom he gave a free will, which has an inherent faculty of turning and going whichever way it pleases.

God, without doubt, can bend my will and determine it to do this or that. He can imprint this or that movement on my arm, but from the moment he uses this power, he acts inconsistently and annuls this freedom of action and determination which he put in me, which I won't take the trouble of proving since everyone has a sense of it. If he acts inconsistently, he ceases to be perfect, he ceases to be God, since the idea of God entails the idea of a perfect being, and it is no more possible for God to act as an imperfect being than for him to make a circle with unequal diameters.

It is just as false that God foresees the actions of free beings, as it would be to believe that he doesn't foresee the necessary cases that follow from a sequence of causes. You plant an acorn, God sees at that moment whether it will take root, what height it will reach, the length and size of its branches, their quantity, that of the leaves, of the acorns it will produce each year, those which will take root, their posterity to infinity, when this oak will die, etc., provided nobody disturbs its natural economy. God also foresees all such possibilities, but he doesn't see which of them will succeed.

Throw a can of dice from the top of a bell tower; once it's been shaken, God knows how these dice will fall, on which face each one will land, because this depends on the degree of force of the shaking, the positioning of the dice in the can, the hardness of the dice and the hardness of the configuration of the matter on which they'll fall. This shaking was free, you could have varied it in an infinite number of ways, God saw all the degrees of force that you might have imparted to

it, and all the ways the dice might have fallen. This is all that God saw about it. In which his knowledge is infinite.

He has given us the liberty of wishing and acting, he sees all that we can want, all that we can do; if he saw distinctly what we will want or will do, his sight would reach beyond what is actually possible.

It is of the essence of a free being not to be tethered to anything, to be able to go white, black, right, left, as it is of the essence of a circle to have equal diameters, as it is of the essence of eternity to have no beginning or end. We can therefore equally say: "God doesn't see in a determinate way the future action of a free being", as we say: "God doesn't see the final moment of eternity" without implying any limitations on his knowledge, and that "God cannot interrupt our freedom" as well as "he cannot make a circle with unequal diameters", without implying limitations on his power. It is, on the contrary, upholding it to say that it is in conformity with things which are its object; to say otherwise would mean that his knowledge is false, and, if we see something differently than it really is, are we truly seeing?

But, an objector will say, God would then only see as we humans do; there is a great difference when speaking in general: God sees distinctly and comprehends all things, we see little and only obscurely; he sees all by his nature, we only see by the faculty he gave to us; God sees all the consequences and all their combinations in a single, clear vision; God sees all the possibilities and every possible outcome in every combination; but in reference to a single point, there is nothing wrong with saying that God only sees like men do, that 4 and 4 make 8. God sees an infinity of other things at the same time, but that has nothing to do with the simple sight of two times four equaling eight.

"You're denigrating God!", the zealous reciters of paternosters will declare: Do we honor him, then, by telling manifest and impertinent falsehoods about God? Do our lies exalt him? Say then, to honor him all the more, that he sees the first and the last moment of eternity, that he sees either the idea of something greater than himself, or that he can make a mountain without a valley. There is no better way to exalt God than by saying that he sees and knows everything perfectly, and that to know perfectly is to know the truth, which is seeing things as they are.

God created free beings; the freer these beings are, the more greatness is inherent in his workmanship, and this greatness is at its highest point when these beings are so free that he doesn't see where they will go; otherwise, we are machines of a very limited degree of perfection. A free being has more perfection than one which is not, therefore those who deny freedom give less glory to God, since the more perfect the product is, the more glory goes to the producer. A king who makes a prince sovereign and independent shows greater power than one who makes a duke like those of the present day.

Roman greatness was never more dazzling than when the Senate made the kings sovereign in their states.

It is true, M.R.F., that I've known for several years that the Socinians deny this foresight, but I can assure you that I've thought these things which I've just explained long before I saw any of their writings or read any of their arguments; and, as I've resolved to treat this subject exhaustively despite all these arguments, let's carry on considering your prophecies:

1st) Most of the prophets were Samaritans, therefore heretics and members of a sect that was condemned by the rest of the Jews. How could they or those of the other sect be equally deserving of divine inspiration?

2nd) People have labeled whatever they liked as prophecies, many fragments have been stitched together as needed; nearly all are tales of past things or threats or wrathful imprecations. The alleged excuse for this is that these past facts were figures or types. On what basis, though? The books say nothing about this, any more than about the mystical sense; this is only too obviously a case of necessity acting as the mother of invention; anyone can find figures or types of their own life in Herodotus if all it takes is a certain agreement or resemblance.

Jan Hus was the type of Servetus, I'm the type of a thousand poor fellows who will be born in the centuries to come. J.C. was the type of Jan Hus, and the whole Gospel is a prophecy about him. There are no story fragments of which I can't seize on to make prophecies for whatever I want. How many magistrates are perfectly represented by Caligula's horse-consul!

But what good are all these figures, this fine expedient, so worthy of the perfect being, to teach feeble creatures about things beyond their capacity? What fine type of our religion won't be found in the history of the Incas, who offered bread to the Sun in their solemn feasts? Anyone can find mystical senses wherever they look.

The statues in St. Innocent's cemetery, put there by Nicolas Flamel, represent a Resurrection: the chemists find in them the secret of the philosopher's stone. All these writings which are granted the fine name of prophecies are only gibberish. Let's write our dreams or the visions of a lunatic, they'll also be fine prophecies if anyone wants to make a career out of applying a few lines from them to all events, whether in the natural, allegorical or ironic senses.

Jurieu has proved that the destruction of papism and the triumph of Calvinism in France will happen in 1713 with prophecies from the Old and New Testaments a thousand times better than anyone has proved that the birth of the Messiah would happen 755 years after the foundation of Rome; all these applications are arbitrary, their pros and the cons are equally easy to find.

I can find in the first book I come across a prophecy of my whole life by applying and explaining things as they do with the books of the Jews, citing the Gospels and the Fathers, and I'll do it even more aptly and faithfully than they do: I open the *Lettres du chevalier D.H.*, page 265, the last words are: "I see that I'm extremely unfit for this exercise." I return from a hunt with a fever and the scriptures are fulfilled, when the prophet D.H. says: "I see that I'm extremely unfit for this exercise." The first words on the following page are: "My marriage is broken". I was meant to be married at the age of twenty-four, and this didn't happen. *Ut implerentur verba prophetarum, D.H. dicens: "My marriage is broken."*

This is how the apostles found the prophecies, this is how the preachers find whatever they like in these divine books, and the texts praising an imaginary saint, or the funeral oration of the first man who agrees to their fees.

Who couldn't make prophecies like those that are given to us? If you point to a few scraps from these books that have a more positive air about them, would you be in a stronger position for

that? What does a self-proclaimed prophet risk when he doesn't set a time limit or mention any precise circumstances? I predict that Paris will be utterly destroyed, that the least vestige won't be left, and that the Seine will pass north of Montmartre. If that happens, I am a prophet; if not, my prophecy stands, and after a hundred million centuries have passed, nobody will be in a position to say that I lied. I know the formula of subterfuge used by the theologians: the time indicated by Providence, this time reserved in the treasures of divine wisdom hasn't yet come. And if a flood or an earthquake swallows up the Island called the City and old Paris, and the flood is so extensive that the waters go north of Montmartre, even though they withdraw soon afterwards, I can still be said to have prophesied.

In this way, the Jews still await their deliverance. If eclipses were predicted in this way, then the least peasant would know as much about them as the gentlemen of the Observatory.

If God gave a prophecy, there would be nothing ambiguous in it. Any prophet who speaks clearly won't retain his good name for very long; the clever ones speak in obscure, general and ambiguous terms. There are officious interpreters who exhaust their genius, their knowledge and their power to find sense and reason in crazy visions.

Nostradamus is a hundred times more positive, Ovid gave a far better prediction that his name and his *Metamorphoses* would be immortal, Seneca that America would be discovered. What suffering men undergo to harmonize the prophecies of Jacob and Daniel! If it were possible for them to be even more mutually opposed than they are, they would still find a connection between them.

I wish that scholars like Scaliger and Petau, etc. had been pagans. They would certainly have disproved these predictions. These capable men still can't come to any agreement. Each of them changes the best-established chronology, falsifies all the historians, makes this prince die, makes another reign alongside his father or uncle, changes the name of one, lengthens the life of the other, etc.

They defy a thousand passages of even this venerable book, ruining everything, making a thousand assumptions with no rule but their whim, determined as they are to find resemblances

where there are none. Still, the secret of satisfying both other people and oneself has yet to be discovered; there are as many different systems as there are interpreters. If these supposed predictions had any sense in them, everyone would see it and find it there, in the same way.

But even if the comparison were more solid and there were at least a minor semblance of it, would these prophecies be worthy of God with respect to their use? Were there, in all of Judea, ten people in a position to disentangle this chaos? Where was the evidence on the basis of which an entire nation could recognize this Messiah, who was so different from the one they were waiting for, according to the natural sense, taking these books as prophetic? At very least, the day of his birth should have been indicated, and there should have been an unmistakable sign of it, since other children could be born on the same day and the same moment in the same place. And if the prophecy had indicated the time and the place, without this sign it would have been both imperfect and useless. Anything that anyone could have added about the actions and words of the person prophesied would have meant nothing. Anyone at all could talk and act as the prophesied man was supposed to do, and apply the prophecy to himself. Thus, what was required was a unique and inimitable indication.

If you point to miracles, then the prophecy was pointless and the miracles would speak for themselves if they were true.

FIFTH ARTICLE: THE PROMISE OF A LIBERATOR.

This promise could be denied. The Jews surely didn't think of it as it's usually conceived; at most it could be found in vague terms, so distant from the circumstances and people to whom it was given, who were its trustees, who didn't know it and still await its effect, and a completely different one at that, from what Christians claim.

Finally, if you won some ground from the Jews, it would only be with their own methods and according to their manias. The manner of these ignoramuses was to establish whatever they dreamed up, which has no implications for the rest of humanity.

The Greeks and the Romans did nothing without first consulting the augurs and taking the auspices; Orientals do nothing without consulting astrologers and soothsayers. Would you conclude that I should return indoors, if while departing, I touch the threshold of my door?

This remark is more important than it seems: are we then obliged by the follies of the Jews? People want to convince all of humanity by the bizarre practices of the least and most despised of nations.

There is no denying that certain passages have met with quite fortunate applications, but every single day we find better ones in the authors who never dreamed of the indifferent things to which some of their passages are applied: *Uno avulso non deficit alter* was warmly welcomed by the second duke of Brittany. Was the death of the first one therefore predicted by Virgil, and the birth of the second promised? Let's pass on to the New Testament.

SECOND SECTION: THE NEW TESTAMENT

FIRST ARTICLE: WHETHER THIS BOOK IS DIVINE.

The same general arguments used against the books of the Jews are also devastating for this ridiculous notion; and in particular, the mere sight of it is enough to bring it into contempt. Nothing is more ill-conceived, disorderly, incoherent, badly expressed; poorly written, with pointless repetitions, omissions of necessary details; nothing could be more defective, nothing could contain more contradictions, gibberish, false citations.

I know that there are many very laborious books called chains, concordances, harmonies, which try their hardest to remedy the palpable defects of this divine book. Don't all these pains taken by the zealous partisans of the divinity of this book show conclusively it's a defective work and that they know it? Would a divine book require forced explanations showing that it doesn't actually contradict itself, that it's consistent on the facts and the arrangement thereof, I won't even say dates, for none are given! "In this time", *in illo tempore*: anyone can issue a thousand hypotheses here to reconcile the facts, and still they'll never come to the end, but disorder is a great help [to confuse the issue].

I grant that this book is written simply and with a great air of good faith. But then you must also agree that it's written in miserable language, in a poor style, with great confusion and obscurity, without discernment, without attention, and that no book on earth is more badly put together. Our ancient Gauls have a similar candor that is pleasant and seems to compel credence even in novels; if a peasant writes a false story, he speaks in coarse and simple terms; whether by design or idiocy, his naive manner is persuasive.

The Holy Spirit, it's said, neglects the vain ornaments of human rhetoric. This I will concede, but is it a "rhetorical ornament" to follow common sense, to make oneself understood clearly and

simply without ambiguity, to offer only solid arguments in the briefest and clearest manner possible?

If God dictated a book, he would neglect the vain ornaments of human invention, all these ridiculous figures, these antitheses, these hyperboles, these repetitions where something is turned ten different ways, and so much other nonsense with which our preachers strew their sermons, but he would not neglect neatness, clarity of expression, soundness of argumentation, accuracy in comparisons, etc. It's the omission of what is essential that causes complaints, and which must be recognized as human defects, signs of utter ignorance and low intelligence.

The legends of the barbaric ages are written with the same simplicity, the same air of good faith, in poor language, with poor style; they are filled with bizarre, vulgar suppositions, ridiculous miracles and imposture.

But it is false that the Holy Spirit of the Christians neglects the ornaments of rhetoric: the Old Testament is full of hyperboles and other figures; entire books are written in verse; and isn't its affectation of beginning each part of a book with letters of the alphabet, in order, one of the most childish sorts of human ornamentation? The Gospel speaks only in figures, it consists only in moral explanations. Don't people admire the beginning of St. John: *In principio erat verbum et verbum erat apud Deum*, etc.? "How sublime it is!" they cry. Yes, no doubt, this cock and bull story, and these ridiculous repetitions have very much earned the ride that's been attributed to St. John: he rises all the way to heaven on an eagle. And, let us note in passing, My Reverend Father, that Jupiter had an eagle, Juno a peacock, Minerva an owl; our evangelists also needed symbolic beasts: St. John the eagle, St. Luke the bull, etc.

It's pointless to give the least reflection here, the facts say enough by themselves.

Let's return to the divine book: give it to a hundred people independently and ask each of them to extract a religious system from it, even a basic catechism; none of the results will be alike, or similar to that of any existing sect. A thousand sects, established in parallel, present themselves to us, all opposed to each other: the instructions are therefore flawed.

If there were even a single flaw, this would be enough to prove that this book is not divine or God's workmanship; but there are a thousand palpable ones. If you blame these on the copyists, or the loss or disfigurement of some pieces, which is apparent in many places, God must therefore have lost interest in this book, or he never took any in the first place.

What's even funnier is that those who made this supposedly divine book never thought that God played the least part in it. They say the opposite in positive terms, claiming that they're only saying what they've seen or heard from trustworthy people, and they are on the point of contradicting both each other and themselves.

But, M.R.F., they have therefore reported either what they have seen or what they have heard from people they considered trustworthy. What a fine book could be made by collecting the ideas of the populace and the tales they tell about the most trifling details!

How many follies could be assembled, on the word of credulous and honest people and on that of malicious men who love yarns about wonders, and absolute liars who seem honest? What hasn't been said about the Loudun possessions? We know, you and I, what it all amounts to.

Would God speak in uncertain terms if he had inspired the authors of this book? Reading it, would we see eight or ten authors? Would we see more or less? A certain person, when others are named without need? Would there be any room for ambiguity, etc.? The only reason for these terms is that things aren't known with any certainty.

Would God use parables and comparisons for any reason other than to explain and help comprehend what he had said positively? If he did so, would he use incorrect or false ones? No doubt, any he gave would be absolutely suitable. I know that the usual response is that they are sufficient for his purposes. Firstly, this is false; many of them clash with them and would naturally mean something different. Some of them are explained badly. These are facts; I now return to argumentation.

Is it not true, M.R.F., that if a comparison is made which is not absolutely correct, although adequate strictly speaking to what is claimed, this is only because a better one couldn't be found?

Or at least because the person didn't bother to look for a better one, but that, if a better one had been offered, it would have been preferred over an inferior one: can you say otherwise in all honesty? I don't believe so: then confess that he who used the bad comparisons, even if they were adequate (which I'll grant), confess, I repeat, that better ones weren't possible, that he didn't bother looking for them, or that he's mistaken. None of these options is suitable for God, therefore God made no comparisons.

This, M.R.F., is conclusive, and I can't think of anything that would be more so. Behold, then, the divinity of the book, of the one who wrote it and of the inventor of the parables conclusively destroyed. If you retort that the evangelists reported things poorly, then there is no advantage to be found in their report; if you say that J.C. only spoke as a man, then he might have made a mistake.

Ho! Great God, what could be more frightful than what is strewn throughout this book?

When people speak in obscure terms, it's because they're afraid that their audience might understand what is being asked of them. People are supposed to hear with their ears and not understand with the mind, so that, unable to obey, a crime can be imputed to them, so that they can be punished. I know how much has been taken from, added to, changed and diminished in this book, how many parts were rejected at first and revered later, how many others on the contrary were initially received and then rejected. How many people have had an interest in corrupting them and giving them different meanings according to the occasion!

Many of these books are still extant, which have been set in parallel with our present canonical books. Who made the choice? Who made the Canon? Men, four hundred years after the death of the writers, decided that some were divine, others not. They might therefore have been mistaken, maybe they mistook the false Gospel for the true one, and the true one for the false one. Where then is the certainty, even if I wanted to believe that God had a hand in the first Gospel or that the authors wrote in good faith?

Ha! If anyone dared, M.R.F., he would found this divine book anew, and it would certainly be made to speak very differently. Good intentions wouldn't be absent, any more than with the

Fathers. Unfortunately, the party is divided into too many sects which don't trust each other; otherwise, I do believe that things would be made entirely clear and plain, that there would be no more occasion for disputes or for people to constitute separate sects to the detriment of Our Holy Father the Pope and of all his subordinates.

Moreover, it is certain that there are good precepts in the Gospel, but there are many outrageous and impossible things as well.

I'm not talking about vague words, spoken in the air, and which are beautiful; I'm talking about things that precisely and positively distinguish that which is hard to truly distinguish, those which prescribe duties such that their justice is made evident, along with the possibility of fulfilling them according to human weakness and the vicissitudes of life.

And after all else, show me a religion of which the morality doesn't offer a thousand very good things, indeed, nearly all of it. None of them tolerates vices. Note, My Reverend Father, that I'm not referring to certain bizarre sects; all religions ordain probity, justice in human dealings. Are they all divine?

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is very bad history and it's visibly imperfect; God doesn't only go halfway, and besides, all the religions can and do have similar things to offer, with tales of the wondrous deeds of their founders and their first preachers.

As for the Epistles of St. Paul especially, along with the rest, these are a continual stream of gibberish⁴¹. I'm not unaware of what St. Jerome and many others thought of them. What should we expect from a visionary who heard a voice that his companions couldn't make out, who was raptured up to the third heaven where he heard that which no ear has ever heard?⁴² How hard it must be to be so vain as to play the man of mystery while giving no information about these amazing things! Sancho Panza saw many other such things in his trip on the wooden horse.

I won't mention the Apocalypse, it's whatever you want [to find in it].

⁴¹ Ms. 1192: "There is no more sense, consistency or reason in their words than those of a lunatic."

⁴² Ms. 1192: "he should have shared some of these fine things that man cannot grasp, for example the rings of Saturn which hadn't been discovered yet."

Everyone knows how long it was considered as the workmanship of a fanatic. Its potential utility was later recognized, as the masses' gullibility was secured. In cock-and-bull stories you can find anything you want; rational and precise writings impose limits.

Finally, J.C. was condemned for his doctrine by the public authority of the Jews. Their law gave precise orders to kill anyone who sought to turn people away from them, even if he performed miracles. If the Jews waited for a Messiah, who would judge the merits of any claimant? It could only be the leaders of the religion, the pontiffs, the Levites, the elders of the republic⁴³. They gave a solemn decree and declared that his doctrine was contrary to the Law, which they believed they had received from God himself and which must be eternal according to the words of Moses. Subsequent events have shown how pernicious this doctrine is for morality, for which it is ruinous in a thousand passages, even if it sometimes leads to good principles.

If it were the intention of God that the Law of Moses must make way for another one, then God would have declared to the Jews that this law was only provisional; he would have noted the time when it would terminate. Instead of this, the Law of Moses is everywhere preached as eternal. Moses was, therefore, an impostor. Even if J.C. truly performed miracles, it is presently preached that we should not follow any such miracles and change our religion: the Jews were also justified in this.

But was he supposed to perform these supposed miracles for the crowds? No, right in front of the synagogue, in the midst of the temple, before the pontiffs, the scribes, and there he should clearly have explained his third position in the deity, along with all the rest of what they dazzle us with every single day.

SECOND ARTICLE: THE COMING OF A LIBERATOR.

I only need to write in all the isles of the Archipelago that I'm the liberator who was promised to them, that I have come to save and deliver them from the servitude in which the remnant of this

⁴³ Ms. 1197: "of the synagogue".

people, once so renowned, now languishes. They would no doubt understand that I will defeat the Turks and restore them to their place, to their liberty. But no, I don't do anything, they remain the plaything of a barbaric and plundering nation which steals their goods, their wives, their children, but I tell them parables and then say: "In fact, I came to deliver you from your sins, from servitude to Satan". And I'll deliver them from their sins just as fully as we are from ours.

Do Christians sin any less than other people? For this to be true, both the laws and the passions would have to be abolished. Show me, I beg you, M.R.F., the least peculiarity of the Christians: what distinguishes them from those who haven't been redeemed? Does a man who is baptized believe without education? Wouldn't he also believe with instruction and education if he weren't baptized? Would the absolution of a pagan be distinguished by some mystic in the confessional from that which the priest grants him? Does extreme unction restore health, or does it make anyone depart from life without regret and in peace? Do his orders make a priest wiser, more enlightened, more learned, more orderly in his morals? Does a marriage performed before the village priest make a couple more fertile, or does it make their children any better, does it mean any less discord, any better a home life, any less adultery, even any less murder, than exists in the families of savages, which are formed without ceremony and simply through assent? Do children respect their parents more? Are the parents wiser, more attentive to their duties? And does he who receives confirmation have a purer faith? Does he who has received the consecrated bread into his mouth, which is the body of Jesus Christ, who is God: does this man live any better? Is he more upright? From what, then, are we delivered, saved, and redeemed, if none of these things change us at all?

THIRD ARTICLE: THE MIRACULOUS BIRTH OF THIS LIBERATOR.

If we overlook all the flaws in the Gospel, which are countless, where is the advantage to be gained from a mere tale, where is any semblance of proof, starting with the genealogies? Doesn't it simply relate so many generations, organizing names in a certain way? I could make myself the descendant of Cyrus on equally good grounds. Would a similar document be accepted in any public court? Would the Jews agree? Our own doctors are criticized for having pointed out these

blunders by trying to harmonize them; they should have simply been passed over in silence; maybe few people would have noticed.

Isn't it easy to say, twenty years after the death of a man whose father and mother had been known, that he was conceived without a father, that his birth was proclaimed by spirits to shepherds, that kings came from afar to worship him, guided by a star? He said nothing about this when he was alive, but what does that matter!

But what did people say about this birth? Was anyone talking about it? Fifty years, maybe eighty, passed before anyone mentioned it. Where is the testimony of these shepherds? To whom did they tell their story at the time? Who were these kings? Where were their kingdoms? Three kings don't leave their states, they don't pass into those of others, without leaving some trace of it, at least for fifty years afterwards. In those days there were astronomers who would have noticed the course of such an extraordinary star, moving in such an incredible way; some testimony of this would have come down to us, or else the first Christians would have been disproved; but what if this star was only visible for the three kings?

It is easier to believe the history of the Epiphany is a passage from elsewhere inserted in the Gospel. It still says that presents are required: they carried gold.

To make the thing reasonable, a prophet should have taken Mary at the age of six and have said in the middle of the synagogue: "Put this child on guard if you please, but at the age of fifteen she will give birth to a boy without the help of any man." Then the Jews would have believed, relative to the care they had taken to watch over her. Or instead, she should have been taken at the age of two and she should have given birth at four. Even this could still be contested, in the absence of ample information from many witnesses. He should have been born from a stone or from a man: a miracle for a miracle, neither is harder than another for God, but it's different for men.

If you point, M.R.F., to the confidence people have in history, I will point to the confidence people have had in fables and novels, but I've discussed this point elsewhere (truths 10 and 11).

There is far more to say here: that this history was universally contradicted when it appeared and even by those among whom it was supposed to have happened, which wasn't the case with Pierre de Provence.

It's also worth mentioning that this history was infinitely to the honor of the Jewish nation, which the whole earth would recognize as God's people, the original source of religion, honored by the incarnation of a God in their race and their blood. Does anyone resist a factual truth, especially when it raises us so high?

Truly, M.R.F., is it reasonable to destroy the books of the Jews of the present-day because, we say, they contain blasphemies? Can they defend themselves from our claims without using what we decide to call blasphemies?

The first Christians were terribly blasphemous against the gods of the pagans; our theologians, our missionaries blaspheme Mahomet and the gods of the Indies, of America; we are either mistaken or the Roman emperors had good reasons and acted properly when they burned all the Christian books they could find, and the Chinese today have a right to do the same thing.

But nobody wins their trial by having the writings of their party burned or suppressed. No, it's by responding to them and showing that they contain false facts and bad arguments. Justice refuses to let us argue alone: a party which has produced its documents and its arguments invites the other to do the same, and judgment is only pronounced after these summations, since he who doesn't dare produce his authentication probably doesn't have a good one. But he who doesn't want his adversaries to produce theirs is afraid of their power: only ecclesiastical tyranny and brazenness ever dreamed of imposing silence on those with whom they were in dispute by suppressing their writings.

Nothing does more to discredit Christianity than this effort to suppress what is opposed to it, while the greatest extravagance, the most impudent suppositions are adopted when they promote it.

Nothing the rabbis might say would affect a reasonable mind as much as the trickery of the sibylline books and the testimony stuffed into Josephus. For ultimately, these rabbis might lie, but it is impossible that those who love the truth or who have it on their side should fall into these unworthy snares; you'll never find a litigant who has forged false titles relying on genuine contracts, but you will find many who have made false quittances for a genuine contract, or false contracts against people to whom they'd never lent anything.

If Christianity had had good reasons and solid foundations, it wouldn't have relied on fraud and bad arguments; the mouths of those who objected wouldn't have been shut; the texts written to shed light on the matter wouldn't have been burned.

It's proclaimed loudly that our Gospels have a great testimony in their favor, that three evangelists died to maintain their truth, which none of the historians of antiquity, whose accounts we believe, did or would have agreed to do. A ridiculous argument:

1st) Even if we wanted to deny these deaths, where are the formal proofs for them? Nobody knows what became of them and what is said are mere tales. In addition, those who told the stories of their supposed ordeals would need to have died maintaining their own stories, which would not be enough: error, prejudice and obstinacy having produced martyrs in every religion.

2nd) We would need the text of the trials in which they were condemned to know if this was precisely why they suffered their ordeals: they might have committed other crimes, outraged the magistrate or the government, stirred the people to sedition, etc.

If I go telling fables in the streets, nobody would put me to death; but if, in these fables, I take girls from their mothers, women from their husbands, if I waste the goods of these families, if I turn the peoples away from due obedience to their sovereign, if I imply there is virtue in idleness, etc., I can be put to death quite justifiably. Will we conclude from that that I died to maintain my fables, and would that mean they were true? Does the death of many Jesuits and monks in Japan and elsewhere entail the truth of Papism?

Does the death of a few Protestant ministers imply the truth of the Reformation? Anabaptists were led to the scaffold by the thousands, and died with utmost constancy and with all the signs of a sincere conviction.

FOURTH ARTICLE: THE INCOMPARABLE DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE PURITY OF HIS MORALITY.

I am prepared to embrace the purest morality, whoever preaches it, but I can't handle this part calmly: aside from the bad faith, there is also impudence here. Forgive me, M.R.F., I am beside myself when I see such shameful fraud upheld so brazenly.

I notice, for example, that the word religion is murmured everywhere. "If this person," says a certain Pharisee, "hadn't been religious, they would have denied this deposit or this debt, the receipt of which has been lost". Miserable hypocrite! Say: "If they hadn't been upright!" And save your word "religion" for those who say masses, for those who bring feasts to talapains so they'll minister to their dead relatives, for those who make pilgrimages to Mecca, for those who, guided by their Brahmin, eat neither sole nor rabbit, nor anything that was once alive.

"They have abused, or they will abuse your religion", a powerful man is told, to make him do something or refrain from doing something. Who would guess that this is applied to even the most profane cases, which means: "You've been imposed on, or they will impose on you." Soon, our friends the clerics get their way: although religion is the apple of discord, it rules everything, it will maintain peace in families, honesty in business, it will maintain society, inspire bravery in soldiers, justice in magistrates; words like conscience, probity, honor, and disinterestedness will be forgotten: we can already see how far this has gone. Words like Church, charity, sacrament, priest, cleric, saint, meant something completely different than what they're made to signify at present, and we're informed about the meaning they once had, which is applied to the one they have gradually been given. *Sacrament* means a solemn oath, a commitment; nothing is as sacred, nothing is as holy as this; this word is adopted to designate certain gestures said to have been instituted by God, which the clerics offer for sale. And the sacraments, in their final meanings,

end up clothed with the idea of holy and sacred which has been attached to their original meaning.

Church means the assembly of a whole people, which is always a venerable thing. Soon it only meant the Christian people, then a small number of tyrants in hoods and little collars, people who are far from venerable, and who cite in their favor what was said of an entire people!

And *priest* too: it means a senator and magistrate; cleric: another, subaltern magistrate; it now signifies a man who makes God descend to Earth with his rod, who remits sins!

Charity signifies love, tenderness, a keen interest in someone; it now signifies "giving".

A *saint* is a just, innocent, respectable man; at present it's a man for whom the Pope has assigned a spot next to God, whom they believe is localized, he's a man who commands nature, who brings rain and fair weather, and who is given a share of God's honors and worship.

But let's come back to this incomparable doctrine. He said: "Be subject to the powers." The powers forbid the publication of the Gospel. The Roman emperors outlawed the practice of Christianity: the apostles had either to sin against these commands or against the order they had received to preach.

What did he say that was new? These parables, these proverbs, baptism, the common meal are only old Jewish rubrics. If there are a few good, reasonable sentences there, our peasants often add them to their way of talking, and rightly so.

He acted like Luther: he left the groundwork of Judaism intact and wished to reform what fraud, pride or avarice had introduced into religion, and spoke up against the pontiffs, the sacrificing priests and other tyrants who had seized control of religion; but with such good intentions, he was far from being up to the task.

I maintain that he spoke imprecisely and with a crude mind. All that's needed is the same example: "Be subject to the powers, all power comes from God." What a fine example of morality,

a fine policy you have there! The Arabs, the corsairs, armed brigands have power; should we be subject to them, not defend ourselves against them? A distinction between legitimate power should have been made, setting the limits of this power.

We have already seen that all factitious religions are the ruin of morality. It is easy to demonstrate that Christianity is its total annihilation, with its dogmas of faith, predestination, grace, to which we might add the efficacy of the sacraments.

When Numa said that the Nymph Egeria dictated the laws to him, his main goal wasn't to make others believe that he had revelations, it was to instruct the masses, to help them rise above their barbarism. Christianity, on the other hand, prioritizes belief in J.C. as God, by a third and totally. Virtue and good deeds are only accessory, useless without this precondition. We are supposed to believe, but what precisely? Terrible, impossible, or at least unintelligible things, things disproved by reason, common sense and our deepest feelings. Perfection is made to consist in being convinced of a pile of gibberish which nobody can believe if they don't understand it, and which nobody can ever understand.

Some people have said that faith alone was necessary, that it alone justifies, that works are useless, since salvation is given to us gratuitously. What remains, then, of morality?

Not one good deed can be done without the particular assistance of God, and this assistance is given only to his elect. Everyone is freed from the obligation to do good deeds or is at least legitimately excused by saying that this assistance was lacking when he committed his crimes. I once heard a bigot, caught *in flagrante delicto*, say this very thing; she responded to the judge with a professional coolness: "God abandoned me."

Some have dared to say that good deeds done without grace, far from being meritorious, are crimes. The greatest personalities of antiquity, whose names are so highly revered, did not one heroic deed which didn't render them criminals; they are so many illustrious wretches, their victories over their passions are so many misdeeds. Socrates, Phalaris, Seneca and Nero are all equal! Who among us knows if, by doing a good deed, he might only increase the number of his sins? We don't know if we have grace or not.

Those with whom reason has some sway, seized by horror at the aspect of this dogma, say that God has never refused his grace when it's asked of him. But what does that prove? We would need to know the full scope of this request, and a set way of requesting it, which is effective *per se* (as with transubstantiation: five words and you're done!), otherwise the criminal can always say that he asked all he could and obtained nothing. Even the devout person can never know if he has been successful, although he has spared no efforts.

What can we say of these mystics, these saints with their revelations and these ecstatic personages, who are with God as Hyacinth was with Apollo, Adonis with Venus, these people who believe they are even further above other men than God is above them? They will declare that all it takes is contemplation, a purely passive state, whereby virtue and duty is lowly and vulgar, and it is folly not to do whatever you please, even if it would be a crime for others; that after their spiritual marriages they are no longer themselves. They can follow their first impulses and consider them to be always divine; ultimately, they are sinless after these spiritual marriages. Tell me about Christian morality and spend some time in the company of these saints, these mystics, all of whose first impulses can never be crimes. Trust them with your wallet, your daughter, your wife!

Finally, Christians accept predestination and maintain that God has his elect. If this is so, if my state for eternity is a fixed and determinate thing, then it's folly to torment myself about it and I won't do the least thing in hopes of obtaining a good or avoiding a bad end.

It is useless to dwell on this, this matter discussed a hundred times will always be a Sisyphean task for theologians; all their detours, all their subtle distinctions, which often trouble reason without persuading it, are roads to nowhere; we must set them aside to deny this detestable doctrine, or we will fall victim to all these absurdities.

When people who are imbued with such doctrines refuse their criminal passions, their conscience would have to have spoken very loudly to stop them; thus, this isn't what usually holds them back, these mystics, marinating in contemplation: human fear is their only restraint.

Add to this the casuists and directors, who make a profession of keeping records of every imaginable crime and who give an education to people who normally wouldn't even dream of such things or who would be more horrified by them if they had thought they'd gone unnoticed. Let's say something about these venerable authors of the *Summaries of Sins* who are ingenious in finding ways to sin without offending our conscience.

Indulgences and absolution authorize the greatest crimes through the hope of forgiveness. Madame de Brinvilliers, one of the most infamous monsters, had poisoned her father, her mother, her brothers, the poor of the hospital [Hôtel-Dieu]; she expected, once satisfied and satiated with crime, to be absolved by going to tell everything to the first rogue dressed in a priest's robes. How many people are at peace with themselves after pillaging whole provinces, after murders, after having torn wives from their husbands, daughters from mothers, sons from poor widows, simply because they went to confession and received the absolution of a hypocrite who also excused them and restored them to grace because they are powerful? Has the benefactor of a convent ever been refused absolution? They go even further. The most vile, the most notorious extortioner, the most barbaric tyrant, *in fine* the worst man on earth has only to found a convent, fund a chapel, and a proud mausoleum will be placed beside the altars; there he will be represented in the arms of Piety; all the Virtues will weep around the tomb of a man who knew them in name only, or as the prerogative of his victims; an unworthy flatterer will deliver from the pulpit, which he calls the pulpit of truth, a speech in his honor and will place in the bosom of the deity the subject of public abhorrence.

How can the wicked man, the vicious man not rest easy when he sees a man a thousand times guiltier than himself made a saint?

But, coming back to this director, what species of man will he be, then, face to face with an attractive woman who has full confidence in him, who might ask him the most peculiar questions? And who could be sure they would never succumb to the near-inevitable temptations? Thus, nearly all of them would give in, if human fear didn't keep them in check. Debauchery, curiosity and the desire to rule various families and estates, by making themselves masters of all secrets, are the only things that led to the invention of this supposed sacrament.

I've seen confessors asking the penitent who came to see them what their profession was. A domestic servant? "Go to the confessional at the end of the church", says the august fellow, "I don't take servant's confessions." What could be said of these people who, after telling you in the confessional to give alms, after preaching the need for this and giving you to understand that this liberates a person from nearly all penitence, after giving you absolution, they tell you that if you have plans to give some alms or other, are they more needy than many other people? Reply, M.R.F., am I exaggerating? You won't dare deny what I'm saying, and I haven't said all I know.

The difference between morality and religion is easy to see, it's the difference between the natural lights which are given by God himself and the artificial instructions of men.

The pagan philosophers didn't exaggerate the vices of Constantine and Clovis, whom they saw as apostates; Christians sought to tarnish the almost infinite virtues of emperor Julian. If Nero had become a Christian, if he had founded churches, enriched the priests, monks and bishops, we might celebrate feastdays for him.

Is this not the same as saying: "Forget all the virtues, trample on all probity, be cruel, barbaric, tyrannical, wicked in every way, that's all meaningless; sacrifice everything to your passions, your pleasures, your ambition, you will be saints, men will raise altars to you if you profess to believe certain things, force others to believe them, and you will be enriched and respected by certain people who are the dispensers of saintliness, or at least of the title of saint".

In vain are a thousand innocent people tortured, stripped of their property, dead from poverty by your rapine; in vain will the blood you shed cry out to heaven for vengeance; trifles, give to the clerics; presents appease the deity as they appease men.

A wicked man who is a protector of a factitious religion, is a saint in the one he professes; a good and virtuous man who sees its falsehood and abuses, who resists it, is an enemy of God, no effort will be spared to do away with him: treachery, murder; he will be pursued with steel and fire; if these efforts succeed, this is a just punishment of God, who will be thanked: it will be called a miracle.

Let's make a little reflection here before we go into the details of Christianity. Look, M.R.F., at the Georgians and the Mingrelians, nations which have abandoned the study of philosophy to become Christians: they read the Gospel, the priests explain this incomparable doctrine, this pure morality to them. In what fearful chaos, in what vicious brutality do they not now live?

There is nothing in the Gospel beyond what our natural lights alone tell us; our theologians object and admire the dogmas of relating all things to God, of humility, of contempt for riches, of forgiveness of insults, of the love of enemies, of the destruction of self-love; with all this they fill the ears of the masses who listen unreflectively. Let's investigate these a little, if you please, M.R.F., and let's get into the details.

Relating everything to God: every religion does this, including paganism, all the ancient monuments are full of punishments for crimes, rewards for virtue, all of them preach fear and respect for the gods. The talapoin presents Sommonocodam as the example of all the virtues and as the source of the ones we are lucky enough to practice.

It's not beyond the mind's capacity to know that God is our creator and our judge, or at least to believe that there is a creator and a judge, and that we should seek his approbation.

If this precept were something new, it wouldn't offer any other feeling of its author than what was held by Plato and Confucius. After that, we must explain this expression of "relating everything to God". If this refers to the pure love of the mystics, it's an extravagance, the production of a hollow brain or the language of a visionary or an impostor; we can only love what we know to be useful and capable of bringing us pleasure; we can't decide what we love or hate, any more than any other intelligent being. With our capacity for love, we invincibly love that which is loveable with respect to us, and yet we can act as if we hate it; in the same way, on the contrary, we can hate and act as if we love: I can mistreat my mistress and caress my wife whom I dislike.

We cannot, therefore, love God in a disinterested manner, but only with respect to ourselves; we can value things without relation to us and as a disinterested act, but we can only love God in

light of the good he will do us. As for admiration, respect, adoration, these follow from our knowledge or idea of the perfections of God.

If gratitude is cited as a necessary principle of our love, is being grateful a blessing comparable to the risk I would incur in Christianity of being tormented for an eternity by an infinite power? Can I call the hope of a better fate and unlimited felicity which I can only obtain by observing so many difficult laws, amid so many violent temptations, a blessing? Indeed no, M.R.F., where then is the cause for love? It's already plenty if, in this religion, fear and respect remain; people shudder at the very mention of death because of their uncertainty as to what will happen to them, annihilation would produce calm, and most men would wish for it on the spot.

This respect, this fear, consideration of the immensity of God, attention to his power, his wisdom and his justice produce the feeling called adoration; which is the only one we are capable of.

It can't be said that the hope of infinite blessings, which are nearly impossible to acquire, with an alternative of pains which are nearly impossible to avoid, could produce any love for the author of these promises and threats; offer a child whatever he wants if he sits still on a chair after dinner, and a whip if he moves, see whether he ends up loving you!

It is, they say, God who feeds us, who provides us with so many necessary and pleasant things, so we must love him. We certainly love father, mother, benefactor. Empty words, all of it! Doesn't God also give us diseases, poisons, accidents?

Besides, we always return to the agreement that existence is not a blessing. Those who say the opposite will speak against their own inward feeling.

I deny that I owe love to my father for bringing me into the world and taking care of me in my infancy; I owe him respect, but gratitude and love originate in the blessings I receive from him when I am in a fit state to recognize them and when they soften my pains and are personally useful to me.

As for food, the pirates of Salé and Algiers feed their slaves; food is a blessing to the man who is owned; hatred is due to those who would deprive us of it, but no love is owed to those who grant it to us.

It has been proved that God didn't give us a blessing by giving us our existence; does he do any more by keeping us in existence? If he had made us pure spirits, or if he had offered us great blessings, easy to acquire, then we might love him. But, M.R.F., you agree inwardly, it is impossible to love the God who is presented to us.

All that remains, then, is the fear of God, of his judgments, of his punishments and respect for his greatness: which factitious religion doesn't preach the same thing?

Now, point to the goodness of God, who has given his only son, who, unsatisfied with having put him to death for our sins, also leaves him upon our altars: rubbish for the masses. *Ad populum phaleras.*

If you like, [I can concede that] the word love cannot have bad effects; however, the simple and bare truth is better than exaggeration, especially when it comes to God, who is truth itself. This simple truth is that we must relate everything to God and not even be virtuous for any reason but to deserve his approbation; but that this could ever be disinterested, free of fear or hope, is a pure illusion, a phantom that can only enter the brain of a true madman.

All fanatics, mystics and ecstasies who say that they love God disinterestedly, for his sake alone, without any return for themselves, that they would suffer the pains of Hell if it were his pleasure and other such fine things, are far from sensible, pronouncing words they don't understand. They have heard things, they repeat them, their fancy is wound up until their imagination reaches a fever pitch. Thus, certain people think they're brave, boasting of their imaginary prowess and convincing themselves that they're capable of doing so on occasion; however, they could hardly stand to let someone flick their noses twenty times. When things are made real, they recognize their folly.

Our ecstasies are just as they say of themselves, just as it's true that they see J.C. flattering them, caressing them, piercing their bosom, tearing out their hearts and so many other visions.

If we searched through the philosophers' writings with as much eagerness to find fine things there, and with the same indulgence as we grant to the Gospel, a far more perfect morality would be found there. If the Gospel were read with the critical spirit that Christians bring to their reading of the philosophers, how many far more pernicious maxims would they find there! But party-minded men abandon all sincerity; they focus on a word that honors their own party, while passing over a myriad that would put their enemies in a good light; and this works well enough, as long as steel and fire and dungeons keep the other side from speaking.

Humility is a creature of reason, if it isn't simple modesty and a reasonable feeling leading us to attribute to ourselves what we're owed and which is suitable for us. Is there a people anywhere, even the most savage and wild, that doesn't consider this mental disposition as one of the most essential and necessary virtues for society? This virtue is promoted in all the writings of the pagans, and the opposite vice is the subject of their most passionate speeches.

As for ourselves, we owe ourselves a reasonable and judicious opinion; as for the virtues before God, we can never take pride in them, no matter how good we might be in our lives. The reason why is because it would take an infinite knowledge to disentangle the motives behind our actions.

I comprehend nothing that does more to honor God than this inward pleasure men feel for having been faithful in practicing the virtues, while Christianity wants to forbid it; it takes everything to excess for a semblance of uniqueness.

It would be rather bizarre for a good man to call himself the worst sinner, for God isn't pleased with our exaggerations but the precise truth, and an awareness of our good deeds should not keep us from trembling before God. When we believe we're doing the best things, our true motives must necessarily be hidden from us, but we can discover them if we pay them our attention; we sometimes abandon because of laziness things we believe we're neglecting out of generosity.

This, I believe, is how we should show this virtue to God and men, whether it be called modesty or something else, we need not look insane to abase ourselves, as a certain saint did, or call a baby goat our brother, as another one did.

These hypocrites who preach humility in this visionary sense: what consideration do they not demand from the rest of humanity? What respect, far more astonishing, does the director of the monastery not demand from the other boorish monks?

He who is the trustee and the infallible interpreter of this law of humility, of this Gospel, by taking the title of the servant of servants, which office he doesn't fulfill, wants instead to wield that of the King of Kings: he has dared let himself be named Vice-God, he acts with the most brutish obstinacy, the most shocking pomp and pride. It was rightly said once that there was more vanity under a frock than under a helmet: nobody is as insolent or as haughty as a monk, a hypocrite, a Jesuit when he thinks he can get away with it; nobody is so cowardly, so groveling, when he thinks he needs someone who dares to ignore him.

Everything should come down to a proper use of our rights, a reasonable opinion of ourselves and a judicious deference for our superiors.

Forgiveness of offenses is also that clemency which is preached and praised by all nations, but it has its limits; we owe strict justice to those who are subject to us, but their failings must not go entirely unpunished. To do otherwise would be to tolerate crime; and if, in many cases, we ourselves didn't do what is right, we would be forever victimized by unjust people; the economy of societies would be destroyed.

But, it will be said, it's the business of public justice to avenge offenses against individuals; therefore the complainant and denouncer of the offending party mustn't have forgiven him.

To take things back to the origin, which is required in good and sound philosophy, men are born free⁴⁴ and everyone comes into the world with a right of self-maintenance, of taking back what

⁴⁴ Ms. 1192 adds: "It is only by chance, by human institution, and by accident, that there are republics, princes and magistrates: this is not essential to human nature."

was taken from him, of forcibly repelling those who would disturb and by punishing offenses, to keep others from being audacious enough to commit another one.

If you deny this right which is so obvious, M.R.F., you also take it from the republics and from all kings, who only have it because it was surrendered by individuals. If you claim that, after this surrender by individuals they no longer have any right to it, I reply that if they have ceded their rights, this was on the expectation that the magistrate would avenge them, and there are cases where they are unable to use this means. For example, when they have no witnesses.

But, after all, savages, who are not governed by anyone, still have it completely, this natural right: the Gospel is not therefore made for them, or rather, it would preach them the way to self-destruction.

We must return and consult our reason: it teaches us that we must not be so sensitive to insults as to vengefully react to every transgression without regard for the weaknesses of others; it teaches us that we must be swayed by their repentance, but it also teaches us that in other cases we must seek vengeance, such as when we can expect further offenses, when our honor would suffer if we remained passive, etc. And at the same time my reason prescribes a mistrust of myself which keeps me from acting on my first impulse, since I'm afraid I may delude myself and trust my passions more than justice.

The subject of the sense of honor arises too naturally here to avoid discussing it briefly.

Theologians, vested with names that have made them revered by the stupid masses, have no need for true honor, they disregard it; they are sure, without any great show, of always enjoying the respect that they want others to have for them. If they are treacherous, deceitful, unfaithful, untrustworthy, this means nothing: they can even commit dark crimes without any fear of repercussion. It's not the same with the man of the sword, with the man of the robe, the merchant, girls, women: preachers, monks, priests cry out against open acts of vengeance; they have no desire for them. If they had tricked you, stolen, debauched your wife or your daughter by the sacred means of the confession or counseling, you would seek vengeance on them. Ah! The Gospel forbids it. Have recourse to the tribunals, see what sort of justice you get! These anointed

of the Lord will come out white as snow, and the prince will be told that he must interpose his authority to save them the shame of the sentence, if the evidence of the crime can't be eliminated. The sense of honor is folly, they say, and contrary to the Gospel. So be it, but they add: "contrary to reason". Based on what? Am I in control of the minds and feelings of others? Honor, in general, is the present respect of men. Therefore, I must do what will bring it to myself in the country I live in. In Turkey, a woman loses her honor if she walks outside with her face uncovered; in Europe even the most prudish vestal virgin walks around without a veil; in many parts of the Indies women are naked, at least from the waist up; how would we react to that in Europe? We must adhere to custom; among so many men of the sword, a man would be lost if he endured certain words, certain gestures or blows without defending himself; we must adapt to people's feelings.

What could be more odious, more surprising than to see the true believers agreeing that, to save your life or even your money, you have a right to kill anyone who would try to take them from you, and then to see them refusing us the same right against someone who takes away our honor, which is far more dear to good people than all the money on earth and life itself? Is it, then, the job of theologians to decide what is right for me? Would the clerics accept a decision that respect is all they need and that money is useless? Is it my fault if those among whom I live have made honor reside in certain things? "But honor is folly!" they'll cry. Oh! Their own lives for the most part prove well enough how convinced they are of this.

In some lands, passers-by are allowed to eat any grapes they find on vines; in other places they are pursued as thieves if they do this. In both cases it's about honor, we must adhere to custom; the Gospel cannot deny it, without treating honor and the respect of those with whom God wants me to live as something chimerical, and consequently it can't deny it without falling into fanaticism.

I don't intend to criticize the prohibition of duels; this became necessary due to the excesses and brazenness of so many louts taking pride in a false notion of bravery; but that has nothing to do with the right everyone has to make a proper use of it. It's no crime to drink a glass of wine before entering a war-council to judge a criminal, but it's a just law and a wise precaution to order sobriety in this office.

Nothing would be more useful to society than dueling properly understood, if men only had recourse to it when they have neither documents nor witnesses to obtain justice. Brutes and usurpers would be more reserved. This is why more politeness is found, fewer insulting words are heard, there is less oath-breaking in the countryside than in the city, and among troops than among other men.

It's also brutish madness to say that you'll make your own justice when you can establish your rights with documents or witnesses before your natural judges; the right to make one's own justice is reestablished when credit and plotting prevail over one's rights.

The most plausible argument made against duels is that the weaker offended party succumbs to the efforts of the more vigorous one, which is unjust and wrong. But when the weaker party is outraged enough to run the risk of a fight, which he demands, he is usually as strong as his enemy who is only accepting it, and who suffers from the pricking of his conscience; this isn't an infallible rule, but in the case of regulated justice, is it less common to see the rights of the unprotected man succumb to the power of a usurper with titles? At least, in the other situation, the weaker party with right on his side, if he succumbs, has the consolation that he managed to put the offending party in danger too.

Let's return to the forgiveness of offenses. Let's keep on following the law and natural reason: let the offended party put himself in the place of the offender; let him place himself in the same circumstances and let him judge calmly, setting aside all passion, what sort of punishment he thinks he would deserve; and then, let him treat his enemy equally boldly.

I've heard that an emperor was once asked for a city, to be governed according to Plato's Republic; what I'd love to see is a city governed according to the Gospel where people were convinced that good works are useless for salvation, since this is attained by immutable predestination, where every insult is suffered without seeking vengeance in forgiveness of our brothers, where everyone sells their property to give it to the poor, where nobody sows or harvests, like the birds of the sky, where nobody thinks about tomorrow, saying: "God keeps the sparrows well fed, let's simply trust Providence!"

Let's think a little about how this forgiveness of offenses is meant. A Pope receives a slap, he isn't content with the usual forms of vengeance, he excommunicates. This, he thinks, means to damn, for all eternity, in an inextinguishable fire, a man who is very wise and very virtuous. This isn't all: he also sought to damn all his family and all his posterity for all centuries, and the bull of this excommunication is renewed and published every year. The Pope should have offered the other cheek, according to the precept of the Gospel.

Will you say with the ultramontanes, M.R.F., that the Pope, as God on earth, can do what God did, who damned all men for a slight offense by their first father? What a beautiful morality this is, well established and worthy of mention for its purity.

However, it's not the insanity of just one man, it's perpetuated and renewed every year and it's approved solemnly every year by continuing it.

But, oh my God! Where are visible marks of the rank more carefully observed than among ecclesiastics, where, for the sake of interest and vengeance, are they observed better than among them? But they have obtained a state of affairs where the slightest attack on a useless rascal dressed in black, whose profession is to bring God down to earth for money, is punished more harshly than the murder of an upright man, regardless of how he benefited his fellow men. That is the forgiveness of insults.

Julian, whom the Christians want to believe is a monster because he abandoned their religion, Julian, I say, was content to simply reply to a satire that the inhabitants of Antioch had written against him; Caesar didn't punish Catullus when he wrote against him; Cimon and another Greek begged their children not to think of avenging them; but Sixtus V ordered to have the tongue and wrists cut off a poor fellow who confessed his guilt on the basis of a promised impunity; Sixtus, with a forced explanation, claims a right to break his word and he thus avenges himself for a word which harmed neither his honor nor his probity. Where, then, is the efficacy of this morality? And even if it really did contain all the beautiful things people claim to find in it, it would still be quite useless, since, dictated by God himself, it is unable to elevate people to the point of virtue which the philosophers attained by means of reflection alone, and by the urging

of their righteous hearts and their consciences. Antioch would have been leveled, Catullus would have been killed if Caesar and Julian had been besotted with Christianity.

Theodosius is one of the heroes of this law: he had ten thousand men massacred in the same city of Antioch for less than a satire! Lycurgus, a pagan, saved from the rage of the mob and gave shelter to a rebel who had offended him to the point of putting out one of his eyes when he published his laws. But, you tell me, Ambrose refused the door of the church to Theodosius, covered as he was with this wrongly shed blood. But didn't Demosthenes also criticize Philip for his vices? Was it necessary to be Christian to sense the horror of Theodosius' crime, and what did St. Ambrose have to fear by criticizing him? He was only too familiar with the mind of the emperor, and if this was a heroic deed, many others can be found, of which Christianity was not the first motive!

You'll agree, M.R.F., that this precept taken literally is a hyperbole and that it neither can nor should be put into practice; if it's not taken literally, it's only the same clemency that is known, preached and admired in all nations. I strongly endorse forgiving offenses, but the offense must be purely individual and the lack of punishment must not be dangerous as an example or have bad repercussions. This wasn't the kind of forgiveness that queen Elizabeth of Hungary granted her father's murderers. Although I've seen this cited in a famous book as a Christian deed and a point in favor of canonization, I regard it as a frightful crime against nature, against order and law.

Love of enemies is a hollow expression: love is not a free act, nobody loves or hates as they please; to be truer, it should have been said: *Treat your enemies as well as you would treat those whom you don't hate*; then it comes back to clemency and forgiveness of offenses.

I believe that, to be precisely true, we must forgive, tolerate and endure the offenses of others against us without pursuing with too much animosity those who have wronged us; that we must, by the gentlest means, shelter ourselves from their wicked intentions, and only consent to their destruction when we have no other way to protect ourselves; finally, I believe that if we were sure of never being harmed by our enemies, we should live with them as graciously as possible.

The Pope... did he love emperor Henry? Did Innocent XI love Louis XIV? Did the clergy love the Huguenots? What love is this!

The commandment to love our enemies is an impossible one, therefore it didn't come from God. If it means treating them like our friends, then prudence should be ranked among the vices in this doctrine. Unless you're insane, you take precautions with your sworn enemy.

He who taught these precepts never practised them, he ran away from his enemies, bitterly reprimanded them, cursed them and ultimately didn't treat them like people he loved; yes, he asked for them to be forgiven for his death, but, according to our beliefs, do you think he obtained this? He could only hope that his father would be more attentive to his recommendations.

Finally, the Incas, calling themselves the sons of the Sun just as J.C. called himself the son of God, taught in literal terms the same precept of forgetting offenses.

The destruction of self-love is a chimera; it can't be destroyed as long as we exist; it's a question of regulating it; which is what a sensible mind would have recommended.

As for poverty and despising riches, the philosophers have handled this subject a thousand times better than the Gospel and they practiced it better. Compare the Cynics, two hundred years after Diogenes, with the bishops only a hundred years after the Apostles, compare the Indian monks with the Capuchins: argument is pointless, the comparison speaks for itself! Spinoza, who is considered an atheist, refused a pension of 800 pounds and was content with one of 500 pounds. The Pope decided that a Bishop couldn't get by on less than six thousand pounds in income: two large noble families would think themselves rich with wealth like this.

What a strange way to practice alms: the highways, the streets are full of poor people, mendicants, cripples. Were so many visible in Sparta under the laws of Lycurgus?

The Turks are more charitable than we are; all that Christianity can, therefore, boast of is having produced so many voluntary beggars, not of encouraging people to practice the sort of alms that would benefit the truly poor, who have no way to make a living. What a trick! I'd gladly wager

that if the Popes had been restricted to a modest expense, their houses to four rooms, their table to two plates, their domestic servants to two, then there would never have been annates, or indulgences, or dispenses etc.

Nature tells us of the need for alms. And what does the author of the Gospel say about this? Bizarre, impracticable, ridiculous dogmas: "Sell all you have, give it to the poor if you would be perfect." Then these poor would have to hand this over immediately as well, if they would also be perfect, otherwise they should refuse it: nobody could accept it. Therefore, for the whole world to be perfect, all property would have to be abandoned. And where would they get the wherewithal to say the holy mass if everything were left to ruin? Maybe it's the division of lands he commanded, following Lycurgus and the two Gracchi.

It might be said, to the honor of Christianity, that it prescribes an impossible perfection. What would happen if the whole world stayed virgin, if the whole world gave itself to contemplation? What an effect has this morality had! A mob of rogues make a vow of poverty, then they do all they can to steal property from families and substance from the truly poor people⁴⁵. The perfection of poverty is to possess nothing; that of liberality, is to give everything and retain nothing; modesty, abasing oneself beyond all measure; chastity should not beget the sort of clemency that punishes nobody: then sobriety should also consist in never drinking or eating anything!

The ministers of this pure morality have the impudence to praise it while they're building proud structures, delicate tables, sumptuous carriages, sovereignties, principalities, pompous titles which they bestow on each other.

"You will know the tree by its fruits", said J.C. Indeed! I know from the effects it produces that his morality is contemptible. Give me the Church's property, reduce each stipend to six hundred pounds, the prelatures to a thousand écus, the monks and nuns to fifty écus, I would see to it that there wouldn't be a single beggar in the kingdom, or a single poor person, or anyone unfortunate

⁴⁵ Ms. 1192: "When will all these poor folks and these rascals be sold to the Algerians? There they would learn what poverty and work really look like. They would find themselves subject to a truly strict morality unlike that of their patriarch."

enough to be reduced to a dishonorable profession to make a living. Then why beg, why impose taxes for the Hôtel-Dieu [hospital]?

When I'm asked for money in God's name, I always ask myself: "In God's name, I beg you to work. If you're unable, then go to the bishop who has fifty thousand pounds in rent entrusted to him to distribute it to people like you, to the parish priest who receives the tithes from which you deserve a share; as for me, it's not my job to feed the poor, any more than to look after the bridges and roadways. There are funds for them. If I find you dying of cold, I'll bring you into my house to warm you up; if you're naked, I'll cover you with a rag; if you're drowning, I'll pull you out of the water, I'll help you recover. My heart tells me to do all this without the benefit of the Gospel, reason alone is the source of the right morality. I'd bet my head that a thirty-year-old shepherdess, who has seen nothing but her flocks, will give correct answers to every question about pure morality that you might ask her, provided that the questions are humanized and brought to the level she can understand.

I'd like to share a short analysis of the two main parts of the Gospel, the Dominical Oration and the Sermon on the Mount, but I would end up repeating what I've already said. Let us, M.R.F., pay attention to one line only: "Our Father who art in Heaven."

What does that mean? God is in a certain place, and what exactly is Heaven? Is it the end of the universe? Does the universe have an end? Where our sight ends, we call that the Heavens. If the universe has an extremity, do you think of it as bounded by nothingness? If there is no extremity to it, there is no center and Heaven isn't there either. The locality of God destroys his immensity, which is one of the most essential attributes of deity. Draw the conclusion, M.R.F., about what this fine debut would mean. J.C. and his apostles had no higher idea of God than the pagans who thought of him as limited, situated, and moving around as needed. The divine book in question has the deity descend and has him rise up again. The tale of the ascension shuts the door on any allegory. J.C. rose to heaven, body and soul; he is seated at the right hand of God his father; this is a material body placed beside the deity, therefore, the deity must either be circumscribed in a place, or this ascension must be scratched out. Is God not everywhere, M.R.F., is he not equally in all times, in all places? But a crude mind, devising a fable, fashions it according to its senses.

But ultimately, what do the beauty and purity of morality prove, even if we condescended to find this in the Gospel? Would a savage be in his rights to believe that Plato was God's son or envoy because he found good things in the writings of this philosopher? Why do the Christians base themselves on such feeble proofs if the truth is on their side?

FIFTH ARTICLE: THE DEATH, RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF THIS MEDIATOR

The death [of J.-C.], if I believe it, shows me only a man preaching against common ideas, an innovator who deserves punishment since he got people behind him, since he stirred it up, which aims at sedition. As for the miracles that accompanied him, these are embellishments like those found in all the legends of factitious religions. Let's look at the resurrection and ascension.

If it were only a case of a natural fact, better proofs would be needed than the ones offered: two or three mad women say that they can't find the corpse. Maybe it was never put there, or perhaps it had been taken away so that the miracle could be proclaimed. They say they saw him alive: in the same way, people spin off tales of spirits, devils, goblins every day, while the weak and credulous, with their minds filled with the tales they've heard, believe they see all these things. The devout papist sees his father and mother asking for Masses, the devout Siamese sees his daughter growing thin because the servants ate the meats that were brought to her tomb and sees her fattening up again after he's ensured that these are left untouched and in great quantity, in the same way the Romans saw the shades of their relatives whose bodies were not buried; in the same way, Odin appeared after his death.

2nd) Those who relate this story tell it differently, all those who saw the supposedly resurrected man belonged to his cabal, either relatives or friends, and this has come down to us without any authentic proofs. Is a mere story sufficient for belief?

3rd) Were these witnesses and writers impartial parties? Aside from the pleasure of recounting unusual things, they enjoyed gifts, they found themselves oracles, arbiters on all matters, and they gained power over men's minds.

4th) This resurrection should have occurred with impartial witnesses present, in the presence of the priests, in the middle of the synagogue, before Pilate, Ananias or Herod; he should at least have appeared to these people. Would even the most determined sophist tell a fact before the court of justice on the basis of a mere story? And would the deposition of their accomplice truly advance their cause? What, then, should we do with something supernatural, which is no more credible than the fables of Aesop and the *Metamorphoses*?

“He resurrected himself, by his own power, therefore he is God,” I once heard a preacher say. “I would like,” he added, “to have seen the Jews here, what could they have said?” Is this challenge made in good faith? And is this argument really unanswerable? If so, how strong prejudice is! Wouldn’t you think that the Jews saw him resurrected, that they had indeed heard about it with real evidence? In the same way I can preach Mahometanism in Constantinople, and defy all the opposite religions to answer me!

The two evangelist Apostles who might have seen his ascension said nothing about it; it’s only mentioned by Luke and Mark, who could only report it on the basis of hearsay. One has him depart for heaven from the mount of Olives, and the other has him departing from Bethany. The other circumstances also contain contradictions. In the same way, Romulus was raised to heaven. There may be no religion where the hero didn’t also rise to heaven at some point, and always according to popular ideas: it’s thought that heaven can only be above our heads and that God dwells there locally.

The Siamese said the same thing of Sommonocodom four hundred years before the Gospel and with the same circumstance of the impression of his feet on a rock, as we also have on our own Tabor.

SIXTH ARTICLE: THE REVELATION OF THE TRINITY.

Nobody can ever believe this extravagant dogma even by performing, for the sake of persuasion, a million miracles. It would be more credible that these miracles are an illusion of our senses or

that of a power doing tricks for its own amusement; it would be, I say, less absurd to believe that he who performs these miracles is treating us like children to whom many tales are told, based on the skilled tricks of a cup-and-ball game player, than to imagine three absolutely distinct beings which are only a single one. We have demonstrated elsewhere that belief is not a free thing, and that we can only believe what seems possible to us. Let's examine this dogma:

1st) It isn't in the Gospel. I won't bother with the distinction that the first Christians didn't believe it, that many assemblies of three and four hundred bishops decided the opposite; this is all I'll say: give the New Testament to an impartial person to read, let him extract its dogmas, give it to a thousand, I bet that not even one would get the idea of the Trinity from this book.

2nd) J.C. never preached or assumed the idea of the Trinity; he never said that he was God; far from it, when he was about to be stoned as a blasphemer for having said that he was the son of God, he excused himself by citing the occasions when men had been called gods.

The Jews were satisfied with his response, it was clear and it distinctly taught them that he didn't distinguish himself from other creatures. Nobody told him on the cross: "Come down, if you're God", but "if you're a prophet." The disciples who were talking about him on the road to Emmaus didn't refer to him as a god, but as a human prophet. Finally, they put these words in his mouth on the day of the Ascension: "I go to my God and to yours." They wouldn't have made him say that if they believed he was God. One of the kings of Sparta, on his way to visit a colleague, wouldn't have told any citizen: "I go to see my king and yours".

3rd) All the passages that are pointed to in connection with the divinity of J.C., including those which were clearly added after the fact, are not as positive as those that negate it. But even if that were the case, what would it prove?

If a provincial governor says again and again that the king and himself are one and the same, that he who disobeys or clashes with him will offend the king himself, it will be obvious that he's speaking figuratively.

J.C. should therefore have explained this great mystery, this amazing revelation, saying: "I tell you that I am God, literally speaking. This is how: there is only one God, as Moses has told you, but he didn't know that God is composed of three persons, equal to each other, and which are nevertheless one and the same. I am the second of these persons; this seems amazing to you, or rather incredible, but it's true, real and without hyperbole." If J.C. had said something to this effect, he would obviously have been regarded as God, but he would even more obviously have been regarded as a madman and an impostor.

All the pagans have to do when accused of absurdities is to say that all their gods are only the persons of the selfsame god: this works as much for a hundred thousand as for three, which is the number at which the Christians preferred to stop.

What is the point of these three persons since they are equal? The only proof of the unity of God is that God is infinite, consequently a single one is equal to a hundred thousand; the same applies to persons.

Why doesn't the third person produce a fourth one and so on to infinity? He is not therefore equal to the others since it lacks this quality which the two others have.

Unless you say that the virtue of producing an immense and infinite being, a true god, is only a trifle that doesn't merit any attention, and which doesn't distinguish the one who has this virtue from the one who doesn't.

If these three persons are equal, who decided the second one would become man and immolate himself to the justice of the first rather than the third one, or the first to one of the two others? Did they draw straws? Furthermore, the first person was satisfied: but who will satisfy the two others? They should all have been immolated, each in turn, to satisfy all of them.

It is quite easy to see that this Trinity is a subsequent invention which was never thought of at the time; the lawgiver of the Christians was made into a god, and for this the Gospel of St. John was assumed, as has long been thought, or at least the pompous verbiage of its beginning was assumed, and the poor masses believed whatever they were supposed to, without seeing the

weakness of this authority, even if St. John were its author. Behold, then, how J.C. became God! How many things have been built on this groundwork of divinity!

SEVENTH ARTICLE: THE REVELATION OF THE RESURRECTION AND THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Another fine discovery! But what's amazing here is that the Gospel only refers to it as an opinion already held by many Jews. We have already touched on the futility of the body in a state of reward, we'll return to it; while waiting, M.R.F., please see, in good faith, what the reason for this resurrection might be and how miserable it is for intelligent and sensible men to say that the body participated in crimes or virtues, and that it is therefore only right for it to be punished or rewarded as a participant in the criminal or virtuous deeds. I've seen and heard this preached.

What a pity that men who are enlightened on other matters, who can talk so astonishingly and sensibly on other subjects, can be so feeble or dishonest as to say such things!

Is flesh, is blood, are bones, are nerves, are nails any more capable than stones of knowing good or evil, and deciding in favor of either? Can it be that a philosopher who has just accepted the distinction of the body and the soul, who has demonstrated that the body only acts or feels because of the operations of the soul, after this can he really share a view that is so contrary to his reasoning and to reason itself?

But the body can be soiled, and the spirit pure. The opposite is also possible: a girl seized by bandits and forcibly sullied in every way only loses the virginity of the body; her mind does not participate in the sully of her body. And on the contrary an elderly man, impotent to gratify his desires, which he would eagerly do if he could, would be very unchaste even though his body remained untouched. What sort of treatment would these bodies receive after the resurrection? They deserve a treatment different from that of the souls to which they were connected. How can you agree with this, and what miserable opinions has this fine doctrine not authorized? Entire peoples have fallen into trances, fully convinced that the dissolution of the world was happening

before their eyes. Wretched mortals that we are, we let ourselves be degraded, we sink down lower than brute animals: we renounce our reason, but people always follow their instincts.

The replies J.C. gave to the questions he was asked about the resurrection and the last judgment are really something else. We laugh at the ambiguous replies of the pagan oracles. Are those of J.C. any clearer? What is this “in the last times?” Is it in a hundred thousand years, or in a hundred million years? What is more pitiful than the signs he gives for it, this *consummation of times*?

Confess, my Father, that he had very little knowledge of astronomy, and that his divinity knew far less about it than Gassendi.

I would love to examine the possessed and the saints receiving revelations, asking the spirit that moves them to explain this or that relation of mathematical figures, for the solution to various problems; if they gave correct answers, that would be good, but R. F. Malebranche would soon leave all the saints and all the devil dumbfounded.

And these resurrected bodies, what will they be like? They will be interpenetrable, they will move in an instant from one end of the universe to the other without colliding with other bodies or even being slowed down by them. What rubbish! Did the authors of this fine invention know how to define what a body is?

I'll skip over what could be said about this resurrection with respect to the selfsame body: it's impossible, you don't have to be a great physicist to see that this dead body changes its substance, that after having been grass, a vegetable or fruit, it becomes the flesh or blood of another man, and so on with many thousands of men by the same means. It's a good comparison that St. Paul makes of his grain of wheat sown in the ground. The saying “answer a fool according to his folly” seems apt here. The grain of wheat is a complete and perfect plant, which humidity and the earth's salts develop with the assistance of the sun's heat. Is it the same with a cadaver? Does it only need to be penetrated by certain corpuscles to become a living man? What thoroughly clever minds we're dealing with here! And what fine evidence they give of their divine instruction!

EIGHTH ARTICLE: THE REVELATION OF PREDESTINATION

This article naturally leads to so many things I've already discussed that I wouldn't even go into the matter, except that I've thought of something that I believe is decisive.

God should have created his elect and his reprobates all at once, placing the first in the happiness he prepares for them and the latter in the fires where they must burn forever. Why leave in suspense, for millions of years, the execution of something according to his decrees and where nothing can be changed, since God gets no benefit from the duration of the world or the lives of men? The sight of this duration and the duration itself are one and the same for God; thus, when he sees what must be, duration is useless and a perfect being does nothing useless. Nobody would ever put a weight of 100 kilograms on one side of a scales and twenty pounds on the other, to see if the 100 kilograms would be lifted up.

If we are pleased by the sight of a machine, the powers, motions and effectiveness of which we understand, this is because we admire the invention and assembly of the means, it's because the sight flatters our senses or our self-esteem, if we are its inventor; it's because we see present things more perfectly than we can imagine them, finally, it's because what we see in these effects gives us ideas that we didn't have before.

But for God, whose sight is always uniform, actuality adds nothing; he has no better sight of an existing thing than of a possible one, he finds no greater satisfaction in seeing Judas in Hell and Peter in Heaven than if they were placed there simply based on his predestination. If we accept his foreknowledge, their deeds were just as present to God from all eternity as when they were accomplished.

It would be useless to say that God wants men to deserve their state, since salvation is said to be free; it would be useless to say that the damned would have any reason to feel wronged: it's the same if a man is punished for a deed he couldn't avoid doing as for one he didn't do.

All of this can be applied naturally to the sacrifice of J.C., however it is conceived.

NINTH ARTICLE: THE REVELATION OF THE POWER OF SATAN, AND HIS TEMPTATIONS.

What a terrifying animal is this roaring lion, constantly prowling around all the poor mortals to devour them!

When that is preached in a village, when that is daubed on the walls, God knows how all its residents shudder! People in Greece and Italy shuddered in this way at the stories of the cruel lamia. The Indian shuddered at the sight of their idol depicted as devouring a marmoset.

You laugh at these things, M.R.F. but you would also laugh at the devil if you'd only heard of him at the age of twenty-five, and you would still laugh at him today, if you ever took a tour of this intelligible realm, which you have described so beautifully. And minds a thousand times beneath the level of the R. F. Malebranche would jeer at him, if they paid the least attention to the idea.

Where is the evidence for the devil? Where is any semblance of likelihood? This is a continuation of the reveries of the ancients, of their genies, of their jealous and maleficent gods. It's the effect of the stupidity of the people, who invent miracles or extravagant causes to explain what they're unable to grasp.

We have already seen that spirits are incapable of virtues and vices, which by itself annihilates the fable of Lucifer: a pure spirit knew God and the least idea he has of Him is incompatible with the notion of this roaring lion that He will raise up and which will be like Him. This fable can only come from people as crude as the Jews were, people who kept to their senses, without realizing that they had any judgment. Would a four-year-old child ever dream of knocking a powerful man off his chair? This comparison is infinitely weak, with respect both to the child and to the pure spirit.

Can you truly conceive, M.R.F., how one spirit could speak directly to another one? Can you conceive how it could turn it this way or that? Can you imagine that this pure spirit, suffering infinite torments, as they say, would have the patience to come and fly around some poor lout to

get him to swallow an egg during the full moon in March? And if you can conceive of this, can you also conceive how a pure spirit, how that which lives in us, is unable to distinguish when Satan is speaking to it and not itself, that this voice isn't its own nature, reason, will, or drives speaking?

You yourself, M.R.F., have you ever felt impulses that didn't come from the mere constitution of your body, from your temperament, from your mind without any devilry?

Why does the devil waste his time tempting heretics, people who go as far as to burn O.H.F. the Pope in effigy, people who are already irredeemably won by the devil? Why are they tempted to do things which their false religion regards as crimes, just as we are?

A Jew, a Calvinist, a Turk will feel the same temptation to worship the Eucharist, if urged by promises and threats, as we would feel if we were urged to worship Mars or Jupiter.

Our grandparents the Gauls were tempted not to hand over their children to be burned alive, just as we are tempted not to fast or go to confession; it's even credible that many of them didn't do it, the way we often don't fast during Lent or cast ourselves at the feet of a true priest at Easter.

Why did the devil turn them away from these diabolical and detestable deeds? Did he play no role, then, in these temptations? Ours are similar. Why would they have a different cause?

It's the devil who keeps a girl from allowing herself to be led by the nose by a director who wants to make a nun of her, having big plans for her salvation, all the more intense as she is beautiful, and that it would be a pity if she were exposed to the outside world. It is, therefore, the devil too who keeps an Indian widow from burning herself with her dead husband despite the thundering threats of her priests who urge her to put herself in their hands.

All that is required for temptation is the constitution of our machine: this is your devil. All we need is our reason to resist the desire to do what is shameful: this is your grace. You would preach this and prove it, my Reverend Father, if it were a received dogma and if the opposite were maintained by Indians or by heretics.

TENTH ARTICLE: THE MIRACLES OF J.C. AND HIS APOSTLES.

I don't deny the possibility of this. Why couldn't God suspend the power he gave to certain creatures, why couldn't he increase or diminish it? It is no harder to keep a stone in the air than to have given it the power to fall down, if it's the movement of surrounding bodies that controls its own movement. God can arrest this movement just as he was able to confer it, or even convey to the stone another motion capable of resisting that one.

When I stop a ball that would continue rolling, I am resisting the forces of nature; yes, I'm doing so with another natural force, but why wouldn't God do this by his omnipotence, without the interposition of any body? Even if it were by the interposition of a body, it would be a miracle if it were by the immediate orders of God that this body presented itself contrary to the natural course of things.

Indeed, I can't see the shadow of a reason to argue this point. You might as well say that a clockmaker can't stop a pendulum, that he can't slow it down or speed it up, and if I hadn't seen people disputing on the possibility of miracles, it would never have occurred to me that the slightest doubt on this subject was possible.

But it is evident that God has only ever performed one miracle and that he will never do another: that is, the creation of the universe. And since an infinitely wise being established everything in a perfect fashion relative to his plans, nothing can cause him to change it in the least: he foresaw all the possible combinations of the motions he impressed on it, at the same time he gave to it all the order it needed and all the possible remedies to the problems that might appear.

Only limited beings can and are obliged to act according to the occasion and to provide remedies for accidents that appear, since they can't foresee everything and since, even if they foresaw everything, they could never fix everything.

Men, on a thousand occasions, would hope for changes in the laws that God has established and even in the inner essence of things; extreme desire leads them to ask for changes with prayer, vows, ceremonies, sacrifices and every insane thing their imagination can offer them; all they lack is the fulfilment of their desires, which comes about naturally, and behold the miracle.

The source of the supposed miracles and of the hope in them is caused by the immoderate desires of men. Excessive curiosity is what produced judicial astrology and a man of sense ought to believe the miracle stories in the same way he does those that are told of the fulfillment of the astrologers' prophecies. The practice of the preachers of miracles always disproves their pretensions: nobody has ever seen, in any religion, vows to obtain things against the order of nature. The healing of a disease is requested, without neglecting medicine and diet, vows are made for a ship to arrive safely at port but without neglecting to steer it carefully. I would like to see these people who promise miracles, even if one's faith is only the size of a mustard seed, I would like, I say, to see them pressing a man with one arm missing to ask their saint to make him grow a new one. They wouldn't dare: this isn't an effect they could expect to happen naturally. Nor will the astrologer ever predict that a private individual will be the future king, but he will predict this for a *prince de sang*: he has probability on his side.

And yet, collections of astonishing wonders, of miracles contrary to all natural causes are forged; these say whatever they like; but isn't it self-refuting when they do nothing to obtain these sorts of miracles? Do they think it's harder for God to reattach a severed head than to heal a fever? This would be a very imperfect idea of the deity. Why then don't people ask for the former as they do the latter?

The policy is a wise one: the masses will never see the success of such pledges; this would open their eyes, and their purses would close. All the henchmen of factitious religion promise miracles for pledges and offerings, and chance decides the matter.

If fifty parishes made vows to do nothing to avoid hailstones, and fifty others devoted themselves to whatever saints the village priest chooses, I would bet against the venerable pastor in favor of those that are pledged to nothing, and I'd bet a large sum: maybe he'd have enough faith to

double my wager! But it won't happen. The chances would be too much, and don't we make the same vows, the same processions year after year? Do all our years turn out the same?

It's known that one thing causes another when it necessarily and immediately follows it, and when its effect always happens thanks to the action of its cause. You can't touch fire without being burned, or water without getting wet; from this we draw the conclusion that these two elements are the causes of the effects we feel. But a hundred million diseases will be healed without any vows being made, and other will be healed after making vows, a thousand ships perish while bearing the names and images of saints: you would have to be insane to believe these vows and invocations to be cause of the ceremonies that come behind us. The temples of Neptune and Aesculapius were covered with *ex-votos* just like those of N.D. of Lorette, of St. Nicholas, etc. Those of the bonzes and talapoins are the same in our day, they all tell amazing tales of their own: Sommonocodom once jumped three thousand leagues!

What could be more insane than to bless banners and weapons! Does this make them any luckier? What could be more ridiculous than offering *Te Deums* after a victory! Those who were defeated should therefore be outraged against God; if this victory was a favor from God, the defeated party has much to regret, otherwise no thanks would be necessary.

Did we make more vows concerning the campaign of Höchstädt than for that of Fleurus? Did the Germans make more than we did?

We must thank God for all things and thank him for nothing particular. He has no more of a hand in a flood that ravages a country, an earthquake that swallows a town, than a bucket of water that tips over and drowns an anthill or when a wall, falling down, smashes a rat's nest.

I can hear your rebukes and exclamations, M.R.F.: "You're denying providence," you say. Yes, indeed, I do deny that kind of providence. The providence of God is nothing other than the simple act of wisdom by which he foresaw all that would happen from the necessary causal chain that he created, and the stroke of his power which placed everything in its necessary order. Those who preach any other doctrine don't have their heart in it; nobody pays more attention than such people to accidents or takes more measures to avoid or correct them.

These monks who profess to abandon themselves to providence are the least likely to be in a position to need any help from it.

Forgive, M.R.F., a scrap of song which, although hardly appropriate for such a serious topic, gets to the point too well to omit it here: "Brother Andrew, our collector, gets results from providence."

But let's attack the miracles of the New Testament directly. From the outset, who can prove to me that they are reported faithfully? Or rather, who will prove to me that these healed cripples really were cripples, that Lazarus really was dead, etc.? We see daily examples of similar things.

These books written in the Oriental style with figurative and hyperbolic expressions can be taken in the natural sense. Thus, it was once said in Rome that Pompey had only to stomp his foot to assemble an army, as a poet represents things:

*...The two seas astonished
To see their fleets joined at the foot of the Pyrenees.*

In the hands of a theological commentator, this expression would mean a sea carrying the king's ships and not a pit of seven or eight yards across.

Aesculapius resurrected Hippolytus in the same way as J.C. might have done with Lazarus, i.e., he was faring poorly and on death's door when he was successfully cured.

We have proved elsewhere that a fact is never established fully enough to be thought miraculous, and without entering a discussion of the facts, nobody is bound by conscience to believe, on the word of another, even the most plausible facts.

Aside from that, all the religions that you regard as false have similar miracles which are similarly believed and contained in books they revere; the memory of which is celebrated and perpetuated by feasts, temples, monuments.

The Jews, among whom these miracles are supposed to have happened, deny them; they put to death the one who boasted of working them.

The Assumption of Mary is quite a good proof that the Christians preach miracles without any foundation, and that they celebrate visions with solemn feasts.

I defy all the theologians to support our miracles with arguments which don't also work in favor of the miracles of the Turks, the Siamese, etc. I defy them to combat the miracles of these nations with arguments that can't also be used against themselves.

If you say, M.R.F., as others hold, that the Jews didn't deny the miracles of J.C., the populace, which adheres to Saint Ovid, never denies anything, and what odd judges we have here! Did he perform these miracles in the presence of the scribes, the pharisees, the priests? He ought to have performed miracles before Pilate, before Herod: testimonies like these would have had some weight. And besides, the populace, as witness to these miracles, didn't deny them, so be it. But did it certify them either? All we can say is that what it really thought hasn't come down to us.

People who make no use of their reason, who have read nothing but *Le Pédagogue chrétien*, *Les Sept Trompettes*, *Le Bouquet sacré* etc., will believe as many miracles as they hear of; just like the Jews, besotted with their own legends. A nun will believe any miracle attributed to a monk: God armed the holy personage with his omnipotence. If he's a Mahometan, a heretic, then the devil, who apes God, did it, although the miracle won't be questioned; she believes it because it is miraculous.

Nobody believes the miracle depicted in the painting offered by the most spiritual and learned city on earth, in the church of St. Geneviève, for the supposed succor that Saint Geneviève gave to France last year in 1709, those poor wretches died by the thousand, and yet, she is thanked. Nobody believes in this miracle, but nobody denies it: in two hundred years from now, all the rabble will believe it. People who are more enlightened than the Jews, that miserable nation hated by all others, the Spanish, the Italians, the Germans, the French believe in the revelations of St. Brigitte, the appearances she relates, along with St. Theresa, St. Gertrude, St. Catherine of Siena,

Marie de Agreda. None of all this is denied: all the monks act as if they believe it; the nuns are nearly all convinced; Popes, theologians, bishops believe it, since they give these books their approval. Can I conclude otherwise without saying that they are willfully abusing the credulity of the masses? If they abuse it on this point, what does that mean about all the rest?

Did the Church Fathers deny the miracles attributed to the gods of the pagans? No. Are they true miracles, my Reverend Father? The Fathers gave the honor of them to God. What should we make of the miracles accomplished the way people believe them?

Finally, even if the Jews had believed them and still believed them, that would prove that they are superstitious and that they love all things miraculous; and do those who go to the stake rather than disparage the contents of the Talmud, deserve to be believed? If the tale of Melusine were the inheritance and common property of some community, if men were paid to defend it, with the power to burn anyone who denied it, then it would be venerated too. Wonders would have been stacked on wonders, we would presently have four volumes of them.

Two centuries ago, how many devils, will-o'-the-wisps, sorcerers, ghosts, how many people were accused and convicted of magic!

All these follies have ceased. Has the devil become more easy-going, more honest, less malicious? No, it's because people aren't as credulous: physicists, mathematicians, chemists are everywhere, men of resolution and far from gullible who would go man to man with the devil himself; adieu the profits of exorcism.

I read one day, for lack of other books, the *Histoire de l'exorcisme et le procès de Louis Gauffredy*, written by one of these exorcists approved by the Pope and by the faculties of theology; with this one book I can destroy the deception involved in exorcism and the imposture in all spells.

The miracles of the possessed who were healed in the Gospel now look ridiculous and show the idiocy of their authors. But let's leave the facts to one side; I maintain that miracles are useless as teaching devices, even if I granted that God wished to perform them:

1st) Because those who would see them are in no position to know the truth about them;

2nd) Because we would have to start all over again everywhere and with each person. The reason for this is clear: let the miracle be as obvious as you like, the evidence only applies to its witness. Whoever hears it secondhand can't reasonably believe it, since it is a million times more likely that he who tells it is either mistaken or has bad intentions, than that the miracle occurred.

Where are the truly sensible and impartial men who have seen miracles? If there are any, let them believe them, but anyone else would be mad to accept them.

Besides, if miracles were a rational way to instill belief, then everyone would be at risk of error; how many clever magic tricks would be miracles for nations who didn't know any better! Wasn't gunpowder, for example, a miracle for the savages of Mexico? If an imposter digs mines, uses waterproof rockets, if he kills those who rebel against him with a pistol, are these poor folks required to believe all the dogmas he wants to preach, when these are crimes? He will lead some unbelievers to the spot where he dug a mine, he will exhort them. If he fails to convince them, he'll cry out that the fires of hell will avenge him: will these wretches, hopping in terror among the fire and earth be an example for others and a persuasive spectacle? Won't they have seen miracles? Then they will be under obligation to embrace the imposter's morality.

What will you say to this, M.R.F., is it conclusive? And will these poor folks, misled in such fashion, be mistaken in the system we're teaching about the supposed miracles of J.C., and couldn't inventions be found that would seem equally wondrous to us? Do we have to believe whatever we're told if such and such a "miracle" occurs? And yet the Antichrist, of whom the masses are so terrified, will perform miracles, says the book of Revelation.

THIRD SECTION: THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECIES.

I will equally find predictions of the history of France in the Old Testament, as I've demonstrated elsewhere.

This prophecy of Daniel, which is so emphatically cited, what is it? Let's not say that that Jews have never taken Daniel for a prophet, let's not say that the word prophet among them meant a theologian and not someone who predicts things, let's set aside the different interpretation that could be given to the words, let's avoid the objection about the months and years of those times, let's assume that it did indeed refer to the Messiah who was to come, as it says, in sixty-nine weeks.

Do we know when Daniel lived? do we even know with any certainty when J.C. was born? Then how can we apply this prophecy at all, even if the Hebrew version read like the Latin one?

Daniel ought to have indicated, in an unmistakable manner, the year he was writing; the evangelists should also have indicated when J.C. was born.

They make weeks of years, they would have made centuries or months of them if needed. They are content to take the first moment of one of these newly minted weeks, the time of the birth, baptism, death of J.C. are taken without distinction, and some twenty different systems have appeared, even the best of which is ridiculous.

Who said that this moment from which we should count is the king's edict? How do we know that it's the first or the second edict? Who is this king? They take the one that squares best with the vision being forged; it's necessary to look in the other histories where the names of the kings of the Jewish nation are not found; they select, they change the names, they bring them back to life, they put them to death as needed, they multiply them, they split them into pairs: how much torture to give some color to a manifest falsehood!

The oblation was supposed to end, according to the interpreters and Daniel himself, on the sixty-ninth week. It lasted beyond the seventy-second and perhaps even the eighty-seventh, which is the period of Hadrian, as seems very likely.

Properly understood, this oblation had ended in the times of the Maccabees, more than one hundred and twenty years before the birth of J.C. Aaron was the one who had been set apart to perform the sacrifices, and this consecration flowed from generation to generation through all his

posterity, which, having died out or been dispossessed, there were no more sacrifices, since there was no longer anyone qualified to perform them.

A new Moses was necessary to consecrate the Maccabees, who, since they weren't of the race of Aaron, had no right to perform sacrifices: the oblation was therefore finished, as among us the mass would come to an end if all the priests or bishops died or went away.

Let's add that we only know of the destruction of the temple, the dispersion of the Jews and the rest from the profane writers. Where then is the divine certainty of the fulfillment of these prophecies?

That of Jacob is equally good, fine and true: therefore we must say that the scepter would fall to the family of Judah and that the Messiah would come from it. I also leave to one side the protestations made by the Jews against the false sense that we give here to their books. We've seen an explanation of this prophecy, as well grounded as anything else, which sets the conversion of the Jews and the destruction of papism in the year 1716⁴⁶.

The family of Judah was without a scepter for more than seven centuries; when it held it, it wasn't for long. The nation had lost this scepter long before J.C., if we don't want to call "scepter" the liberty they had been granted to govern themselves according to their own laws. By following this latter sense, the scepter was in the nation after J.C., which runs counter to the prediction.

If the other articles of this supposed prophecy were examined, what fine things would be found there: Levi is a vessel of iniquity, and yet his descendants are the ones who were anointed by the Lord to live from the toil of others.

It was the fashion of the times for fathers to dispense morality from their deathbeds, it was the nation's way to speak figuratively. So, grab what you can: the field is open for all commentators and interpreters.

⁴⁶ 1710 in Mazarine 1163; 1716 in the Leningrad Ms.

Why didn't J.C. explain this chronology to the priests and why didn't he back up the idea that he was the Messiah with good arguments!

You shall not break his bones. What a fine discovery! How very important it is to predict such a detail!

With regard to the prophecies of J.C. himself, he was very restrained: he eluded every occasion to make any; he refused to satisfy his dear disciples. A prudent trait. People take as predictions what he said about the contradictions that his doctrine would meet with, and the punishments that would fall on those who would preach it. You would really have to be smart to know such a thing!

If he had predicted clearly and plainly that the successors of his disciples would rise, by preaching poverty, humility, disinterestedness, to the heights of splendor, luxury and riches, that would have been more impressive. If he'd said that there would be a succession of vicars, the first of whom would grovel in the dust, and that the later ones would tread upon kings' heads and address emperors as slaves, that they would sell exemptions from their laws for enormous sums: this would have been worth knowing, and a good subject for prophecy; but truly, M.R.F., you have to confess, the prophet didn't expect so much success!

FOURTH SECTION: THE SURPRISING WAY IN WHICH CHRISTIANITY WAS ESTABLISHED.

We take pride in what doesn't belong to us; our Christianity isn't the same as in those days; ours was established gradually, encroaching today on reason, tomorrow on liberty, and finally on property, the laws and equity; violence and cunning have, in thirteen centuries, struggled greatly to get things into their present state.

However, I want to go into detail on this point, about which [Christians] are so satisfied and which they proclaim in such triumphal tones.

St. Paul himself says that the Gospel is preached by envy and greed; these might be the things that worked most of all. But if we don't find this very miraculous, how did the flagellants ever manage to get men to walk around naked and tear themselves with cruel blows from their whips?

This Gospel contains a law forcing everyone, a law we've seen executed with such cruelty: *Compelle intrare*.

To judge properly on this point, we need the writings of the Jews and the pagans about this miraculous establishment. It will soon be preached to the Americans that their fathers were converted by a miracle and by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, there will be no mention of all the deception, violence, or massacres that did so much to win them over!

A present-day bishop has been brazen enough to write that the Huguenots were never done violence, either in their persons or in their property, and this at a time when the galleys are presently stuffed full of these poor souls, when a courage as heroic as it was misplaced has led to the triumph of tyranny, and when the bodies of those who had confessions extorted from them have been dragged through the streets, and finally when dragoons have been used as missionaries, using rape and massacres to win acceptance for the pure and holy religion.

I think the Christians have always used cunning and violence, since this is presently the case. Why should I suppose that in its first centuries it was all candor, simplicity, good faith and patience? We're told this. And by whom? Interested parties only.

In fine, if the Christian religion needed nothing beyond its pure morality to be established, then you are truly wicked, you missionaries, bishops, inquisitors etc. who take the opposite tack of those whom you claim to succeed, since you who steal, plunder, burn alive those who refuse your shackles.

But even if said establishment had been miraculous, what would that prove? It is even more astonishing that kings allow themselves to be crushed by the pope, it is more surprising that

paganism established itself, that the Inquisition with its politics and its cruelties hasn't yet managed to destroy Mahometanism and Judaism in Spain.

Lutheranism and Calvinism dealt the same blow against papism that the pagan and Judaic religions received from Christianity. He was a simple monk; however, in less time, despite the wheels, irons and pyres, despite the most powerful princes on earth, the Socinians, the Anabaptists, without any prince belonging to their religion, survived the horrible carnage they suffered, and persevere through all manner of persecution.

But let's destroy this preacher's argument, this false ray of light with which they want to dazzle the whole world, with a simple parallel. Mahometanism was established rapidly; the Christians object to the Turks that Mahomet was a lout, a common slave, an ignoramus; his power therefore commenced without any apparent means; if he gained them later on, he only did what the same as the Christians. At the end of twenty years, Mahomet saw his religion achieve a state of splendor that the Christians only achieved after three centuries: this establishment is therefore more miraculous; there is also this difference, that Christianity only had to fight against paganism and a religion far more extravagant than Christianity, while the Mahometan religion resisted Christianity.

Another thing worth noting is that the apostles did less to establish Christianity than to ruin paganism; this religion had come to such a point of excess that a simple touch was enough to topple it over: they preached the unity of God, men were reawakened at the rumor of this truth, their errors were recognized, which made reason blush; after this it was easy to get those who were fearfully escaping their error to believe a few articles, but this wasn't our catechism, even less the *Summa* of St. Thomas, the Clementine books, the Decretals. If the apostles had preached the trinity and the rest of the theological paraphernalia, they would never have got anywhere; if they had mentioned transubstantiation, the adoration of the bread, of the wine, the cult of saints, of images, the pagan priests would have refuted their arguments; the masses would have stoned them when they mentioned the tithes, the taxes on marriage, etc.

It is therefore true that Christianity only triumphed with great difficulty, the apostles only preached a pure deism to which they added the name of J.C., such that their only idea of him was that of a prophet sent by God.

It was due to the absurdity of current religion that they had so much success. If one of those extremists was encountered, he was told: "Sell all your property!" But such zealots were rare at the beginning.

It's possible that debauchery played a role. These wife-sisters who were led around, after selling their goods, made Christians of many, just as laziness and libertinism today produce so many monks. These nocturnal meals attracted the young people whose love affairs they favored. These mysteries where wine was received didn't do any harm. God knows whether these kisses of peace attracted anyone, whether this fraternity that would make all things common would do away with the poor, and if, as reported by St. Clement of Alexandria, we add to this the community of wives: both sexes found some advantage there. Many other things, which those who know their history might explain better than I, without counting those which have been abolished from history, have had this marvelous effect and have produced this miraculous establishment.

It was preached that faith was all one needed, that works are useless for salvation: was anything more required to win over all the wicked men who expected baptism to wash everything away and erase all their crimes, and lead them straight to heaven?

It's said: "Distrust this or that author, he is a pagan, a Jewish zealot, he should be read with a grain of salt." Why isn't it also said: "Distrust this or that Christian author, he speaks for his religion with as much bias as the pagan or Jew do for theirs, he uses many tricks to win you to his opinion." Everything that a serious and honest author says, if it doesn't favor our religion, is imposture dictated by party loyalty; everything extravagant that an author says, even if he's compromised by his love affairs and his behavior, is amazing if he speaks positively of the religion we profess. And finally, once there were emperors and kings who had become Christians, violence marched behind cunning: Charlemagne, the king of Denmark and other potentates butchered without a second thought those who didn't conform to their religion; they do the same in America and in all the countries under the Inquisition. These deeds are not disproved; why

should I find it so miraculous that something was established when people's only choice was to be executed or accept it?

FIFTH SECTION: THE TESTIMONY OF THE MARTYRS.

"The blood of so many martyrs..." are impressive words that certainly fill the mouth of a preacher; their harmony strikes the ear, and the mind is seduced by this image, the common people are dazzled by it, but truly, M.R.F., can this affect a rational mind, even a little?

1st) There might not be the thousandth part of the truth in what is said about this; our only proof is the Christian Acts [records], many are later than the events they retell; and are pious frauds absent here?

2nd) In everything we're told, there are very few martyrs, i.e., people who have suffered for their beliefs alone; the priests of the gods were insulted, the temples were defiled, altars and simulacra were upset, seditions were instigated, magistrates were despised, people refused to bear arms for the ruler: these purely fanatical deeds are rightly punished in any civilized state and are truly criminal, since they go against the established order and against the good of society, since they disturb it.

3rd) There were heretics in the times of these persecutions. How many of them perished? The pagans didn't check whether they were Catholic or not: they had renounced the old religion, this was enough. Will the blood of these heretics convince me of their beliefs?

Besides, this constancy under torture was a virtue of their times.

Epicharis certainly suffered rather than give up the names of his accomplices. These amphitheaters where blood flowed freely for entertainment, where lowly slaves died laughing and where word was sent to find out if it was time for them to lay down and die, such things conditioned minds to a state different from our own, and to which such mental power, such courage seemed obligatory, which we're now supposed to honor and find miraculous.

Finally, M.R.F., if things were literally true as the preachers tell us, will you claim that there have only been martyrs in our religion? The stubbornness of all sects, the hard-headedness of every religion leads men to die cheerfully in anticipation of their reward. Have we not seen, in America, men who let themselves be crushed under the wheels of a chariot carrying a certain idol? This martyrdom is even more voluntary than that of our saints.

Doesn't the Reformation have a more certain and authentic martyrology than ours? Doesn't the Inquisition make new martyrs under our noses every day, who perish only for their beliefs, who could escape the fire if they would only agree to say a certain formula?

Will you say, M.R.F., that it's the power of the truth, the grace of J.C. that sustains them? A certain kind of Franciscan endures fire for the question of a short or a long robe. Finally, even atheism has had its martyrs. Which shows that people aren't martyrs to religion, but to certain prejudices or even stubbornness.

SIXTH SECTION: THE TRADITION.

What could be more dubious than this tradition which they would like to make so authoritative? How can it even be defined? The knowledge of certain facts passed from hand to hand, from parents to children, and writings from century to century.

But did all these [Church] Fathers have such a good memory that they didn't change any of these facts, can we be sure that those who learned them didn't confuse or omit any details? Those who witnessed these things must necessarily have had a sound judgment, which wasn't prone to any error, they must necessarily have had all the education, prudence, comprehension, the time and the occasions necessary for a proper discernment, above all they must have had an uprightness untainted by any desire to say unusual things, they must necessarily have been free of the prideful foible of passing off their ideas and imaginations as real things, they must necessarily have been superior to greed, to vanity, without any wish to dominate others by taking advantage of their

credulity, and in addition, all these men must have been incapable of lying, forgetting or confusing things.

It doesn't take much cogitation to prove that a fact is altered, corrupted and completely changed when it passes between many people: a "perhaps" becomes a "definitely", one thing becomes a thousand things.

How could the tradition be sufficient for doctrine? We don't find it sufficient on the most trivial facts. If this were a good method, would we be ignorant about the founding of many cities, the origin of certain populations, and, *in fine*, of the most striking facts? This one reflection absolutely destroys tradition and shows that it can only establish very feeble probabilities, but there is more: all these facts, reported in the histories in a hundred different ways and with such uncertainty, are almost indifferent for those who report them, but in matters of religion one falsehood can be a gold mine.

Greed, deception, superstition, the thirst for domination, all the passions get involved, everything is proposed, the credulity of the masses drinks everything in, the ignorant grow stubborn, the powerful are won over and taken advantage of, they're shown the heavens opening; if they authorize both the fable and its henchmen, he becomes a saint.

And in truth, M.R.F., do you believe that if the apostles returned, they would be able to understand half of the theological disputes? They would have to read the catechism and do a *quinquennium* [five years of hard study].

If J.C. came back to preach in Spain or Italy, he'd be dragged the next day before the Inquisition if he said that the power of the ministers of the Gospel is not of this world, that the priests should have no money, or even a purse to clasp, no weapons, not even a rod. O God, what heretical, scandalous propositions, tending to lead the people astray, offensive and detrimental, especially to the Holy apostolic See! He would meet very different people than the Jews and he wouldn't have time for a twenty-four-hour passion!

The apostles were the first to fall into a state of disorder about tradition. Listen to St. Paul: "I have no precept from the Lord on virginity," etc. And yet it's made a virtue, this idea contrary to good sense, to the order of the universe, to the clearest intentions of the creator. What dogma had need of more authorities to gain a hearing than this impertinent doctrine, than this barbarity wielded over thousands of young people who are sacrificed to pride, avarice and vanity, although they're said to be consecrated to God?

I'm not basing myself on history, M.R.F., both because I'm ill-versed in it and because of my conviction that this route doesn't lead to the truth: physics is based on experiments, it can't be infallibly true, unlike mathematics, which intelligibly bears on matter [extension] itself.

It is utterly manifest that the dogmas of religion have always been increasing and that this will continue until the edifice is so monstrous that it can't remain standing, as would have already happened in the absence of opposition.

Wouldn't the ecclesiastical power and its juridical tribunal, one of the most insane chimeras ever, have eclipsed all the power of the magistrates and annihilated that of the sovereigns? All this nonsense, all these parchments full of words liable to terrify little children, have they not torn the scepter from the hands of kings, of emperors; have they not disarmed their soldiers; have they not debauched their household servants and taken their children from under their power? Haven't we heard the prohibition on marrying to the eighth degree? We've heard it to the thousandth. Haven't second marriages been prohibited? Oh! What a loss to the Holy Father! Rebellious children, think of how high the revenue from exemptions would have risen! You take more than four million in rent from our mother the Holy Church!

You won't say, M.R.F., that what the apostles preached on Pentecost was insufficient for salvation. And yet, it is impossible for them to have preached and for the hearers to have retained all the articles of belief that are given in our books of theology, or even the entire catechism: therefore, our religion is very different or at least more extensive than that of the apostles.

This applies to all the rest. Caesar didn't undertake things that his successors ventured to accomplish.

As for the literal tradition, i.e., the books, we have already established that a book never passes in a pure form from one hand to another, both due to the failings of copyists and the fraud of those who find advantage in changing it; then the translations and the meanings altered by ignorance, by prejudice or malice, and the lacunae in the manuscripts replaced with conjectures: everyone follows their biases, and in such matters men can be mistaken even when acting in good faith.

Give someone all the traditions, all the Scriptures, and tell him to create a system of religion. Which sect do you think he'll belong to? Since he wasn't in any of them before, he will surely make a new one for himself. The means of instruction by tradition and books is therefore ineffective, therefore it doesn't come from God and is unworthy of him.

Let it not be said that the bishops are the infallible trustees of the doctrine of Tradition: some have been heretics, and it's not hard to find crazy ones either.

Your bishop only knows about it thanks to his reading, his studiousness and his capacity, the Holy Spirit therefore has nothing to do with it; and it's the same with this whole theatrical game, the obsequiousness, these lectures delivered in an imposing tone, these venerable words like "consecration", it is all, therefore, less than nothing.

Let's speak in a more human fashion: how did the bishops become the trustees of this tradition? In the first times, the voice of the people instituted them, for better or for worse; the kings are in control of them today. For this idea to prevail, every bishop should have had his own successor in training. This is how the various crafts are perpetuated, and even in this case things don't always work out; the successor can misunderstand or have a poor memory and the tradition can easily be corrupted.

Finally, dear Bishops, do what this divine book says: drink venom, speak various languages, heal the sick, and then your doctrine might be accepted or at least you'll be thought worthy successors of those who, you say, could do these things.

But I lose respect, it's against the rules to demand reason and experience. Let's not reveal the absurdity of these gentlemen or their vices, for fear of scandalizing our mother the Holy Church by her husbands; we are only her children, let's obey her husbands.

SEVENTH SECTION: THE FATHERS, THE COUNCILS, THE EXTENT OF RELIGION AND THE ASSENT OF THOSE WHO WERE ILLUSTRIOUS BY THEIR SCIENCE AND MORALS.

FIRST ARTICLE: THE FATHERS.

This is an imposing and venerable name given to certain people, who are then painted with a dove on their shoulder, their eyes lifted to heaven, one a hand on their breast and the other on a quill, with many rays of light filling them with the inspirations they set down on paper.

What does all that mean? Only this: they are trying to create a system; reason and experience are against it; certain books had to be adopted; and from a maelstrom of arguments they selected what they liked, but the best part is that they only took what fitted in. There isn't a single one of these grave personages, all of whose views are followed; the inquisitions have taken away or cut out many parts of them, and they're all regarded as heretics nowadays.

There is much anger and fulmination against those who speak of the Fathers without respect. Show me what their dogmas are; you cite them to me to support your views, I'll also cite them to support mine, which combats yours.

As for the facts they report, I don't think anyone who is unbiased pays the least attention to the testimony of those who create such ridiculous arguments in an effort to convince us. The facts become surer as they grow older; after the first years had passed, subsequent ages have a right to dispute their authenticity; but a ridiculous argument is always ridiculous. It is therefore natural to say: since they hazarded arguments which are clearly false, why would they be given credit for false facts and suppositions which acquire a veneer of truth over time and which gave them hope for the future?

One might say that even the most capable of these Fathers were bombastic preachers and little more.

Are there any books in the world that are more stuffed with false principles, sleights of hand, ridiculous and forced comparisons, frivolous allegories, puerile word games, crude and bland points, figures, etc.? And all of this is offered as arguments, including fairy-tales, fables, the fruit of the most ignorant minds, contradictions, etc. They never tire of saying, without any shame: "Saint so and so proves this in an amazing way"; they go by hearsay and this patron saint is admired, without any [first-hand] knowledge.

You see as I do, my reverend father, if Mr. Arnaud, if you yourself, had set out to write contrary to the views of the Fathers, if you had tried to write against Christianity, in the way the Fathers wrote against other religions, you wouldn't need more than a pamphlet to crush and destroy their arguments and this entire system.

SECOND ARTICLE: THE COUNCILS.

Firstly, it is manifest brazenness to call them general, there has never been a general one; even taking this word in a moral sense, they were only ever the subjects of the Roman empire. However, the apostles, we are told, had preached all over the world.

But let's pass over this reflection, which isn't absolutely conclusive, I propose an assembly of all the regimental troops who will travel across the kingdom this year, to decide how the soldiers should be treated by their hosts. I have no doubt that the first statute would be: "When entering the house, the soldier will receive the key to the wine cellar, then it is stipulated that the finest room and the best bed furnished with the prettiest lady in the house is their due." Oh! How many interesting rules they would come up with!

In the same way, these holy synods ended by elevating the clergy and, in a certain way, degrading everyone else, while the supreme power of decision is given to the biased party.

In this way the Church became the master of all secrets, of eternal salvation, of property; it is exempt from all charges, from all jurisdictions, from labor, from contributing to the public good; everything is God's, the Church is his spouse, we decide that we are the Church, *ergo* everything is ours.

However, these fathers of the councils, these men who are widely recognized as ignoramuses or fanatics, decided as they liked, and it is easy to show that their interests, ambition, political maneuvers, their thirst for domination and sometimes stubbornness and party loyalty were the only motives behind their decisions. Among these fathers and these eminences, how many were lechers, unbelievers, men unworthy of this title, how many scatterbrains, how many drunkards, how many tarnished with crimes and the most notorious sort of debauchery! And yet, these councils are comprised of such men, and I'm supposed to believe that the Holy Spirit comes to rest on them and that they are different while in synod from how they are naturally.

What makes popes? Courting favor, money, promises. What makes bishops? Flattery, court intrigues. Ecclesiastical titles have often been rewards for crimes or for turning a blind eye to the ruler's vices.

Thus, a right was acquired to excommunicate a whole nation for the crime, whether false or real, of its king, and so many other horrors.

Pope Innocent X, when harassed by complaints about his officers, who had been put in place, for money, by his sister-in-law, his concubine, exonerated himself with this excellent response: *To punish them or take away their positions would be to insult the Holy Spirit which guides me on all occasions.* "But, Very Holy Father," I would have replied to him, "you punish and depose bishops who don't obey you or when they spread a doctrine you dislike." What could he have replied, except: *The misdeeds of my officers harm the people; what do I care! But as for the bishops, they might harm me personally.*

When they live under a strict and powerful prince, all these bishops grovel, they believe whatever he says; with others, they rise up and instill fear in all those who inspire no fear at all in them;

and the amazing thing here is that these fathers of the councils, in spite of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, need theologians to whisper to them. Every bishop has his own!

God made the world by the single volitional act of a single minute, but they have him taking 25 or 30 years to deliberate on a point of controversy, and during these thirty years, what are people supposed to believe? The Holy Spirit therefore felt uncomfortable taking sides. And his mouthpieces were quarreling, fighting, disputing, changing their minds and parties. Did Homer depict his gods as any more feeble or ridiculous?

What a fine decision was the first synod of the disciples of J.C. rendered: *You will not eat the flesh of a strangled beast!* The abolition of this precept had no sooner appeared than it fell of its own accord; here is the reason: the ecclesiastics had nothing to gain by supporting it.

I deny that God takes part in this, and I argue like this Egyptian and his wife: the priests of this people had given them the ridiculous idea that the gods fell in love with their wives and these poor superstitious folks had been persuaded to send their wives to the temple of the god who requested it. One woman, returning from the temple, told her husband that what took place between the god and herself was only too human; they concluded that it was a trick played by the lecherous and wicked priests. Were they wrong? For my part, I find that these assemblies are like any others where diverse interests are opposed: ambition, pride, stubbornness all played their own part. I draw the same conclusion as the Egyptian.

Some councils decided the opposite of the others, then called them whatever they wanted: an assembly of five hundred bishops is called a *conciliabule*; its decisions were unsuitable; another one, of a hundred and even of thirty bishops, is called a general council for the opposite reason. And finally, Saint Augustin, this Achilles, this hero of persecution, this knight of grace said very openly and directly: *One general council reforms the abuses of another.*

And some have the impudent impertinence to say: "God uses these altercations, these deceptions to attain his aims." What horrid absurdity!

But Saint Gregory of Nazianzus said and criticized these members of the council for cowardice, ignorance and prevarication. These councils themselves are disputed about. No sooner had their canons appeared than people argued over their interpretation; they are still arguing about the doctrine of the Council of Trent and the Synod of Dort. There are four different copies of the Council of Constance, and to finish, the councils assume religion and never prove it.

THIRD ARTICLE: THE EXTENSION AND ANTIQUITY OF RELIGION, THE ASSENT OF A GREAT NUMBER OF WORTHY MEN.

As for antiquity, paganism, the religion of the Persians and many others existed many centuries before Christianity; besides, if antiquity grants authority, then it was at least dubious on its first day; it is not yet absolutely sure, and its plausibility is always growing.

The same thing applies to its [geographical] extension: paganism and Mahometanism must then be true religions: the former has been a thousand times more extensive, has had far more followers than Christianity, and Islam is followed still today in far larger countries and by far more people; so if Christianity was confined to a small corner of the planet, if the number of Christians was tiny, this religion was therefore false.

The consent of all our learned, enlightened men, of all our philosophers doesn't surpass what is known of paganism – men like Cicero, Seneca, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Diophantes [of Alexandria], Cato, Plutarch, Ptolemy, these men were distinguished in all sorts of sciences! The Chinese, the Arabs, the Persians also have their own philosophers, their own meritorious men who follow their religion.

If you reply, M.R.F., that all the Ancients saw the truth, on what basis do you conclude this, and do you Moderns see it any less? There is far more reason to suspect our scholars than theirs; there were no inquisitions in pagan times; I know only of Socrates, whose life was lost for having denied the plurality of the gods.

And besides, our scholars, for the most part, are attached to religion by a strong bond: self-interest.

The pagan religion didn't provide a living to the ancient scholars. Someone who makes 50 thousand livres in rent will never refute it, and its absurdities will never be revealed by one who lives in hope of grabbing, sooner or later, a nice benefice.

[EIGHTH SECTION:] THE DISPERSION OF THE JEWS

This part is proclaimed loudly. I admit that it's unusual, but what does that mean? Dispersion is just one more misfortune, the state of blacks is a thousand times more unusual and worse. What crime did they commit? Misfortune isn't always the outcome of a crime: can we say that people are criminals with no other proof than their misery? And what crime did they commit? They killed a god.

This same people has been defeated, taken captive and scattered so many other times, and ten of the twelve tribes were dispersed many centuries before. Why wouldn't the two others also be dispersed in the course of human affairs? And only these two tribes are supposed to have condemned J.C. What, then, did the other ten do, and why is the punishment visited upon them?

The Greeks, formerly so brave, so famous, have, for the past three hundred years, been enslaved by the Mahometans. Did they crucify a portion of the deity?

In the Indies there still remain some of the ancient inhabitants of that country, who could never be detached from their religion despite all the insults they suffer, which are a thousand times worse than the treatment we inflict on the Jews.

But if this people, rich as it is under its apparent poverty, if this people, I say, wished to gather again or if it ventured to do so, if the Great Lord decided to sell Jerusalem to them for a high price,

in this case would anyone decide in a council that the Jews will remain dispersed as they are, or that if they don't remain this way, the Christian religion is false?

I don't think anyone would dare to decide this point; there's no need for a great warrior to shut himself up somewhere, and the henchmen of all the factitious religions will never restrict themselves to factual proofs. Let them stick to their legends, their allegories, their figurative language, their meaningless distinctions. St. Augustin, who denied the antipodes and thought this opinion was contrary to his religion, is too good an example.

The profession of the prophet is a risky one: J.C. didn't chance it.

Another proof: from the death of J.C. until the destruction of the temple, this proof was lacking. Let's give an irrefutable reason: those who committed this crime, the supposed cause, they say, of the ills suffered by the Jews, all died peacefully in the same conditions in which they were born.

Every rational being who both wants to avenge himself and can do so, won't leave those who have offended him in peace and oppress their descendants who are innocent of the crime of their forebears.

But Scripture says that God will punish the iniquities of the fathers on their children. Yes, and Scripture says the opposite in another part, but even if it had always maintained this ridiculous maxim, it would have done nothing but show us that it is the product of a madman or a politician, who, seeing the wicked dying unpunished, wants to instill fear of punishment by saying that it will fall upon the children of these lucky criminals.

Besides, how do I know that the sacking of Jerusalem was a punishment? The Jews had revolted, they were the weaker party, they were destroyed, it happens all the time. What happened to Carthage, Thebes, Sparta? These cities were ravaged by enemies who were stronger than their inhabitants, and these inhabitants were scattered. It would be more reasonable to believe that these cities, swallowed by subterranean fires or by the sea, were the ones that put a third of the deity to death, not those destroyed by war, which is caused by men.

Besides, this desolation is not as bad as it's made out to be, since devout pilgrims are shown the praetorium, Anna's house, etc. Why were these places where J.C. was most mistreated saved from ruin?

But where was the crime of most of the Jews against J.C.? Moses had given them a law that was to be eternal, along with a prohibition to change any part of it or to listen to those who would attack it in any way, and the characteristics of the Messiah (assuming that they were waiting for one) were very different from those of J.C.

The people follows its guides. J.C. himself said: "If they are seated in the seat of Moses, hear them, do as they say." These priests say that J.C. is an ungodly man, leading the people astray, who is destroying the religion established by God himself, and that he must be treated with utmost harshness: this nation follows its orders and zealously obeys in favor of its religion. It gave striking proofs of this soon after, when it camped at Pilate's door for five days, begging to die rather than allow the image of the emperor to be placed in their temple.

Finally, if we follow the arguments of the Christians, we must conclude that the Roman empire was destroyed for turning Christian. It is far more astonishing to see this formidable power falling to the barbarians than to see the Jews crushed by the power of the Roman empire.

There's a point on which a preacher's tone would be quite appropriate!

This empire was formed and subsisted with a power before which the whole world bowed; it was glorious and revered under the gods' protection; they blinded the first apostate from their rites and from the religion of his fathers, they made him abandon Rome to move the seat of the empire elsewhere, they made him divide this empire for his three children, they whipped up previously unknown peoples, they led them from the ends of the earth. Oh! My R. F., what fine things would so many pagan preachers have said of something so fitting to ornamentation!

It is more than obvious that the Jews are not guilty: that, even if they were, we couldn't draw any conclusion without allowing the pagans to maintain that the destruction of the Roman empire is

a punishment of the gods; besides, it has been shown that their dispersal is not a punishment and bears no sign of being any such thing.

NINTH SECTION: THE MARVELOUS EFFECTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

It takes horrible effrontery to play this card. One finds among the philosophers a thousand examples of virtues that are more striking than those of our hypocrites. No pagan sect, no savage nation fell into such disorderliness and blindness on morality as was seen among the Gnotists⁴⁷, the Adamites, and in our time the Quietists, the Multipliers, the Quakers, all of which are based on the Gospel.

Have we not reached this horror of horrors, to say that someone could baptize the children of pagans and of those who belong to other wrong religions, then kill them for fear that their parents will raise them according to their own precepts?

Where, then, is the good that the Christian religion has done? Are people any better now? Far from it, you won't find more wicked men anywhere than among Christians.

Were Constantine and Clovis any better for their Christianity, were they any less inclined to usurpation, impudence, murder? Was Julian, due to his relapse into paganism, any less chaste, less generous, less frugal, less patient, less equitable?

Rome, it's said, is the center of Christianity. Where will you see the politics of Machiavelli practiced more harshly? Is there any place on earth where crime reigns so shamelessly and openly? There we see sodomy, poisoning, murder, long premeditated assassinations, treason, perjury, spineless vengeance; all the virtue in that country is confined to building temples to flaunt their luxury, enclosing rotten bones in gold and crystal; the cruelty of avarice, rapine, deception, pride, unlimited ambition and persecution are enthroned there.

⁴⁷ Possibly a copying error, which should be *Gnostics* (See Mortier, p. 292)

Under paganism, everyone lived in peace, worshipers didn't wage war on those who worshiped other gods to force them to renounce them. Behold the beautiful innovation of Christianity: the divisions it has produced are beyond counting. But let's cast a glance on what it's done in only a few centuries: Lutheranism was clearly the cause of the troubles in Germany, Calvinism almost ruined France, Jansenism and Molinism will finish the job; haven't the Arminians in Holland come within inches of wrecking that country?

J.C. said that he had established peace. What sort of peace, good God? It is true that he said elsewhere that he brought division, and he certainly did that. By speaking out of both sides of one's mouth, you are essentially wrong, but you'll always be right for those of your party.

How many massacres, crimes and horrors are carried out in the name of the Christian religion! In which religion will you find a St-Bartholomew's massacre, Guelphs and Ghibellines, the mission of the dragoons against the Huguenots, the horrors of the Inquisition and finally the horrid cruelty seen in America, without right or reason, to convert these poor people?

The savages, before they knew anything about us, lived peacefully and in many ways, innocently; we have brought them our religion, our ambition, our insatiable greed, our treachery, etc. They are presently infatuated with all the vices of the Christians, including a shameful disease by which Christian debauchery has sullied all of humanity.

At the peak of shamelessness, after having driven these sorry people from their lands or enslaved them, the pope divided all these countries between two kings who now enjoy their possession. And with what right does he take from one to give to another? This is sheer mockery of both God and man.

Let's make a sincere comparison between the pagans and the Christians; find me princes as good as Titus, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Antonin. To find any as wicked as Nero, Phalaris, Denys and Caligula, I need look no further than among the popes: Formosa, John XII, Pascal II, Boniface VIII, Sixtus V, Alexander VI and Julius III.

St. Cyprian declaims in a letter against paganism: "It has filled the earth with blood", he says, "and soiled it with infamous filth." He is referring to the excesses of the theater and the combats of the amphitheater; I confess that these were abominable things, but ultimately, this public prostitution did no harm to anyone; at most it was taking a permissible, natural and necessary pleasure to excess, and unduly inflaming a passion which should be moderated. But these infamies which are presently practised in the convents, these frequent abortions, are an effect of Christianity which is far more contrary to the order established by the Creator. The gladiators were criminals, but was there more inhumanity in making them fight for the public than in these notorious *autos-da-fe* of the Inquisition where men are roasted alive, attached to gibbets?

But where will you find in any other religion such a frightful dogma as the one we're told about: there are people to whom one is not obliged to keep one's faith, when sworn solemnly and of one's own free will. Where can you hear it said that God treats men like this potter who makes one vase for a noble use, the other for a filthy use, for no other reason than to display his justice in punishing them? A sharp and learned mind could write something beautiful on this subject matter.

Along with the Gospel, the Fathers, the casuists, the theologians and the glosses, a sincere Christian, if he has no other intelligence than that of his religion, without having the morality which nature places in the heart of the upright man, this Christian, I say, will find in all these holy books materials to authorize the desire that seizes him to pillage, persecute, betray, deceive, break his oaths and contravene his promises, to kill a man who harms him or merely intends to, while common sense, conscience and the natural law don't offer the slightest pretext for all these horrors.

And even if I agreed that Christianity has led to good things, what would this mean? Philosophy produced better ones in ancient Greece; Confucius in China, by his morality kept the great empire in peace and the religion he established there remains in place and has fewer bad effects than Christianity.

TENTH SECTION: THE AMAZING DISCOVERIES OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHERS BY THE LIGHTS OF THE GOSPEL.

FIRST ARTICLE: THE CORRUPTION OF NATURE AND THE NEED FOR A REPAIRER.

What a fine chimera this corruption is! Men are what they must be by their nature, it's of man's essence to feel opposite things, since he is composed of essentially different parts. A bow tends constantly to straighten out, its string tends to keep it bent, the string tends to relaxation and the bow to keep it tense: behold monsters of contradiction for those who grumble without insight; for a sensible and thoughtful man, it's a perfect machine. These contradictions constitute its essence and enable it to fire arrows with a force beyond human strength alone, which is the goal and purpose that its inventor had in mind. If the string, which is supposed to restrict the perpetual efforts of the bow to straighten itself out, is broken or stretched out, then the machine is defective; if the mind, following the principle of its duty, doesn't restrain the body's inclinations for anti-social pleasures, it is deficient.

The mind sees justice and virtue; that's not all, we must resist the drives of the passions which can lead to crime; therein lies the difficulty.

But it's a mistake to believe that man is inclined to evil. You don't believe that, M.R.F., on the contrary. These missionaries who preach the opposite don't believe it either, they ask for directions and follow the path they're shown without any hesitation. If they believed men are led naturally to evil, they would do the opposite of this. This choice, made without deliberation, is a proof of the inner feeling whereby everyone believes that man follows good rather than evil, when both are equal in his eyes. If they were merely indifferent to both, they would do them equally without choosing. The same applies to the destiny that people want to imagine they

believe in: their actions and the precautions they take constantly disprove it; the force of nature carries them far from their reasonings.

Even the most wicked people on earth would be virtuous if they found an advantage in it; man is inclined to enjoy his pleasures and to pursue his interests; consider this any way you like: every being who acts with knowledge aims only at their present or future pleasure in all their free actions, and reason has no other occupation than to curb this drive when it tends to lead us to injustice and to all that is contrary to the good of society.

It's said that things give pleasure because they are crimes. I deny this: it's because it is elegant to act without constraint and to shake off the yoke that others have imposed: it doesn't give pleasure because it's criminal, but because people place a false honor in braving the laws.

Nobody does what is wrong without interested reasons, nobody does what is right when it is of absolutely no cost to him.

Finally, after this supposed regeneration, are men any different than before? J.C. played no role in this supposed corruption, he left us fine proofs of his intelligence!

After all, nature couldn't corrupt itself; if God had made us different, then a new action would be required to corrupt us. Wouldn't this be like a madman who threw a good clock out the window because it was a minute slow? Men are what they were and what they will be, and again, this God who sacrificed himself to God, what did he do? Are those who believe in him different from anyone else?

This isn't all. The means of applying this reparation to us is given into the hands of another: we must go in search of baptism, absolution. But I am therefore at risk of idolatry, without any guarantee on the matter; if he who says Mass is not a priest, if he doesn't consecrate it, what have I worshiped, what have I so devoutly eaten? Oh! It's said in reply, God sees your faith, and credits you for it.

Dismiss the priests, then, if that's sufficient and if their ministry is useless, all things considered. And besides, it's canonizing the practices of all the other religions where men are found who worship God sincerely, and a pagan worshipping a wooden God is in the same position as a Christian worshipping an unconsecrated host.

Behold, M.R.F., the labyrinth and the inextricable twists to which people are necessarily driven when they refuse to base themselves on the [alleged] facts.

SECOND ARTICLE: ORIGINAL SIN, WHICH REQUIRED A VICTIM OF INFINITE WORTH.

Common sense is too offended here to say anything. A great genius, but a Papist and a hypocrite, accuses our justice of being a lowly kind of justice in his reflections on the punishment of original sin. True justice therefore resides in punishing Peter for John's crime.

If some human laws have extended the punishment of a slave's crime to all his fellows, it's not that this punishment was not regarded as unjust, it's that this injustice was thought necessary to keep men in check in certain cases; the slaves were meant to watch over each other and resist the desperate one who might attack his master.

It's not to make up for past crimes that punishment goes this far, it's to prevent them. This can't be the case with the supposed sin of Adam. Can we say that we are made in the image and likeness of God? We are horrified by what he finds very holy.

This great St. Paul, who had risen to the third heaven, also says that human wisdom is folly with God and, by the rule of opposites, the folly of men must be wisdom before God. Behold the fine conclusions to be drawn from this sentence: probity, virtue in general is, therefore, folly with God, and so on with the opposite.

Behold, M.R.F., these amazing discoveries. Your great genius is forced to save the horrors of these absurdities without managing to satisfy the philosophers: the fable of the wolf and the lamb

betrays that Phaedrus was aware of the amazing doctrine of original sin, just as Plato knew about the Trinity. The wolf might add: "I act like God, I punish you for the fault of your father or of one of your fellows."

God is just according to the justice of men; his is more perfect, more extensive, but not different from ours. Add that he is exempt from the mistakes man might commit when he thinks he's pursuing justice. He knows all, he can't misunderstand anything; but it would be absurd to say that his justice is different in essence from ours.

The tale of Adam's sin is self-refuting and nothing is more humiliating for humanity than to have to combat similar follies and make great efforts to establish the clearest things.

Adam was the master of his passions; finally, to be perfect and in a state of a nature without corruption, is manifestly a false supposition; men today are of a more perfect nature, none of them would succumb to a similar temptation, under a similar threat.

If the king opened all the coffers of his treasury, where there was an abundance of gold and a single piece of strange workmanship, and all the peasants in the kingdom were told: "Take as much gold as you want, but don't touch this piece; he who takes it will be hung immediately and all his family will be enslaved", do you believe, M.R.F., that if I took one peasant aside and said: "Take this piece, the king doesn't forbid it because he who holds it will be the king like him," do you believe, I ask, that this peasant would risk it, knowing that he is under constant examination and that he wouldn't be able to hide this deed (for Adam must have known the essence of God and that he wouldn't be able to hide his disobedience from him)? No, truly, he wouldn't do it. But assuming he did, what would you say of a king who, informed that his orders had not been followed, said: "The state of this poor peasant has touched me, I wish to forgive him; but I've been let down, and I require a victim. Have the Dauphin hanged!" Or, if you object that the dauphin wouldn't resurrect like the son of God did, would the king be more out of line if he commanded that, as restitution, the Dauphin was to be whipped to the point of bloodshed?

The sound of the drum calls soldiers, often dying of hunger, back from their pillaging. What is this next to a commandment of God given to a single man by himself and with such terrible penalties attached?

And then incarnation was elaborated. God was offended, the offense was infinite, a victim of infinite worth was required.

Ergo, a god. This is told like something true and which a whole people had witnessed.

And to return to my comparison of the king, the king wouldn't crush the whole province of the Limousin with taxes and duties because one of its inhabitants ate a fig in his garden against his orders; he will never think, after sending the Dauphin to the Limousin and after disguising him so that nobody knew who he was, in order that the Limousins should give him a lashing for claiming to be the king's son. What a funny sort of satisfaction and what fine subtlety!

And again, the comparison isn't right; as slight as it was, it's still an offense against the king and a personal offense, but none of this applies with respect to God.

Since this, as sensible as it is, might seem like a lame joke to you, I maintain, M.R.F., that the principle is false. The mismatch between the offender and the offended party brings contempt on the offense, hence the proverb: *Non dignus Caesaris irâ*.

And what was Adam as compared to God? A thousand times less than a child compared to an old philosopher. Then let's say that the offense is minor to the extent that the offender is contemptible, and words like "offense" are unsuitable. Man has failings, God sees them, that's all; these failings don't offend him.

Assuming that God can be offended, this would imply that he is capable of passions, of vengeance and that, to avenge himself for a slight offense, he takes vengeance on himself in a way for which he can never be compensated. This is like slapping your own face for a contemptuous glance which annoys you, and leaving it at that.

If this game of offenses and satisfactions were carried on, what would have happened to the Holy Spirit?

Do you wish, M.R.F., for your own book to condemn you and for me to do away with this need for a repairer? I've just heard these words sung: *Omnia tibi possibilia sunt, transfer hunc calicem a me*. If J.C. had seen this necessity, he wouldn't have said this prayer; if he didn't see it, then what was he? A man with less insight than our capable theologians. I end with this little thought which is worth considering.

If there were a need for suffering in the person of the redeemer for an infinite offense, then this would require infinite suffering. If it's said that the dignity of the person who was God rendered these sufferings infinitely worthy, this is a contradiction: the lightest slap would have been sufficient. Consequently, anything more is absolutely superfluous and I don't think you can agree, M.R.F., that anything in the ways of God is useless or superfluous. So we must cry aloud: "What follies the human mind invents to achieve its aims!"

THIRD ARTICLE: THE WEAKNESS OF MAN WHO HAS NEED OF GRACE, WITHOUT WHICH HE IS CAN'T DO WHAT IS GOOD.

There are certain things that are so bizarre that it would be insane to discuss them seriously. And yet, let's consider this grace which God gives us little by little, the way a hand-mill is operated, otherwise it won't turn.

If God requires something from men, he has placed them in a state fit to carry out his wishes. If they lack anything for that, he only has himself to blame, since he sees this lack and he alone can fix it.

I can damn myself, you agree, M.R.F., without any victorious action on God's part and without his pushing me irresistibly to sin. Why wouldn't I believe that I can equally be saved, without God irresistibly pulling me with his victorious grace?

Why wouldn't my mind have the power of itself to perform its functions, to deter me from evil and lead me to good? By body certainly has this power as to what concerns it, I expect no grace to eat, to digest, to see, to recoil from tremendous heat, to withdraw from biting cold. Can't we discern a good conclusion from a bad one, a sophism from a sound argument, do we ask grace for that? Is anything more needed to know what the laws of nature and society have prescribed for us?

J.C. says in one place that he doesn't explain himself clearly for fear that the Jews might see and be converted; thus he implies that the mind is strong enough to see what is good and to follow it. His developed argument is this: "I don't want these people to be converted; however, I want to preach to them; I want to speak to them in an obscure way, lest they understand me and the truth strike them and they follow my dogmas." All he had to do, he who was God, was preach to them and withdraw his grace, they would have heard without wanting to convert, and J.C. would have been relieved of giving these subtle explanations to his disciples.

Is it grace that makes me choose between two things that pull me on both sides, on one hand eating a certain thing that I love, and on the other the fear of a stomach-ache? Certainly not, it's me who determines my choice, as I sense very well. Why, if reason alone is sufficient for me in matters of indifference, is anything more required in matters of religion? In both cases all I feel is the same operations of my mind.

Once I have accepted the idea of punishment and reward, I'm acting on this idea in the same way as when I see a dish that I love, but which will upset my stomach.

Add to the catechism that it's a crime to kill the least animal and a virtue to feed them, and on this point we will feel all that is felt on the Easter confession and on eating fat during Lent. A certain conflict, a certain remorse will be felt.

A Church Father has said that the virtues of the pagans were vices because they were without grace. What! Socrates, what! Trajan, what! Marcus Aurelius, Antonin, Titus will be in eternal

horrid torments, while St. Bernard, St. Ignatius and so many others, imposters like the former, madmen like the latter, are in the bosom of God where they enjoy endless delights!

What then is this grace? Does it add anything to my action? “Yes”, someone will say, “before redemption all men were God’s enemies and could do nothing to please him”; yes, I almost understand you: the Trojans were in the same situation, the judgment of Paris, by denying Juno the apple, rendered this whole people odious to the goddess; the one is as true as the other.

2nd) The wise man loves and respects virtue, even in his enemy, but God would hate even the most praiseworthy deeds because they are done by people to whom he hasn’t deigned to reveal himself!

3rd) Assuming the truth of this absurdity, once redemption happens, we have no use for grace. Men might have done good deeds, as the pagan sages have shown us; all that was needed was reconciliation with God for these actions to find favor with him; when we are reconciled, virtue will be rewarded.

I find in a book, given as a prize to a third-grade student, that the missionaries of Asia furtively cast a few drops of water on Mahometan children, murmur a few Christianizing words and they believe they’ve baptized them. Do these children have grace at this moment, or are your missionaries only fanatics?

Justice would have us refuse to punish anyone for an action that they couldn’t avoid, or for violating a law of which they weren’t aware, when they couldn’t possibly have known it.

A person can be given more benefits than they deserve, but not treated worse than they deserve, even less punished when they don’t deserve it. A father might well clothe and lodge one of his children splendidly, give him the best morsels at his table, he doesn’t owe the same to all his children: by doing this for a single one he does nothing to offend against justice, as long as he treats all the rest appropriately. But he can’t clothe one, caress him, educate him, while he beats the rest, neglects their education and lets them go about naked, and punishing them for ignorance

of mathematics without having taught it to them, while rewarding his beloved son who remembered one arithmetical rule which he was slow to learn.

Go ahead and preach then: at most, that God has elected, by his will and gratuitously, a certain number of souls to bring them eternally into his glory, but that he will render justice to the rest and that he will reward or punish them according to merit, and that he will judge their deeds according to the knowledge they achieved and the temperate feelings which drove them to act.

This choice without a reason would be bizarre, but at least there would be no injustice in it, and I fail to see how this accuses the perfect being of being more flawed than humanity.

Say also, if you like, that reprobation will be eliminated from existence. God brought me from nothingness, he will send me back. I have nothing to say, existence is neither a blessing nor a curse, the conditions of existence make all the difference. Whether I'm invited into a house or not is a matter of indifference: if it's to treat me well, it's a benefit, if it's to insult me and make me suffer, it's an offense that deserves all my hatred.

Shout as much as you like: "God is the master of his creatures"; this is beyond any contestation. There is no objection with regard to power, but this is absolutely impossible with regard to morality. Cato could have put his slaves on crosses: that was a right of all masters, but Cato's justice couldn't accept the death of an innocent man. Maybe you'll object that the slave was a man like Cato; so let's say, instead: Cato was the master of the trees in his garden. Wouldn't he have been taken for a madman if he burned and thoughtlessly dug up a bunch of them simply because, without pruning or watering, they didn't produced fruits as fine as those he looked after carefully?

But St. Paul said that; and St. Paul says the opposite as well. Every dispenser of chimeras contradicts himself: he exhorts the Galatians not to receive grace uselessly, he fears for them. How can this be harmonized with his grace, which is victorious by itself?

Nothing is as comforting for a wicked man as to be able to say that grace was lacking, and this is where this fine idea leads, behold these amazing efforts of Christianity! A scoundrel can commit

all sorts of crimes, at death he hopes to get a moment of repentance; grace won't be lacking for him and behold, he is saved.

ELEVENTH SECTION: THE HOLINESS OF THE RITES.

We have dealt with the interior aspect of worship by discussing morality; now let's discuss its exterior: the grimaces, the playacting, the pomp of human luxury, is all I see there. Let's consider the ritual and the catechism: it starts by saying that the Pope is God's vicar on earth, that he has full power to absolve and condemn. What! A monster, blackened by every sort of crime, a man like Alexander VI, who poisoned his bastard while trying to poison someone else, this man is referred to as His Holiness! Well, His Holiness raped the wife of an illustrious citizen, His Holiness made his own daughter his concubine! It's added that kings and emperors owe him adoration and signs of respect that no master ever required of his slave.

I also see here that a hooded scoundrel has eternal salvation or damnation up his sleeve, that we have to worship a wafer, a spoonful of wine and pompously sing that this is our God. Can anything more insane than this be imputed to paganism? What kept the priests of Jupiter from mumbling a few words over the statue of Jupiter and saying that this god became present and that only the accidents of the marble remained? Are we not like the Egyptians? They worshiped onions, we worship wheat. It was said of them: *Sacra gens cui nascuntur in hortis numina*. Could it not be said of us: *Sacra gens cui nascuntur in arvis numina*?

What? A scoundrel, often a wicked man, whose hair has been cut and a bit of hair shaved behind his head along with some other burlesque ceremonies, what! this man has the power to change all the bread on earth into the infinite Being, and we must worship the tiniest crumb of this bread!

What! Rotten bones or rags, along with statues of stone or wood or metal. What! This is what God's graces distribute! By touching this filth, by burning incense or wax in their presence, you can get whatever you like from God!

What! So, holiness consists, in reality, in doing nothing but singing at certain hours, often without thinking of what you're saying, in enjoying all the advantages of the republic without being of any use to it, in wearing certain robes, bits of stuffing attached to a ribbon, grains of wood threaded on a string, in not marrying, in eating this or that? What mummeries! But that's not all. A pompous cortège of people with their smocks and robes, singing things that have nothing to do with the cadaver that follows them, all of this hastens the blessedness of the soul of the defunct! A great quantity of torches that profit the parish priest, the sound of bells ringing, which dazzles the living and certainly doesn't ring cheaply, the attendance of all these charlatans which comes at a price, like Italian courtesans, behold what leads a soul straight to Heaven, and the poor man who can't pay is nearly dragged to the charnel-house.

For marriage, a piece of silver or gold, a ring, impertinent formulas: "With this ring I marry you; with this silver I bestow a gift on you, any with my body I honor you", and an *Ego vos conjungo*, how pretty! Nothing could be more to God's liking than to get between one's heirs and the wealth they expect to receive, to fatten do-nothing monks or build prisons where the innocent victims of their relatives' greed and pride are locked up.

And the best part is these statues of naked men that are displayed everywhere, even on altars: Christs on the cross or suffering his flagellation; a handsome, young and fresh-faced St. Sebastian, the drapery cast in certain places, makes a strong impact and awakens the imagination about what it's hiding, and this idea is only the more lively and touching for all that.

Is it holiness in worship to teach children words in a foreign tongue, words they don't understand? What a way to honor God.

Set all these articles and the rest, too many for our pure nature to endure, and place the craziest practices of the other religions beside these, do you believe, M.R.F., that anyone will find much of a difference?

Add to this the power of baptism, which instantly sends to heaven a monster who has bathed for forty years in the blood of his miserable victims.

Will this unprejudiced man, who hearkens only to the truth, who knows God and has a proper idea of him, find a form of spiritual worship in a religion which is only a pretext for rapine and vexation, and which relates entirely to physical observances? No, he can't call either spiritual or holy something that's only performed at an exorbitant cost, paid in advance, or demanded after the fact by the intervention of prosecutors and bailiffs.

Telling one's life-story to a man, putting water on your head, oil on your feet, on your hands, your stomach, lighting candles, burning incense, leafing through books, walking while chanting, none of these things constitute a holy and spiritual form of worship.

What shall we say of the wages given to these God-bearers, of this God who is eaten by rats, who is thrown to the dogs by thieves, whom the Christians of other sects trample underfoot, who is found in dustbins? Is this God any more worthy of worship than the rats and onions of Egypt? All the grimaces, the bowing, the odd looks, the raising and lowering of the voice, the head and the hands, these changes of robes, of masks, these lights at midday: you really want all of this to be holy?

It's said that the Romans carried, with great fanfare, a mass of dough in the shape of a woman's womb. This was done in honor of Ceres, and to the sound of cannons, to the sound of bells, with a thousand lighted torches, the streets decorated, the people prostrate, we carry a bit of dough representing a naked man on a gibbet.

What reply can be given? To say that the ceremonies of the ancients were based on falsehoods but ours are based on truths? The idolatrous priests, the bonzes, the mullahs, the dervishes pay their blinded masses with the same coin.

Let's end with two thoughts. If we were to subscribe to the Gospel, which sect should we follow? All of them are diametrically opposed to each other, all of them say that they're right and the rest

are wrong: who can discover the truth, even assuming it can be found somewhere; and after all imaginable efforts in this, how can you be sure of your judgment?

Christianity needs the arts and the sciences. Without the art of reading and writing, what use is this immense quantity of volumes and how would they have made them, how could this body of doctrine be preserved, how could they be translated without grammar-books? How are the Caribbeans, the Eskimos, the Iroquois, the blacks and the Tartars supposed to understand the priests, where will they get the bread and wine for the Mass, where will they find what they should dress these priests in, as we do, for the ceremonial; where will they get oil, wax, how will they understand the masters of Latin, of theology, of plainchant? They can only become Christians by becoming the slaves of the Europeans. How are the inhabitants of the South and North from the 83rd parallel to the pole supposed to receive the Gospel? If you say that the apostles were miraculously transported to these zones, then how are they supposed to send their own problems to Rome and the councils? There will never be enough paper or time to express everything that comes to mind. This could mean that Christianity is not suitable for all countries, that, since it requires arts which are not natural, it's not a God-given religion, since it is not born in us along with the other laws that we find engraved in our heart, and that, since its rites aren't practicable in certain climates, this form of worship is not necessary, or rather that this religion isn't suitable for every country. Make your choice, M.R.F., what should we conclude?

CONCLUSION OF THIS NOTEBOOK

I have formally set down the arguments that destroy all factitious religions in general: the major arguments are clear and incontestable truths; so let's set all the proofs of the Christian religion beside them and see what they rest on, and compare the two.

The books of the Jews. First proof: men distinguished by their riches, their clothing, etc. say that these books are divine. Therefore, they are divine.

The New Testament. Second proof: the same as that of the books of the Jews; I leave it to you to give a portrait of the apostles and evangelists, but don't state any quality that isn't well established.

The fulfillment of the prophecies. Third proof: As soon as the tales of past facts, or imprecations, or wishes can be turned *ad hoc et ab hac* to make them apply to posterior events, these become prophecies. But we have these wishes, these imprecations, these tales, and by putting one line to one side and one line to the other, we apply them. Therefore, they are prophecies from which we can draw whatever conclusion we want.

For the establishment of Christianity, fourth proof: When something is established in a strange and even surprising manner, it is good, just and true and it's the effect of a special act of God; and Christianity etc., therefore etc.

For the witness of the martyrs, fifth proof: Whatever is maintained even to death by men who could avoid this by recanting is essentially true and incontestable; and Christianity etc., therefore, etc.

For the tradition, sixth proof: Everything that a certain number of people say was handed down to them is incontestably true; and etc., therefore etc. I might add this fine argument to the major thesis: even though it's contested by a greater number and reported differently by confused, jumbled speeches and writings etc.

For the Fathers, the councils, antiquity, extension, seventh proof: All that is said about the men honored with a venerable title, all that has been decided by assembled persons, all that is ancient, all that men of learning and merit outwardly profess to believe is incontestable; and etc., therefore etc.

For the dispersion of the Jews, eighth proof: When a people is dispersed among all nations, without losing its customs, or its religion, this people must have been cherished by God and lost his favor for having killed a portion of the deity which had become human; and the Jews are dispersed, thus, therefore, etc.

For the amazing effects of Christianity, ninth proof: Everything that has caused something good, even if it has also produced horrid evils, comes directly from God and is an essential truth that the whole world must embrace; and, etc., therefore, etc.

For the discoveries of the Christian philosophers, tenth proof: What can we say that seems even a little plausible? When men got strange ideas while reading a book, and shared them with others, this proves beyond any doubt that this book is full of what they thought they had read in it. That is too miserable for a sensible discourse.

The same applies to the eleventh proof on the holiness of the rites.

I ask you, M.R.F., whether these major theses are like mine. The theologians are very careful to pursue this manner of formal argumentation. These famous authors, who are so well compensated for producing books like the *Traité de la Religion chrétienne*, *L'Incrédulité des Déistes confondue*, *Preuves de la Divinité de J.C.*, *Démonstration des Vérités de la Religion*, *Apologie de la Religion*, etc. are all content with the style of a preacher; they cover the falseness of their arguments with flowers, and finally they use astonishment and emotional excitation to win over reason.

I believe, M.R.F., that your religion is destroyed by the demonstration of the emptiness of its proofs, it would be destroyed by the facts if we had the ancient histories, and I'm sure that if Father Malebranche, Scaliger, Petau, Chevreau and other learned men, well grounded in their reading had undertaken this, they might still be at it; but, led as they are by prejudices or other, perhaps less respectable reasons, they betray their conscience and seek to prove what they cannot believe when they think about it.

All the ancient philosophers found their sciences and their laws in the books of Moses: if you claim this, it only shows how tyrannical party spirit can be.

You may say, M.R.F., that Satan inspires such solid arguments in me; I will insist that it's God and I'll have this advantage over you, that it's certain that there is a God and that it's nearly certain that there is no Satan; and if all is equal, then we have ended up in a perfect Pyrrhonism.

Even my high opinion of your rare and sublime genius and of your deep learning can't give me any hope that you'll turn any of the proofs of our religion into a conclusive argument, whereas I've formed twenty good ones against it. Agree, then, that the falseness of all factitious religions is proved and demonstrated.

I impatiently await the response of your Reverence, I wish it would satisfy me, but I don't dare hope it will. Does God ask for anything more than the use of my natural talents, more than the sincere application of the powers he gave me? I am no more required to know how to read than to know algebra, I am no more obliged to know Latin, Greek and Hebrew than a taupinambour is. I am no more obliged to believe that a certain man is a good and faithful translator than to believe that a certain traveler has told his tale faithfully. Nor am I obliged to discern and believe that a certain man is the sole depositary of the true doctrine, to the detriment of a thousand who dispute the matter with him.

How am I obliged to browse your Scriptures and consult with this or that interpreter, even if I were to believe these Scriptures were valid? But I see clearly and distinctly with the eyes of reason, which I received with my being, I see incontestable proofs of presumption in those who promote the Christian religion, and weakness and stupidity in those who accept it and submit to it.

FOURTH NOTEBOOK: CONTAINING A SYSTEM OF RELIGION BASED METAPHYSICALLY ON NATURAL LIGHTS AND NOT ON FACTS

To get a proper understanding and acceptance of the doctrine I'm preaching here, we must not disturb those who preach something else, either their honors or incomes, and leave them in lifelong possession of everything which they universally enjoy. A complete reformation would be reached in the abstract.

After having demonstrated the nullity of all factitious religions and, as it were, ground to dust, to be carried off by the wind, all the proofs of the Christian religion in particular, let's listen to reason.

It will tell us that there truly is a religion, that it really exists (despite what the missionaries intone) that there is no people on earth that lacks one. The most barbarous and savage peoples have some sense of the divinity, of the survival of the soul after the body and of morality. It is true that these ideas are weak or obscure, for lack of thought or simply attention.

Reason will also tell us that it is impossible for a falsehood to have fallen equally into the minds of so many millions of men who are so different, so far apart, for millions of centuries.

Let's also turn to our pure nature and ask it what it thinks on this subject, let's become pure nature ourselves, let's rise above all prejudice and all human instruction to see if we have a certain instinct leading us to feel that there is a being above us; or at least whether, when this is suggested to us, we will subscribe to it more naturally and without repugnance, as we do with the clearest truths we are shown.

You have wished, M.R.F., to throw powder in people's eyes with this principle, when you said that the more incredible the mysteries of the incarnation and rest were, the more certain their truth was, since all men recognize and confess them.

1st) A thousand times more people deny these mysteries, while there is only a very small number of atheists, maybe not even one;

2nd) Any religion can make its own arrows from this wood. The less possible it is that the supreme God could fall in love with a girl and change into a bull to gratify his passion, the more certain it is, since so many people have believed it. The most extravagant doctrines of both worlds, their most abominable practices are well founded in truth and holiness, since such large numbers of people believe them contrary to all reason and probability;

3rd) Everyone sees the falseness of your argument from the fact that people only accept things by means of instruction, suggestion, education, example, custom, etc.

They don't believe this naturally, they don't submit to it without difficulty when they learn it after the age of reason and without the backing of authority. My argument is not that the truth is whatever many people believe, even outside of and contrary to common sense, when they are induced, but what men believe naturally without induction, fraud or force, at least what they accept without repugnance, when it's shared with them.

I maintain that nothing but the truth can present itself equally to all men or seem acceptable when it's presented to them; meanwhile, you maintain that only the truth can be introduced to certain people by cunning, by ambush, by violence.

Forgive me, M.R.F., but my natural candor overcomes the respect I feel for you and the feelings of uprightness that can't be refused without causing offense. I cannot imagine how such a great genius could fail to see this flaw, or consequently how you can be speaking sincerely. All the theologians are damned for similar kinds of lies, but I don't doubt that O.H.F. the Pope has issued a general dispensation and a plenary indulgence on this matter.

It is certain that everyone is the same with respect to the deity as with all else that is beyond question; any given savage has an idea of quantities, he understands that there is a certain relationship between magnitudes and that numbers exist, he even uses them to some extent; but, having never reflected or meditated on such obvious points, he has kept such a distance from them that we say that he knows neither geometry nor arithmetic, instead of saying that he only knows a little. Still, we say that there is no religion, or the least notion of the first being, instead of only assuming he has a small and confused one, since he also has the principles of arithmetic and geometry, which principles he will use more if the necessities of life lead him to their pursuit.

It is useless to go further here, there are few atheists and there won't be any at all once there is a judicious religion which doesn't repel the purest lights of reason, and which won't be a snare to capture men and cast them into the irons of a certain number of wicked men who care nothing about it.

Let's look for it, then, this judicious, real and true religion, glorious to God and salutary to men. To find it, let us note that reason is the only light by which men can be guided and the only means of attaining and grasping the truth by a serious and complete meditation on their ideas. If we learn the sciences by studying, by reading and listening to teachers, then it's only to speed things up and take advantage of the toil of others, it's to spare ourselves the tiresome efforts by which we could have attained these fine discoveries like these teachers and even like authors and inventors, or rather, it's to profit from the efforts of the great geniuses to whom we are inferior. With all that, we must still absolutely consult ourselves, we must always know whether they're right. Finally, when we have to choose among many opinions, we are the only judges, it's necessarily up to us to decide, if we want to avoid choosing at random. But nobody relates randomly to matters of utmost importance; we certainly turn this way and that for one allotment or other, since when it's assumed that two lots are equal, we don't turn to know whether there is one or none at all.

Then let us, My Reverend Father, undertake this great task, let's withdraw into ourselves, let's consult the perfect Being with which our intelligence is united, let's give the glory to reason, which is only one in the Creator and in intelligent creatures and with a serious and sincere attentiveness, detached from all passions and free from all prejudice, let's earn our enlightenment.

Oh! If our R. F. Malebranche, with all the nobility of his genius, his penetrating mind, his profundity and all his learning were today without prejudice or prior commitment, how useful might he truly be to humanity! What supreme glory he would give to God! What a fine system, well-established, consistent, well explained, well expressed, even more useful than marvelous, would he present to us!

The truth can do without such rare talents, but falsehood needs them. Far from wishing to ambush people by education, or forcing them with torture, the truth doesn't even use eloquence, it scorns a deceptive art which can seduce by false brilliance, it is content to share its arguments without artistry, without artifice and with candid simplicity, without ceremony, without urgency, and with so little equipage, like the sun, it forces all minds into submission, although without violence, makes itself known, despite our reticence.

FIRST SECTION: ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

In this confidence, I examine the first of my thoughts that seems to deserve attention; not whether I am, since I find no difficulty there and I see clearly that nobody can doubt their own existence, but who made me, who made the heavens, the Earth, the animals, the plants, who gave them life, who formed such a marvelous arrangement and imprinted it with such amazing motions, who pushes the Sun and the Moon to a certain place and returns them to their starting point with an equal pace? Who maintains such a beautiful and surprising course? No doubt, it's neither one nor many men, since I can't do anything close to it, and since I can't even comprehend how it occurs. It is, therefore, a being who is wiser and more powerful, for extreme wisdom is necessary to invent and elaborate such a thing, to foresee all its possible problems, to understand all its parts, and combine all its relations, unlimited power is necessary to carry out such a vast project.

When I limit myself to the contemplation of the body of the lowest animal that can act, eat, grow, reproduce itself, which lives by a perpetual motion of fine liquids without anyone seeing or comprehending its first springs, my mind gets lost and confused. I can see that the minds of all men would be lost and confused by merely trying to imagine everything necessary to construct

the foot of a fly or the leaf of a thistle; and even if we could imagine the number and the organization of an infinity of filaments that are crude, fluted, and configured in a hundred thousand ways, with a multitude of liquids and corpuscles flowing between them, we still wouldn't dare try to execute the least or crudest part of any of it. Those we can only discover with microscopes might well be composed of a million others too.

It is, therefore, the workmanship of a Being far above us poor wretches. And who is this Being? There are only two possibilities: either a Being who surpasses us in perfection, but who doesn't have them all to the highest degree, or an absolutely infinite Being who has all the wisdom, all the power, and generally speaking, all the properties possible for any being.

If I rely on the first solution, I then ask myself who made this finite Being who is so powerful, and I fall, after many cascades at least, to the second one.

True, it's not absolutely impossible that a finite being made the world, by simply arranging the parts of pre-existing matter. There is more difficulty in uniting the mind with a body; but still, the impossibility of this is not manifest, any more than the knowledge of the inner workings of these minds, but as for judging the goodness or evil of these workings, their combinations are infinite. Thus, the infinite being would have to be consulted with. This is getting ahead of ourselves somewhat and will be treated later, thoroughly and in all detail.

To say that everything was made by chance, by the mixture and the fortuitous union of various corpuscles is a pile of verbiage that doesn't merit any reply. The smallest thing made by human hands bears the stamp of an intelligent Being, of a certain wisdom, of a certain power. We may well maintain such a folly verbally and utter a thousand vain subtleties. We may well maintain that it's not the Sun that gives us light, but that mere chance brings it to our horizon while light is present. I'd like to pass a red-hot iron across the nose of such people, telling them that it's not me who's burning them but it's only by chance that I touched them, since they must necessarily feel the pain they're moaning about. I'll shut them up in a room where they'll be given nothing to drink or eat and tell them that they can only blame the fortuitous course of the atoms, which are not moved in such a way as to offer them bread and wine.

These sorts of extremists, as intelligent as they might be otherwise, will not be dangerous, nobody will follow their opinion or rather their speeches (for there is no reason to suppose that they actually think what they say). Nobody will even pretend to, unless for some pressing interest.

Why do we admire every day natural productions, so close to those of art, why are they sought out, why do people hold them carefully and investigate them? Because these productions I'm calling natural come by sheer chance, and we think that chance can't lead to art. Without this idea, if you had presented to Democritus, to Epicurus, to Lucretius a piece of marble representing the precise plan of their city, of their dwelling, and the elevations of the most sumptuous buildings, complete with portraits of the inhabitants in their various ways of dressing, according to their qualities and functions, they would have to look away, since they saw different effects of the same chance every day, which were far more amazing. What I've just said is nothing by comparison to what is seen in men, in animals who reproduce, move, live, grow, in the movement of the heavens and the stars, going to and fro with such a wonderful speed which is nevertheless so well regulated. They wouldn't have admired a microscope, a clock, a profession of making woolen stockings, an organ, a hundred thousand thick volumes written with absolute conformity in a few months, they wouldn't even have looked at Archytas' fly; all that is nothing by comparison with an infinite number of animals that we trample on, and which, in their opinion, would only be the result of a fortuitous concourse of atoms. We don't consider as very skilled those who know how to imitate chance, but only imitate the art of the creator. A painter who copies marbles very well is a mere dauber by comparison with one who makes a good copy of the human form with all its emotional features. Certainly, these great philosophers, against their own system, would have admired, pursued and carefully preserved all the miracles of art that I've just cited.

These kinds of *esprits forts*, whether insane or merely stubborn, enslaved to the vanity of sounding intellectual and subtle, apparently refuse to admit that a moving force which sets all matter in motion, as a result of which the whole machine of the world is fortuitously formed, like a spring, setting aside certain little bodies, would form certain shapes with them. This idea of moving forces is in their minds the same as a weight or a spring is to their senses. It's a blind power that pushes matter in various directions, producing reflections and counter-reflections, such that

certain assemblages and certain circuits are produced, which produce all the bodies and qualities that we see.

But as for me, I think that I see, I conceive of the past and the future, I meditate on the means and compare them with the oppositions. I take precautions and think through things that are very complex, very difficult, very troublesome and very tricky. I am free and I go where I want. I encounter opposition. I argue on all matters, myself, my nature. Could a blind power have made me so clear-sighted? Can a simple moving force have made me capable of thinking, judging, combining, reasoning, denying, affirming? Can a being with no sense have made me sensitive? Can a faculty acting without choice and without purpose have made me capable of making my own choices, and finding means to realize them? You can't give what you don't have. You can't make something infinitely more perfect than you are. There is therefore another being, infinitely more perfect, wiser, freer, more powerful, more just than humanity. And what limits will we set to its perfections? On what basis will it stop short at any point whatsoever?

I can therefore presently consider that I have acquired knowledge of the Supreme Being, that summit of perfections, and so infinitely infinite that, to whatever elevation I might hoist myself, whatever efforts of imagination I effectuate, whatever expression I might form, I am always far beneath understanding and expressing perfectly what it is, that my most sublime thoughts and my most noble words are nearly insults: it would be like saying that a great king has a room with tapestries, that he doesn't travel on foot, that he doesn't prepare his own meals, etc.

This isn't a paradox like the *What do I see? Philemon kneeling at the foot of the crucifix* or like your *Ah! Theodorus, how could I open my heart to you?* etc. Forgive me, M.R.F., I don't exempt you from the crowd on this point, you will break your nose like anyone else. When it comes to the proofs of the Christian religion, the trinity, the incarnation, and all its specific dogmas, original sin, grace etc., all that you can say is miserable, childish, it would be pitiful coming from a third-grader. It isn't your fault; it's the best anyone can do.

Will you tolerate, M.R.F., an effort of frankness, which is about the only tyrant I have? I think that, afraid to say the truth directly, you take this detour in order to show it; preaching to the

stupid masses loudly and in clear terms against what they find established and about which they are stubborn is very dangerous and nearly futile. Solid minds will readily see that a great genius won't see such falsehood as a reasonable proof, or hope to ambush more mediocre minds with it, thus they will infer what I mean to say, i.e., that only nonsense can be given in favor of Christianity.

I mean, M.R.F., that which is distinctive of Christianity, for the trick is to praise it for a thousand things that it shares with basic common sense and for all the things that are no more its own than the advantage of having eyes and ears is distinctively French.

I very humbly and sincerely beg your leave for something that might well offend you, but before I trouble you in this way, check carefully, M.R.F., whether I'm wrong and whether it isn't to your honor. Besides, I'm addressing you man to man.

My meditations, my reflections and my reasoning lead naturally to my conclusion. We don't need so many subtle arguments to prove the existence of the one whose workmanship we are. If some have erred to the point of denying the deity, their hearts are silent while their mouths are moving, they have only come to such extreme and irrational brutishness because of the extravagant conclusions that the ministers of the different religions draw from it. *What! they say, here this supreme being is the sun, there it's fire, elsewhere it's a vile animal. Great peoples, celebrated for their genius, their science, their courage worship a multitude of meaningless names which have no real object. There are a hundred deities in one place, a thousand in another, millions elsewhere. Altars are dressed in a famous city to one that nobody knows about. They are given wives, children, passions, weaknesses, vices. They are supposedly won over by stupid words and even by abominable acts. They can be bartered with, infamous deeds are included in their worship, everywhere their ceremonies are different, odious and extravagant. Some speak of a single god and festoon him with such miserable attributes that nothing could deserve more laughter and compassion. Others, who make a great noise in the world, believe this god to be unique in three persons, and from this dismemberment they draw countless mistaken conclusions, they associate multitudes of subaltern deities with him and from all that find a pretext, not only for swindling, but also to wield the most horrid kind of tyranny. Even they can't find any agreement on their principles, even less on the various dogmas that should follow from them. It's all quibbling and perpetual fighting, violence, vexation, cruelty, barbarity without cease or proportionality, of the strong against the weak.*

The first truth cannot cause so many disagreements and such disorder; if men can never agree, it's because it concerns a falsehood. The truth is simple and uniform, it is never contested and universally disfigured, even less is it introduced by artifice and maintained by violence.

Had these people seen a just and reasonable opinion dominant, with an irreproachable form of worship which was entirely spiritual and disinterested, they wouldn't have suppressed their natural lights and spoken against the internal instinct which penetrates all human hearts. And after all that, this instinct which is called conscience and reason still doesn't cease to murmur if even if it no longer cries out.

I don't reject all these fine metaphysical thoughts which sublime minds have produced, I am even persuaded that they can be pressed on and explained to infinity. But I am absolutely sure that they are not within reach of everyone and that thus, even if they were utterly convincing, they wouldn't be the most appropriate or figure principally in God's designs for our instruction, since they are hard to find and to understand.

The proofs drawn from the fabrication of the world confound both savants and ignoramuses, dullards and the finest minds, the latter even more than the former, since their grasp of things shows them a thousand beautiful lights in the immensity of the universe and in the artistry required to make each of its parts. The qualities of this proof can't be admired enough, since it is so well matched to all minds. Lesser minds are easily satisfied; thus, they see enough of it, although they grasp but little of the beauty of the universe. Savants and great minds want more; thus, their understanding and their study lead them to discover an infinity of marvels; thus, this proof is very appropriate.

I'm not playing a professor here, I don't claim to teach anything new, I only wish to awaken those who sleep. I don't expect you to take my word, or anyone else's, for that matter. I point to no authority or rely on the weight of even the most widespread opinion. It is midday, there is a clock, there is a sundial, look at the sun above your head: just look up. People turn their heads, raise their eyes, they see as I do, without having a better opinion of my discernment, without giving me either money or respect. It's the truth, it's reality that strikes and affects you.

This being which all men have present in their minds and hearts, almost without realizing it, makes them feel the least notification very sharply. Then, by paying attention even slightly we are led to find that it's the necessary Being, the independent Being, the immense Being, the eternal Being, the author of all things, which itself is the essence of all things, which penetrates the universe without occupying it, which limits and surpasses it.

I would share my ideas at great length if I weren't afraid of getting lost in expressions which don't correspond precisely to what I think; what I've said is enough and this is the Being which all intelligences know and which we call God.

I'm more than convinced that every man who is healthy, whole, and with fresh mind (I mean: those who are not biased by suggestiveness, corrupted by self-interest), will receive this proposition without resistance, that whole peoples will submit to it without difficulty and will publicly acclaim its truth as long as people stick to its legitimate consequences.

THE DEITY'S ATTRIBUTES

To go from speculation to practice, and draw the right and necessary conclusions from this great and first truth, we must bring such elevated ideas together and accommodate them to our weakness. To manage this, I divide this perception of the divinity, although it's quite simple and of a single piece, although I can only conceive an indistinct and indivisible quality in it, i.e., absolute perfection.

And I fail to see how anyone can consider this supreme and unique perfection but in three respects:

1st). To know all, to see all, to compare all things, to combine all things, to grasp all sorts of relations in a single and selfsame act: I call this divine wisdom.

2nd). To be able to make anything that is, to change everything, to displace and move anything, to stop anything; I call this the infinite power of God.

3rd). To judge merit accurately and precisely, to be oneself the natural and necessary law which brings punishment to crimes and reward to virtue: this is what I mean by divine justice. It seems to me that everything is included here, except eternity and immensity, which are only subjects of speculation, and which are fairly easy to discover. As for goodness, God doesn't have this in our way, or mercy either; this is included in his justice, as I hope to show clearly. All that remains is the unity which I would discard for the same reason if experience didn't teach me that it has a profound influence on practice since man has fallen into such a terrible abyss on this point, that nearly the whole world believes in a plurality of gods, under the influence of wretches who find such a monstrous dogma necessary. So, let's discuss in a few words, which will be all we need on such a clear subject.

Naturally, it would never occur to me that there are many gods, since a single one is perfect and possesses everything. The slightest attention quickly shows how ridiculous a multitude of them would be, and the subtlest thinker can't offer any semblance about their plurality, since a single one would suffice; there would be the same reason to have five hundred million as to have two of them. Besides, this would also be impossible; they would have to be interpenetrable, they would have to act together to do the same thing with multiple acts or to avoid contravening each other.

It will be denied that a single and unique being can have all possible perfections, but that would be baseless; it's no more problematic for all of them to be united in a single subject than to be dispersed among many, and there are obvious reasons for them not to be shared about, since one would deprive another of its effect if they were guided by different wills, since there isn't anything to determine which ones belong to either, any more than to determine the number of such beings.

What certain people have imagined, after many others, and which we maintain while using different names: that is, that there are two principles, one good, the other wicked, will be refuted by the explanation you'll be given, M.R.F., about good and evil.

Nothing could be more certain than what I dare to affirm, namely, that all the peoples who have believed in the plurality of gods have always recognized one of them as supreme, who was properly speaking the true and only god; the others only had this name figuratively and with a very different signification, although over time and by the corruption common to all things, this difference was obscured and became almost imperceptible. These subaltern and false beings are only the inventions of the priests, who find no problem in making a clear distinction between them, according to the rule that when the pond is opaque, more fish are caught in it. This distinction itself was gradually weakened, the masses readily connecting the same idea to the same words. A scholar could demonstrate this inductively from a historical observation of all the known peoples of the earth. I can see this clearly enough to be sure of it, as I'm sure that the Romans created the most powerful empire we know of from very small rudiments, but not well enough to go into all the details or demonstrate it to others.

Such people, I mean the priests, the henchmen, the ministers of religion, people who call themselves the vicars of J.C. and of God, his officers and his anointed, will eternally attack the true cult of the deity. I'd stake my life for a *sou* that idolatry only began with certain individuals who made it their profession to serve the deity on behalf of the public. They didn't find it useful to have a god who fills everything, who is everywhere, who sees everything, who hears everything, who does everything in himself and by himself, without any trouble, by the mere aims of his wisdom and his justice and by the pure and simple act of his will. They certainly found greater benefit for themselves, their interests under the pretext of public esteem and with the means of profiting themselves in a multitude of deities, each one of which was opposed to the others, in deities who are won over by flattery, gifts, who are corrupted by their favorites, who need assistants, lieutenants, vicars. Finally, they needed gods with all weaknesses of men, since, to flatter them and profit from them, people would use presents and other human means, which they could take for themselves. It's for this reason that these unworthy wretches are seen recklessly basing themselves on misguided comparisons which touch the minds of the crude and the ignorant, as false and injurious as they may be to the deity.

Next, they created material gods so that they would only be sought in their company, so that people would come to beseech them with offerings of the same nature and so that they could

enrich themselves by the brutish devotions of the people. Finally, before our eyes, something a fool in a comedy once said: "They come with their offerings in hand to grease your palm," goes on every day; they give money to the priest to get God or the saint to take action, the way you might grease the palm of a doorman to gain an introduction to the minister, and that of the secretary, the catamite, the favorite, the mistress, to gain favor and sometimes obtain something unjust.

The two first attributes of the deity, wisdom and power, to which we can add eternity and immensity, can only lift us up in admiration and impress a profound respect on us, along with a supreme veneration that is mixed with fear and a kind of joy and pleasure, which leads to submission, and all the other feelings that we designate with the singular term of adoration, which is incommunicable to any Being other than the perfect one.

Nothing is opposed to this tribute, since it is perfectly just and costs almost nothing. These feelings deprive us of no pleasure and lead us to nothing unpleasant. They lead to no sorrow or pain; these feelings are natural and as it were imperative, thus they entail little or no virtue, although it is a terrible crime to refuse them, almost as there is no docility in submitting to a geometrical demonstration, while it would be sheer stubbornness to resist it.

I don't use the words "love" or "please", which seem unsuitable to me; I will try, in a distinct section, to acquaint you with my arguments, M.R.F.

Now let's observe that the whole material and mechanical universe is not the direct aim of God's intentions in its formation, that he saw from all eternity what this machine would do eternally, that the execution was therefore useless to him, that there was no need to give it existence, except that this existence was necessary for humans: men had to be placed there and nourished to give the Supreme Being something to contemplate; the contemplation of his own person would have been insufficient or lacking emotion for the most part.

Men are the only beings that could concern the deity externally, that is, by their acts which are of an absolute liberty such that the deity does not foresee them. If these acts had been determined, concatenated and foreseen, it would have been superfluous to give them existence. This is clear

and plain for anyone who takes the trouble to think about it, always regarding God as God, without falling into the ridiculous comparison usually made with men relative to their weaknesses and defects. Men, after having conceived a plan, take pleasure in carrying it out and seeing its success. There are a thousand differences, each of which is infinite; men are always doubtful of the success of a new invention, this doubt is what makes its success so pleasurable, it provides them with conveniences, etc. I'll stop there, speaking as I am to Father Malebranche who will see all these things and could explain them better than I, who nevertheless sees things very distinctly and so clearly that I would venture to claim that I will satisfy any objection that anyone might come up with.

It's these free acts, which, regulated by the spiritual instinct which we call conscience and by right reason, are the virtues that God demands from us, in which we are capable of obeying him. It's these free acts which, perturbed by the appetites of our passions against conscience and reason, are the vices that God prohibits in us, by which we are capable of disobeying him.

To have a perfect grasp of this point, wherein all morality lies, which includes all our duties and consequently all the subjects of our fears and hopes, finally the single motive of all our actions, let's examine the last of the attributes of the deity, let's closely examine exactly what the divine justice is per se, and what it means in relation to us.

I am convinced and confident that this is enough concerning the existence of God and his attributes, both since we have revealed the causes of atheism, which is never even absolute, and because all the philosophers, especially the Christian ones, have pushed and proved this point a great deal since, with respect to them, it was never a problem.

SECOND SECTION: ON MORALITY.

Justice, *per se*, is nothing other than what right reason dictates with respect to other people: it is the right of each to preserve what belongs to him and the obligation not to violate this right, contenting oneself with what one owns legitimately and what can be acquired without harming anyone else. That we should take nothing from other people, that we should restore anything we have taken, that superiors should give no order they don't think they would accept if they were in the inferior role, that they should communicate their will in the way known to be best, as far as possible, and treat their inferiors justly relative to obedience, i.e., according to deserts, that inferiors should obey in good faith according to their ability.

No intelligent being, without bias and interest, will resist this definition; we've seen it developed completely in the second notebook on the 15th truth of this definition, which is the notion common to all minds.

Let's begin by establishing a maxim that should have been written on the hands of all men, since forgetting it has caused so many and such horrible ills. It's that God gave us clear and distinct ideas of all the truths we need to learn. Those which pass over our heads and about which we have no feeling are not necessary for our essential conduct.

We should, therefore, look for nothing in God but what we openly see in him: this is all he wanted us to know and it is, consequently, all we need to know. By all appearances, people have often been content to preach that J.C. was the son of God and that it was only by him that heaven could be reached, which might have a tolerable meaning; there was no great venom in this claim, even though it was false. This word *son* might be explained a thousand different ways, especially among a people whose genius lends itself to extraordinary figures and expressions. This prediction might mean nothing other than that J.C. was a creature of great excellence, made expressly, if you like, in an extraordinary manner and without the intervention of any man, to reawaken mortals and call them back from their wanderings; that it's only by following his lessons that we will earn the rewards of God and avoid his punishments.

If they had stopped there and a reasonable interpretation had been made of these lessons, there would have been no problem, but they went looking for mystery, inventing the trinity, the incarnation, original sin, grace, seven sacraments, purgatory, *in fine*, all the paraphernalia of papism, the cult of images, the imaginary feasts and the Inquisition, to repress the murmurs of nature and of right reason, which would disturb the possession of the fruits of all these diabolical inventions. What sort of desolation hasn't followed in their wake? And, by comparison, led the ancient philosophers to cry out: *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum?*

With this maxim in mind, let us draw from God's justice, which is the essential and absolutely perfect kind of justice, the conclusion which will be the foundation of all morality: that he will judge us with a supreme and precise justice and that consequently, our only concern is the practice of virtue. This is what I hope to establish with a clear self-evident basis and in an incontestable manner; I will overcome all objections to it, so that there will remain no room for doubts or disputation.

If I had the genius and craft of M.R.F., things would have been expressed better or perhaps more concisely. But a few words more or less, arranged slightly better or worse, are mere trifles, provided I am understood and my arguments are sound.

If all the scoundrels who are led by greed, pride and ambition to [contest] these arguments could remain mute and immobile for a few years, we would see the rebirth of peace and harmony among the largest and best part of humanity. We would see the reemergence of liberty there, whereas factitious religions have brought only discord and desolation, have established tyranny and pillage. They have introduced most of the crimes, authorized or given cover for the rest.

When I give this even a little thought, I see that he who made me, with his infinite wisdom, didn't make me without purpose. But what could this purpose be? I conceive this supreme wisdom as absolutely content, with no need for anything; and yet, here I am. What is my goal? It wasn't for my sake, since I didn't exist when God decided to make me. Besides, I conceive that no intelligence acts but for itself, which is even more obvious for the perfect being: God therefore had a goal relating to himself.

Without offending the respect due to the great genius of the age, to whom the truth is so indebted, it seems to me that there is too much scrupling in wanting to prove even one's own existence. He who denies that he is will certainly deny that he thinks; indeed, [it would be a great mercy] if only those who doubt whether they really exist at present were mistaken.

Let us consider it settled then, that I exist, consequently that God had a reason to make me and a reason directly related to himself, not that I am something necessary or useful, but something suitable to his infinite essence.

MAN'S ESSENCE

The surest and shortest path to discovering the intentions of the artisan is to get a good knowledge of his work. So, let's examine what I am. Thousands upon thousands of reasons, and thousands upon thousands of occasions, inform me that I am a composite of two very different parts, that I have an idea of good and evil, and that I am free. It is useless to look deeper than this, I may even find nothing more deserving of consideration. Let us reflect on these three points with all our might, let's exhaust all our power in figuring them out.

In keeping with the wise maxim that we've posed, I don't bother with fruitless problems, for instance, if the world is less than eternal, being a production and an article of workmanship. I fail to understand how something that pleases God today wouldn't please him from all eternity and suit him. What could have led him to slow down his action? Who could have established it at one time and not another? I would rather understand that he created it from all eternity, as it's understood that certain effects are as ancient as their causes, but I understand more clearly that this is over my head, and I leave it there.

Whether the fabrication of the universe, including men as well, is a creation as is commonly understood, i.e., that if there was a time when there was absolutely nothing but God, or if God worked upon already existing entities, and it only owes its organization and arrangement to him: the creation is an abyss in the first sense of the term; men are lost when they try to explore it. The thesis of making something from nothing is a very shocking one which our mind cannot accept.

It can be argued whether there is an absolute and manifest contradiction in it, however, this idea is repellent. The power of God is infinite, true; but nothingness possesses, as it were, an infinite resistance against being and existence. Two infinities are equal here. Two equal powers remain in balance without defeating each other. On the other hand, eternity seems to belong only to a single and unique being and reason can harmonize it with matter, which is indifferent to all modifications, insensible and unknowing. I confess that here my mind stops short and realizes that it is extremely likely that all the rest is the same, that those who claim to see clearly in this darkness are precisely the blindest of all, unless they are insane or prideful men who boast of possessing things they don't even know about.

Distinct knowledge on this point is not necessary, it's enough when it's obvious to me that the world exists, that it can't have made itself, and consequently that it's the work of a Being who is wise and powerful to a degree far beyond what I can comprehend.

Let us be content with saying that God is the efficient cause of the world, that he is our author and our creator, as far as this is possible, with the greatest metaphysical possibility, which we can't grasp. There is no need to look any further, we have all we need; let's pass along to the consideration of the three articles and from there we'll fall back to the ends of our creation.

FIRST ARTICLE: ON THE DISTINCTION OF SOUL AND BODY AND CONSEQUENTLY ON THE SPIRITUALITY AND IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

When I examine myself seriously and, free from life's problems, from the noise and tumult of society, when, free from all the troubles of my daily business, I let my mind stretch as far as it can, I feel and I see that my body is an amazing machine, certain parts of which are subject to me; others go along without my noticing them, without my knowing how they work, and even in spite of me.

At the same time, I see that this astonishing machine is not all that I am, and that I am something of a different sort, since I can consider this machine, look after it or neglect it, break or preserve it. I see nothing there but what is related to the machines made by men, except that it is more complex, more perfect, more amazing. But I'm also quite sure that there is another substance besides this: I fear, I hope, I see the past and the future, from one principle I can draw a thousand conclusions; there is nothing illusory in this. I have a thousand other reasons convincing me that I am something other than a simple material and mechanical being: my comrade calls me a reprobate, which sends me into a violent rage that will cause me to risk my life, to lose my fortune, to receive wounds that will ache far into the future.

What did this word contain that could have harmed my body? Nothing. This word, per se, might represent a good quality, and if he'd said it in any other language, it would amount to the same thing. In addition, if a madman, a child, a woman, a cleric had said the same thing to me at the same time, I would have brushed it off. It isn't my body that was wounded by this word, therefore, it's another substance which wasn't immediately struck by the disturbance of the air, but which had an awareness that the speaker had bad thoughts about me, that he had such a poor opinion of my power that he let me know his feelings and that those who witnessed it or who might hear about it will despise me: men will insult me, women will hold me in derision. There is nothing material in these feelings and thoughts. Respect and contempt have no front or back, they have no above or below, left or right, nothing about them is bumpy or smooth, hot or cold,

dry or wet, white or black, sweet or bitter; one can't be said to be pointing South, or the other North.

And yet, I have suffered a blow, an attack, a true and real wound, it is therefore a part of me that is a real and true being without being corporeal, which I know without being able to express it, which I feel is the true me, of which the machine is not essential part, but a mere appendage. At the time the wound was made, this machine remained as it was before, without the least change; I felt no pain through my senses, I might even have felt pleasure.

Spiritual pain can accompany bodily pleasure, which will make my thoughts and such an important distinction much clearer.

I want the most opinionated and least reasonable people to confess this: let an honorable woman be tricked by a man disguised as her husband, far from having felt any physical pain, she will have felt the most intense pleasure; however, she will suffer dire pains when she discovers the deceit, even in the heat of the action. Which part of her is suffering here? It's definitely not the body. It is therefore a substance which is not bodily, although it exists in all reality: this seems utterly clear and easy for anyone to see. Nor is it the discovery of the trick that causes her any bodily harm, it could come about from bodily pleasures, parties, concerts, etc. Suppose Mr. de Pourceaugnac to be a real person, bring him to the play that bears his name, he will die of embarrassment when he sees the rest of the audience dying for laughter. What corporeal effect does he suffer more or less than everyone else? All is equal with respect to the senses.

THE SOLUTION TO THESE PROBLEMS.

Even if troubling objections are offered, they can't destroy an incontestable fact. I find immense problems in the idea of local motion, and its varying speeds: if the number of parts is infinite, then infinite time is required to cross the tiniest space: if this weren't the case, then we could only cross a certain space in a certain time, since an indivisible part can only be crossed in an indivisible instant. I find problems in the existence of the universe, which I can't comprehend either as eternal or as made from nothing; in the divisibility of matter, which I see as unlimited, but which

bothers me since there would seem to be as many parts in a given grain of millet as in the Earth's globe, which suggests a presently infinite number. However, I remain convinced of local motion, of the existence of the universe and of the infinite divisibility of matter, since I can sense these things, since I see them and distinctly understand their demonstrations, in spite of the difficulties that can't prove wrong my senses or my reason, however they may trouble it, and which have no opposing demonstrations to offer me.

But what are these objections? Nothing of this soul appears after death, but there is no conclusion to be drawn from your non-knowledge of nothingness. Someone who has never seen or heard of a microscope would have good reason to deny that vinegar is full of eels. We are locked in a body which keeps us from seeing spirits, we only see their actions, effects, operations and this only in ourselves; as for clear and immediate sight, we only see their effects on others from the judgments we make about them, such as when another man replies to my thought, I conclude that he heard it and that I've made an impression on him just as he did on me; such as when I see works of art and conclude that their maker had a certain intention and that he found a way to achieve it.

It seems quite apparent that souls, when separated from bodies, would see themselves in their own way and that if any remain separated, they are aware of others in the same state, maybe even of those which are connected with bodies. I'll never see a given can of balls shot from a cannon again, but I can remain sure that no particle of it is annihilated. I've seen the soul of Peter acting, making his body move at will, hearing what I've said to him, understanding my thoughts, replying to my objections, presenting objections to me, cogitating, drawing conclusions, etc. Then Peter died, this union of soul and body has ceased, but common sense denies that this soul would be destroyed. All the questions that might be asked about its state, about its localization or non-localization, among others, are beyond my knowledge, without this compromising the reality of this being of which I am convinced by a certain reasoning based on experience of the past.

2nd) That the mind is enfeebled to the degree that the body is degraded and destroyed, is easy to grasp, since the mind is united with the body and since this union consists in receiving certain impressions on the occasion of the body or by means of this body, to act independently by it and of it. The actions of the mind are weakened, or even cease, if certain organs are degraded or destroyed as to their form, i.e., they are corrupted although the mind remains intact. Without

going further, my writing grows less tidy as my pen wears out, as it dries up or widens. Nobody would dream of saying that two thirds of the soul of a blind and deaf man have perished or that a paralytic man's soul is half-gone. Even the dumbest bumpkin knows that these afflictions are essentially the same and that the defect is only in the eyes or ears, etc. A comparison that's crude and not very apt is good enough to show how this works: a good astronomer with excellent instruments can make a thousand observations, predictions, etc. If his instruments are taken away and he's no longer productive, nobody would draw the conclusion that he was dead. If his instruments were ruined, nobody would conclude that he'd lost his scientific abilities when he started to make mistakes. His astrolabe wasn't properly marked, he counted 30 degrees instead of 40: this flaw influenced the rest of his procedure which, as far as he is concerned, is accurate.

The union of a spirit with the body is not doubtful, as we've seen, and pleasure and pain are only too often obvious evidence of this. Whether it's the simple will of God that causes these feelings according to the occasions and rules he has established, or if it all happens in some other way, it doesn't matter. I see that that is a matter of curiosity, but ultimately useless for my behavior, which is the question here.

I know that bread nourishes me: whether this happens by a quality called "nutritive" or because its parts are divided and penetrate those of my body, uniting with them, is a matter of indifference to me. I eat and I live. Still, I conclude that, although the operations of my body alter the operations of my mind, my mind undergoes no change; that when the alteration and the corruption of the body is such that my mind seems no longer to act in all things with respect to other men (just as those of all the dead no longer act with respect to me), my mind won't cease to exist, to be the same, to think, if it remains free, and to carry out the same functions it currently performs, if it is connected to another body.

Just as I lose no part of my soul by losing my hearing, but only a part of my body, there is no more reason to conclude from the complete cessation of my actions on the destruction of my soul than from the cessation of a part of these actions on the destruction of a part of my soul.

It's also worth noting that, when the soul is afflicted, when it suffers because of the body, when it seems to lose its forces, it remains unchanged, like the Sun during an eclipse.

It is often in a position to see this loss, to reflect on it, sometimes to repair it, but even when it does nothing more than notice it, this is sufficient evidence of its real distinction. If, in these strong afflictions of the soul, as in a violent dream, in lethargy, in harsh attacks of epilepsy, the soul seems completely annihilated, it is clear that it's still there; it has no memory of what it did during this time, but it went on existing, or it was reproduced.

But by whom and how, and why accept that it ceased to exist? It was always acting, i.e., always thinking. But the organs of memory weren't affected, or maybe they haven't been affected in all things; these kinds of states make them too hard or too humid, or envelop them in some way or other: one might think that in such unhappy moments the soul has confused thoughts, that it thinks it's in trouble, as happens in dreams which match the present state of its body, as all dreams do.

On this subject, M.R.F., I have a collection of arguments and experiments that wouldn't be unworthy of your curiosity.

But I don't care to know precisely how my soul and my body are united, how this began and how it is maintained. But things are different as to its duration; the past is the past, but the future requires all the attention I can muster. This is the true subject of my fears and my hopes, about which I must take sides. Nothing comes close to the importance of this choice, all other occasions on which I deliberate are nothing in comparison: old age, sickness, the dissolution of all bodies, history, the daily death of men assure me that I will die too. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to know whether this death is an absolute end of me as a whole or whether it's only a separation of two entirely different things, only one of which is truly me, while the other is only an inconsequential appendage, far less important and more different from the true me than my clothes and my body are.

If the true self remains after this dissolution that we call death, what will become of me? For, in fine, this is the true me, clearly known as to its existence, although very vaguely as to its nature. I've already noticed and I know very well that I was made for some purpose, that God had a reason to unite my soul with my body, although I haven't yet developed this argument. It is

therefore essential to examine whether my soul, whether the true self is immortal, in order to provide for the future.

There is no need, I think, to spend much time ruminating about this question. I see that nothing perishes, that all that has ever existed still exists, I can't conceive of anything that could destroy the least atom, I have no concept of complete destruction or annihilation; on the contrary, I can conceive of the duration and perpetuity of everything that has ever existed. And when, without carrying out any subtle research, I simply examine what I think about it, I see distinctly and without the least doubt that nothing is diminished, that consequently nothing perishes, by which I mean nothing is diminished in itself without respect to the composition and assembly of those parts. I see clearly that bodies perish with respect to their arrangement and with respect to a certain totality that they form with respect to us. A drop of water on a tile vanishes under the sun's heat, which is only a dispersion of its parts. The matter of which this drop of water was composed remains entire, in a certain number of parts into which it has been divided, and although these parts have become imperceptible to me, there is no difference between this drop of water and a large heap of stones I see in a field. These stones have been scattered, I can't see any of them, but they continue to exist. If I stuff my barrel with Spanish tobacco instead of lead and I fire my rifle in the air, I'll certainly never see any grain of my tobacco again. And yet I know that the violent blast can only scatter things and not destroy them; consequently, I am sure that even the tiniest parts of such a fine powder aren't annihilated, but only separated and that the lightness of each grain makes it stay in the air where it won't fall back anytime soon, if ever. Even if it falls down, its size would keep me from seeing it, even less recognizing it, but this grain, as small, as light as it is, having become imperceptible, is still a true, existing body, no less so than the largest mountain. It's the same as when it was part of a perceptible body.

Why then would a being of a nature so excellent and so superior to that of the body, a being which comprehends these bodies, which measures and compares them in a hundred million ways, which recognizes a thousand properties thereof, which dissolves them and moves them at will, which can grasp the future and infinity, why, I ask, would such a being perish? I don't have the least reason to suspect it and I can't conceive how any could ever be offered. Even instinct speaks up here and I know that all men naturally have an idea that they will exist after their death.

There is nothing to claim, therefore, in favor of annihilation and it remains to be examined whether my soul is a composite, the parts of which will truly subsist forever, but of which death, by separating them, destroys the essence and character, the way a cannon blast would destroy a fly or, if you prefer, a glass machine.

The operations of a body, of a being composed of parts, are corporeal, they are in motion, which is only a successive application of some parts to others. A body can't act otherwise, therefore a being which acts otherwise is not a body, but of another nature, despite the phantoms of my imagination which present me with the material images of all things.

If the mind operates without respect to motion, or extension, or the effect of any division or combination of parts, then it's all a single piece; it's a simple being, without extension, incapable of dissolution, therefore incapable of perishing with respect to its form as well as its being.

Yet, I see clearly and with absolute clarity that, although my soul is tortured and suffers, i.e., when it has certain feelings occasioned by my body, and often acts by its means and dependently on this machine with which the all-powerful will of the creator has united it, it still owns an infinity of acts and operations which have no connection to matter or to the connections or divisions of its parts.

Everything material has a shape, my thoughts have no shape, they are not, therefore, material. If immense and indefinite matter has no shape, thoughts are not indefinite, since there is a countless multitude of them; far from being immense in scope, assuming that they had extension, they would be the very smallest of atoms.

The ideas of justice, uprightness, rewards, generosity, bravery, greed, cowardice, ingratitude, the ideas of relation, proportion, consistency, comparison, aptness of reasoning give nothing for my imagination to depict. They have no semblance of length or shortness, of width or narrowness, of curvature or straightness. The discernment of a correct conclusion, the power and act of deriving an infinity of effects from a single principle, fear, hope, confidence in promises, etc. have no scent, no palpability, they can't be pierced or cut, nor can they even be comprehended as cut, pierced or trampled on; they can't be leaped over, they can't be set anywhere or moved, no distance from

or proximity to them is conceivable. The same can be said of pleasure and pain, properly understood, on which we must philosophize a little further.

Far more, my soul acts on things that don't and never will exist. I can, in a machine with a hundred million cogs, determine how many turns the last would make while the first one only made a quarter turn; once I know number of teeth on the cogs and on the sprockets of the axles, I can make countless assumptions and discover all their interconnections. No doubt, that which doesn't exist has no parts, therefore I'm not acting relative to the various parts. Therefore, I'm not acting physically, I am not therefore matter and a body. I determine what is just or unjust, I set boundaries between cowardice, bravery and temerity. Is there empty space between these things? Will I thrust material beings there? And things are all the more immaterial when great geniuses working in metaphysics and the abstract sciences, discovering so many sublime truths, which they would have made just as easily without eyes, without ears and without arms, and which are materially impracticable since they can't be of any use, but causes of admiration!

I find and recognize myself as immortal, although united to a material machine, the dissolution of which breaks all the connections I had with it — which is called death — and this word death, properly understood, signifies nothing but the instant when my soul, the true self, is found in a simple and natural state, like a bird whose cage is broken open.

I know, M.R.F., what they say: that the human soul is an incomplete substance; although this is said and taken from St. Thomas, it's no less a folly which this Christian doctor thought could prove the resurrection through the usual sublimity of the schools, which resides only in words devoid of meaning. There is no proportionality, no relationship, no analogy between a spirit and a body; thus, if a spirit were incomplete, what it would lack is another spirit, not a body. With an equally fine argument anyone could say that a cadaver is an incomplete substance.

SECOND ARTICLE: ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL.

Men are so made that they need each other. It's a blessing for them to live together and to provide services for each other. The multiplication of the species cannot occur, cannot be sustained or continued without a little society. Men are, therefore, held to certain reciprocal duties which are the rules of this society: this is the basis, the subject and the essence of all morality.

This word duty means nothing but the obligation to always, everywhere and on all occasions do for others what we feel that we have a right to ask them to do for us. Everyone is conscious of this right, since everyone grumbles when people don't act that way with them, and since everyone observes it with others naturally when their passions or interests aren't opposed. If we chose to live alone, without communicating with anybody, then we would be freed from all duties, but we would also be unable to practice any virtues and exempt from any fear of falling into any vice, with the exception of certain actions on oneself which are certainly criminal, since they're disorderly.

The duties are difficult on many occasions, and by consequence they are springs of virtue, when they are observed in spite of this difficulty, and sources of vice when the effort necessary to overcome them isn't made. This, in short, is all the detail on morality which will be developed in the final cause of our creation. I hope, my R.F., to shed such light on this that you will be fully satisfied.

But, since there are some minds which, having taken the wrong side, whether for personal advantage, sheer whim or because they were wickedly encouraged, work to uphold it at any price, wearing themselves out with bad arguments and vain subtleties, which always dazzle those who don't pay attention and can't see through sophistry, it's worth preventing this evil by placing the reality of good and evil on a firm foundation.

I need only a single fact to finish the question: every language has words to signify moral good and evil. Therefore, all men have an idea of this good and this evil. Say, if you like, that this good

and this evil are arbitrary, this can only relate to particular facts. It is no less true that there is a good and an evil in general, of which I have the idea, since I refer to particular acts as good or evil. It doesn't matter if this is said wrongly or rightly, just as I need a prior idea of being and nothingness to affirm the existence or non-existence of something, regardless of whether my negation or affirmation are correct or not. Once the application of this general idea to the different actions and the different cases has been agreed on, these actions or these cases are good or bad according to this convention, and there is virtue in conforming to them and vice in contravening them.

If it's said that men could establish that certain acts which are inherently criminal are just, aside from the fact that very few acts are inherently criminal and I can only think of two, there was never an entire nation, including its women, which unanimously agreed on such an establishment. Besides, nothing is evil but what harms someone, and you aren't harming anyone when you follow freely agreed laws. According to this rule, certain kinds of theft weren't crimes in Sparta and Egypt.

It cannot be said that words like good and evil are relative terms, like big and small. The reason for this is clear. A man who has only ever seen one thing wouldn't say that it's big or small; but someone who has only seen a single action will give it, despite himself, without any thought or reflection and from his feelings only, the epithet of good or evil. I'm obviously assuming an action of some importance, not those which are normally called indifferent.

Those who have claimed that justice is arbitrary and only a human invention to keep men within the limits set by the rulers, have mistaken the part for the whole, the effects for the cause, and the consequences for the principles. This might well be said of certain civil laws, but not about good or bad in a metaphysical sense; for what little we examine ourselves, for what little attention we give to the natural deeds of others, we can readily see that there is, in all hearts, a sense of just and unjust, independently of any law and without ever hearing of any. I agree that it's possible to err in the application of the principle. Every day we see whole nations considering as essentially unjust certain acts which are indifferent in character, which can only be good or bad according to convention or distant connections and what is called politics, and which has nothing to do with the principle in itself.

If I'd lived in isolation from three to thirty in a desert, would I feel the same way about someone who pulls a man out of a river, and someone who hears his cries without taking pity on him or without moving, and someone else who, far from offering help, pushes him out further and actively prevents him from reaching the shore?

When one child takes what belongs to another, why is the victim outraged, crying, storming, and when an adult walks by the victim confidently pleads his cause to him, while the petty thief sits nearby, shame-faced, and obeys when told to return it? This sort of thing is seen a hundred times every day.

Savages have no lawgivers, laws, or magistrates. Why, then, do they wage war, nation against nation, but from the sense that their rights have been violated? It is certain that all wars only began on the occasion of some injustice, whether factually true or only suspected.

Divide a group of children randomly in two, give each band a governor, one good and the other unjust, you'll see which band will end up worse off.

Shall we ascertain the idea of moral good and evil, to avoid all mistakes in its application? It can be summed up in three words: freedom, truth, assistance. All violence, theft, rape, assault and so on, all falsehood, deceit, unfaithfulness, false witness, etc., is criminal, along with refusing to lend, refusing relief in labor, refusing to rescue from danger when possible. All resistance against the passions tending to violence, to theft, to rape, to assault, etc., all resistance against the passions tending to betray the truth, to lie, to mislead, to break one's promises, etc., is all the more virtuous to the extent that we are deprived of pleasure in the affair and endure suffering. The same goes for all forms of assistance relative to the sacrifice involved.

That is so clear and plain that even J.C. had the same ideas about it; he promises his heaven to those who offered help to others; he finds virtue only in what good we do for others. He doesn't say: "Come, you who are beloved of my father, you who have lashed yourselves, who have sung certain words, who aren't married, etc." The reason behind this is essential: violence and lies done

to others are harms we cause them; assistance, on the other hand, is a boon for them, and all physical assistance given to others is a moral good, just as doing physical evil to others is morally evil. All else is arbitrary justice, such as marrying this or that woman, eating this or that animal, being naked or clothed.

Feelings like indignation and gratitude also invincibly prove the idea of good and evil, the former as the effect of offenses suffered, the latter of services received. We have, independently of any thought or education, an inclination to show our gratitude; we also have one to avenge ourselves; therefore, there is justice and injustice, and we have a natural idea of them.

Someone quite rightly said that all the virtues are species of justice and all the vices are species of injustice. Examination shows that all virtues are related to equity: valor is obedience to the obligation to risk one's life to support one's country, to save one's father, mother, wife, children, etc. from all danger of being taken captive. Cowardice, on the other hand, is the injustice of preferring an individual over the multitude, of saving one's life when, by putting it in jeopardy, one might serve the larger public. This is obvious in all the other virtues.

There is nothing to be said against these truths. It's useless to say that something is a crime in one place and a worthy deed in another, this only applies to actions that are indifferent *per se*. There is no country where it's a virtue to beat up the weak, to break one's promises, where it is not a crime to murder, to rape, to abduct someone. The last one was the cause of most of the ancient wars we know of; it was always because of kidnapped girls or women that distant nations, which otherwise had no cause for a quarrel, ended up fighting so many famous battles.

But it's worth noting that if some men have agreed not to regard certain deeds as evil, none have ever agreed to consider certain others as good. There has never been, nor will there ever be, any nations that stipulate rewards for those who murder, who rape, who destroy buildings, who set fire to harvests, etc., even if some don't penalize certain actions that others do punish. The reason why is that some evils can be compensated for by some good, and that others can't, or rather because these actions, which are indifferent by nature, have become good or bad by convention, like a wager or a game: how close a ball has to come to a given point is a matter of indifference, one nation will value landing it nearby, another further away; but they all agree on the principle

of rewarding skill. In the same way one nation punishes something that another allows, while all of them agree on punishing injustice.

Men can agree on certain things and their agreement becomes law, and there is no longer any falseness or violence in such laws. In Sparta adultery wasn't against the law or justice, because law and justice do not concern particular things, but [the principle that] generally speaking people shouldn't harm each other, that convention should be observed: in the established custom of Sparta concerning adultery, it was common and reciprocal, everyone had the same right to their neighbor's wife as the same neighbor had to their own: which isn't the case when the laws are different. Since the virtuous man won't do such things, the two sides aren't equal, debauchery has the upper hand.

I see nothing good or evil, no vice, no virtue which isn't within these laws, which are so generally accepted and so perfectly well known to everyone.

THIRD ARTICLE: ON FREEDOM

It does no honor to philosophy to say that what one feels distinctly and spiritually, that what all men feel and according to which they all naturally act, without a single exception, that whatever we cannot combat with any solid argument, even less by experience, is a delusion of the masses and of the stolid bourgeoisie. This authorizes the bourgeois and the masses to deride the philosophers as vain men who hoist up their minds and rack them in search of ways, with all manner of subtlety, to call absolutely everything into doubt, especially when the same people are always seen acting against the doctrine they advocate. The errors of the senses can't be offered as an example, since the senses, material as they are, must be corrected by the mind.

The mind is simple and has its simple operations. It sees or it doesn't see: when it does see, the senses are material and their operations are material ones, consequently, susceptible to an infinity of forms.

There are more and less [degrees], evil and more evil, good and better to infinity, since these operations consist only in the application of bodies to other bodies, which can occur in an infinity of different ways and never end. The mind has no parts; thus, when it is truly applied, it is applied entirely, and thus perfectly; hence the certainty of spiritual knowledge and the uncertainty of that which comes via the senses.

Man is absolutely free in all his actions. He is not free to love, to believe, to hate, to doubt, to deny, to feel pleasure or sorrow at certain things and on certain occasions: these are passions, not actions. He isn't acting on these occasions, he is receiving the action of another, whatever it may be. Just as he didn't decide to exist, he also has no power over the consequences of his nature and his existence. This nature and this existence give him feelings: thus, he suffers willy-nilly, pain or pleasure, just as he exists willy-nilly.

But our feelings of our own freedom and that of others is a spiritual feeling, independent of the senses, which, far from being combated with arguments based on first principles, has the purest light of reason on its side, the power of which is sensed by all men in general, and the occasion to experience it is always ready to hand.

At the same time as I do any action, moved by the most violent of passions, I sense and I see, however little attention I give it, that I could restrain myself if I wanted to; in the same way, when I do restrain myself, I sense that I am in control of my deed, and I see this distinctly. Freedom can't be more problematic than existence itself: how can I prove that I exist, if not from the way I feel and clearly see this fact, or rather, how can I prove that I think? Truly, to handle questions like these is to abuse the gifts of God and the patience of men.

However, this impertinent question is raised, it is discussed in the assemblies of men paid to be our teachers, it makes a terrible noise, it divides States, provinces, magistrates, families, individuals, it causes disquiet in whole nations and dazzles our great minds. Men seek for things that are hard to understand even though they are plain to see. Here is one: I don't conceive of anything real that is so covered in the semblance of impossibility.

What I've said in the 3rd notebook in the section on the prophecies, on the subject of prejudices, absolutely establishes complete and absolute freedom, although indirectly; therefore, it will suffice to say two words here to shut the mouths of all these doctors and professors of insanity.

You won't say, dear Professor, that you know the future, or that, if asked about something you have neither any knowledge about nor any reason to judge, you could offer a sound judgment. Since you can only judge at random, you can only judge with uncertainty about it, now right, now wrong, but not a hundred million times [right], as would be required.

I ask you whether I will sit down or remain standing; I'll prove you right a hundred million times; you haven't judged it as if you knew the future, since I can make you miss as often as I like, you have therefore spoken only according to whim or at random. Chance can't always guess right; it is clear, then, that I am free and that I have deliberately done what I needed to prove you right. If I am not free, I also act haphazardly and both your response and my action won't meet up so many times: two dice cast a hundred million times won't always land the same way. Or rather, I've acted according to necessity and according to an infallible concatenation, which adds up to the same thing: the necessity which drives my actions can only meet by chance, according to the necessity or chance which led you to speak, and consequently my action and your response can't agree a hundred million times. Besides, I will act so that you'll be wrong every time, or make you right and wrong in whatever combination of times you want to imagine.

If I am only a machine that is pushed by another being, then it is impossible for me to succeed by taking advantage and harmonizing with certain strokes of chance. All the same, if I only act randomly, two chances won't meet up an infinity of times. However, I agree to put my hand on my hat every time you throw three dice and land ten, to draw my sword every time you land eighteen, and so on with different gestures for each combination for ten years. I'm not acting, then, either as a machine moved by an external cause, or by chance, or by necessity according to circumstances. For, instead of taking off my hat when you land ten, I decide to put a second one on top of the first: I am therefore in control of my own decisions, I therefore act by my own power, I therefore act freely, yes, with a power and a freedom that I received from God, but which I truly and really enjoy, to the fullest possible extent.

If men are not free, then how can we expect to make them act in a given, determined manner? How can a general expect to move an army as he wishes, even against the most pressing feelings of nature by exposing themselves to death? If it's only a certain weight that necessarily tugs on us, how are we certain that we've discovered this weight, and how can a hundred thousand men all be found in a situation to corresponding to the force of this weight?

If men weren't free, nobody would be sure that they're putting their hand to their mouth and not their eyes; the same would apply to how one's arms, feet, hands and heart.

If people didn't have a sense that other people are free, they would get just as angry at a clock as they would at a man. Assuming I have my finger on the bell at the time when the hammer will strike it, I'll be hit hard, but I wouldn't attack the clock, even though I might kill a man who hit me that way.

If we didn't feel that we are free, we wouldn't promise certain things while not daring to make promises about others. I will certainly promise my friend that I'll wait for him, but I wouldn't promise him that I'll be in good health; I might indeed threaten to strike someone with a sword, but I would never threaten to give them gout.

If we weren't sure that other men are free, we wouldn't be angry when they break their promises. If it's only a weight that makes them act, as a weight of two pounds acts in one pan on a balancing scale, pressing down and lifting the opposite pan containing only one, then I have no more reason to be upset that my friend went for a walk instead of waiting for me as he promised, than if he were kidnapped by an enemy: it's all the same.

If we are only a machine manoeuvred according to the whims of a being superior to us, in addition, in the preceding supposition I shouldn't have asked my friend to wait for me, but [I should have addressed] this superior being in whose hands men are machines, Polichinelles, dame Gigognes. For if I want Polichinelle to hit his wife, I won't ask Polichinelle himself, but Brioché, the puppeteer.

I'm simply unable to finish with this subject, so many arguments invade my mind. Is there no difference between one act and another, between blushing and talking? What is this difference, except that one is free, the other isn't? If there is no liberty of indifference, the most absolute conceivable, I defy all of humanity to explain to me what "will" actually means. Then, we would also have to deny that men have any will or say that watches have one and stones as well. What distinction would you make between the clock I've mentioned, which strikes me on my right hand, and a man who hits me on the left side, except that the clock has neither the will nor the freedom to do otherwise, whereas the man can stop himself from hitting me? I'd love to see one of these professors placed in this situation, whether he would treat the man and the clock the same way. I'm aware that some people make a distinction between will and freedom, but this is a scholarly distinction, words and nothing else. Men, who have unanimously made the word "will", have claimed to express the natural idea of it, that of self-determination and the free action of the soul after getting a sight of things; a little troop of madmen want to give it a different sense.

We must either allow absolute liberty, as I've presented it here, or absolutely deny all demonstrations, both current and possible ones. And, when philosophers present such nonsense as this, the prudence of the magistrate ought to shut them up in an asylum to deliver society of them, after giving them a good thrashing and replying to their cries that an irresistible weight made him do it, that he isn't the cause of the pain they felt, that they must necessarily have felt it at that moment, that sheer chance made the rods smack them, that if they want to be let out, they should have a word with the superior Being who determines and moves all men.

Finally, if man is not free, with a liberty which surpasses any definition you might be able to give it, then God is a trickster. He's a lying spirit, giving one thing for another: he gives everyone a strong sense of freedom as to themselves and others, and yet meanwhile this freedom is nothing.

All men have the same idea of freedom, it's not one of those that only relates to God, like eternity, immensity: it can therefore apply to men; we can even say that freedom is more obvious in men than in God, because, although God is infinitely free, he never seems to make use of his liberty. His wisdom and his justice always govern his power. He could take a longer path to arrive at a certain point, but he never does. He could condemn an innocent man, but he doesn't do it nor will he, whereas men make use of their liberty for better or worse without distinction. Thus, we

can seem to predict certain actions of God, whereas no human actions can be predicted. Let's suppose, for example, that God will judge an innocent party, I boldly predict that the accused will be completely absolved. The same doesn't apply with a man, who might condemn the innocent man, even when he knows he's innocent.

How inconceivable! The power of God is limited, contrary to all reason and contrary to the clearest experience, and it's extended contrary to the same reason and the same experience. The same people who want God to be able to place a single and unique body in a hundred thousand different places at the same instant, to be able to make a single and selfsame person from two infinitely distinct intelligent beings, with two wills, want him to have been powerless to make an absolutely free being, considered only with respect to his wisdom and his justice, and not his power.

The same people who maintain that God, as absolute master, can impute the crimes of others, can crush innocent creatures with horrid miseries for an eternity, that he gave impossible commandments, that he can use the worst means imaginable to inform men of his will, that he intentionally did so to set traps for those whom he hates with a perfect hatred, etc., these same people maintain that God could not give absolute freedom to creatures who must account for their actions, that he was unable to form a creature that is self-determining according to the reasons that present themselves; however he may respect this, if he does at all, according to the idea that all men naturally and generally have, according to which they themselves act, of which countless experiences convince them. As if there were false universal ideas, as if natural and permanent ideas, coming directly from God, could be false and misleading! They go searching in the books they call sacred and which they consider to be the code of divine laws, a thousand separate scraps that don't say what they say they do, and they conceal a thousand others which clearly state the opposite.

Since I don't want to leave any equivocation or ambiguity and since, in good faith, I anticipate all the objections which have any semblance of likelihood, as far as I can (despite the damage to my alertness, despite a certain indignation and my laziness), I beg you, M.R.F., to note that all I'm saying here so warmly and with so many arguments as I've amassed in favor of freedom, relate only to our actions and not our judgments. I am not free with regard to the truth, or good and

evil in general. I am not able to find something true which seems false, or good that which seems bad, but I am able to act contrary to the truth and to do something I know to be wrong. I am not able to believe that a triangle contains as much as a circle, but I can trade a circular heap of money for a triangular one, of the same thickness and circumference.

Freedom in judgment is impossible, by which I mean spiritual sight; this would no longer be sight, it would be a kind of madness, just as the freedom of physical sight would be simple blindness. When a person sees, he necessarily sees according to the way his eyes are affected; if any other kind of sight were possible, nobody would be better off than the blind; if, seeing a nice path, I can see a precipice, I have a reason to continue or not: I have the same certainty as a blind man who is always afraid of falling into an abyss. Intelligences see the truth and justice in the same way as bodies touch others and push against them, if they're in motion. It could even be said that minds are applied to truth and to justice, i.e., that they touch it, that they are connected to it, that it is always immediately present to them so that they can't fail to be affected by it, like a mass of iron in a burning flame is necessarily surrounded by and filled with heat. This spiritual sight, this union with the truth is the rule of minds and freedom isn't in the rule, but in the use made of the rule.

These three articles of mine, M.R.F., are well established and incontestably proven for any unbiased mind. Let's return now to the main part of our thesis, of which these three articles, as important as they are, are still nothing but preparatory means. This is only the path that had to be established to reach something of far greater importance, as concerns practice. I see that I know good and evil, that I am free to engage in either, as I please, and that I will be free eternally. What will become of me during this eternity? Will I not be accountable for this freedom, for this knowledge? It seems highly unlikely that such great gifts would have been given to me for no reason, and if I consent to think so, against what is true, I will leap into a horrible abyss. Let's pursue this truth in good faith and with all our might. It should not be impenetrable, since it is so necessary; it should not even be hidden.

FOURTH ARTICLE: ON MAN'S FINAL CAUSE.

Whatever may be the union of my soul and my body, which is so enigmatic for me, I can only see God, this infinitely powerful Being, as its author, along with that of the machine of my body; I don't have to find out how that came to be, but only why.

I should, therefore, discover the aims of this perfect Being and discover what his motives might have been. I will act as a philosopher, in pursuit of clear instruction, for I sense in a basic way, by instinct, naturally, and quite strongly, however confusedly, all that I'm about to detail.

It's to awaken those to whom this vague feeling is almost undetectable, and to convince those unfortunate people who would use their minds to suppress this feeling which cries out despite their resistance. First, it seems that God, who cannot increase his infinite felicity or take up any outside affairs which would even approach what he finds within himself, can't have had any reason to form other beings or to pay them any attention, assuming that any were coeternal with him.

Let's shrug off such fruitless controversies: I am, I cannot be anything but the workmanship of an intelligent being of immense perfection. Such a being doesn't act without a plan and a reason. Therefore, there was a reason to make me, I can't see how this can be disputed. The problem is finding this reason, which was the final cause of my creation.

Let's revisit, then, the attributes of this being who is my creator, let's revisit the division we made in his infinite and unique perfection. With respect to his power, it would have been useless for him to create presently, since he knew this power, seeing all possible beings as if they existed in the present. The same applies to his wisdom: it saw all that was beautiful and good, all the means of execution, all possible drawbacks, all the remedies for these and the inevitable efficacy of its power.

But it was far different with his justice. This can't be applied to acts that are linked together by necessary laws; they must be free. It takes acts that initiate in a principle which is its own master, it takes acts that pertain to the agent who produces them. It was therefore inactive and useless,

and, as it were, dead until there were beings outside of the deity who, although made by it, were independent of it in this respect and who could undertake, in an infinity of ways, acts which would deserve his attention and his judgment.

There were no better means to effectuate this than to make beings who were intelligent, free, placed in a situation of subjection to passions. Pure intelligences can only meditate, look upon the essences, the first truths, comparing them, drawing conclusions from them, admiring them, *in fine*, cogitating and loving. They are not susceptible of virtue or vices, since they clearly see the merit and value of each thing, without anything affecting them that would cloud their judgment.

The infinite wisdom has therefore found, in favor of infinite justice, the expedient of uniting intelligences with organized bodies. These bodies leave them their absolute liberty and their perfect knowledge of good and evil, allowed and forbidden, virtue and vice, but they present them with a multitude of pleasures and pains which, by making strong impressions, lead them violently to vice and make them fall victim to it, if they don't use all their forces to resist this influence of their bodies. These influences of the body on the mind are quite properly called passions, since on this occasion the mind suffers an impression which is often so violent that its utmost efforts can hardly escape them.

Man is said to be composite. I am subjected to cruel temptations to vice, coming from a taste for pleasure and a fear of pain, but I know my duty perfectly well, without ambiguity and without obscurity. I am absolutely able to fulfill it or shirk it, even in the face of present, horrible and cruel pains.

I am therefore a being who attracts the attention of the perfect Being in a manner worthy of him, since only an infinite being could be capable of knowing and combining the different circumstances of the least of my doings to decide whether they were good or bad. That depends on how clearly I understood the law, my attentiveness, my thoughts, the weakness of my temperament, the power of the temptation, the situation, my natural inclinations, my motivations and so many other things, each of which has its own infinity of degrees, that it's plausible that no two acts were ever the same morally, although they appear identical, and I act at every moment.

If there were only a single man at a time, this would be a continual occupation of justice worthy of God. What must it be, then, when there are so many millions of men on our earth alone – which might well have millions of twin planets?

How many infinitely difficult judgments to be made at every moment! This exercise, this occupation will go on forever since it is worthy of God; there's no reason to think that it will ever cease, God will maintain things the same way he started: this is the most reasonable opinion, but it is all the more so not to decide about something which is not absolutely obvious and which is of no direct use to us.

Let's proceed to a reflection which is the most important of all: God sees all my actions and all my thoughts, as I form them, he judges their rightness and wrongness. Will he stop there?

God is just: this means, first of all, that he does nothing that shouldn't be done, but that isn't the whole story. Aside from the fact that, by nature and without being driven by some passion or other, I would never do what is wrong, when someone else acts unjustly in my presence, I feel indignant and I would certainly punish him for it if I had the right and the power to do so.

When I witness some heroic act of gratitude, generosity, liberality, humanity, etc., I feel moved by certain feelings to respect and love whoever did it, I want to reward him; I would certainly do so if it brought me no discomfort. I can't rank these feelings among the vices or weaknesses, I am forced to place them among the perfections, it's a force, a reasonable action which is judicious, praiseworthy, consonant with the first truths, with the most necessary and the most real ideas.

I am, therefore, obliged to understand that these same feelings are present in the perfect Being to the highest degree and without any adulteration of weakness; consequently, I see clearly that God doesn't see the good and the wicked equally, that he approves of the former and disapproves of the latter and that, with his unopposed right and power to punish and to reward without the least reticence, he will infallibly do both things.

This reflection is clear and well grounded; its conclusion is natural and judicious; I see nothing that might combat it aside from vain elaborate subtleties, which partiality, vanity or stubbornness

dictate, but which the heart dismisses as they are pronounced, such as when folly is praised, or deafness and blindness, or when someone argues that damnation is better than annihilation.

However, it is evident that God gives neither punishments nor rewards in this world, he lets all things go their way naturally, that is, according to the forces he has given to each agent. Lightning falls indifferently on an empty mountain or a temple full of people and priests, on the pope, the mufti, the mullah or a pig. It falls on the simulacra of the gods and on the relics, and on the papist's god himself, according to the laws of motion and the laws [derived from] the first impression of the Creator on the matter he had formed, combined with the laws that contribute to that motion.

Free beings also act according to all the power they have from their creator, without any occasion leading them to restrict, extend and determine it; I've got the same power to throw my child in the water as to pull him out if he's fallen in. That is absolutely obvious, all the stories that are promoted against reason and experience on this subject are the inventions of small-minded men who believe that this can keep the wicked in check, but they're only monkish deceptions and applications made by rogues who turn everything to their own advantage.

There is not any individual or republican body that's without its own share of blessings or ills. If they are the friends of these impudent schemers, they don't mention the misfortunes, but they blow a trumpet about the happy wins, which they attribute to a divine protection as a reward for the good [they have done]. If they are their enemies, they pass in silence over the advantages and pleasant turns of events, speaking loudly about the adversities they say emanate from the wrath of God, who is irritated against these people who refuse to worship him.

Since none of this has any basis other than their deceptions and their self-serving will, each party turns the thing to their own advantage. The same accident is a punishment with some, and a reward for others. It is, say all the papomaniacs, the finest way a minister of the altars could hope to end his days. It is, the Protestants say, because God punished this scoundrel in his idolatry, which he was aware of and by which he abused the masses to retain his right to plunder them.

A wise man recognizes that the priest died because the disposition of his body made it happen. If he'd been of another religion, or if he hadn't had any religion at all, if he'd been in any other

trade, that wouldn't have changed his disposition. There is no more punishment or reward than would come to a tile which, falling from a roof, breaks or survives intact according to the forces and circumstances of its fall. In the case of the lucky rainfall that saved Marcus Aurelius and his army, the pagans took pride in it, the magicians likewise, the Christians also wanted a share in the glory and attributed it to their prayers. The truth is that it rained because the conditions for rain turned out favorable; even if no army had been in that spot, it would still have rained. After this, the story is embroidered.

It remains, then, that God gives and executes his judgments of condemnation and absolution, of punishment and reward, after death. As for those who see the goodness or wickedness of each human action, they are acting at the very same moment. The sight of the action and the judgment of its moral quality are one and the same thing.

Even if we didn't have experience as infallible proof of this point, if we lacked this demonstration *a posteriori*, we would still have a strong argument *a priori*.

It doesn't seem to belong to the infinite wisdom of God to punish men during their lives, which couldn't happen without upsetting the general economy of the universe and without drastically weakening virtue; a sure and obvious punishment that would have followed the very moment of the crime would have caused far too much fear; this fear must be weaker, which comes at a distance and in the uncertainty of time. Otherwise, freedom is eliminated and too little space remains for virtue. It might even be said that the most wicked action would be a slight crime, since people would have to be as it were carried away in rage to expose themselves to a strict and sudden punishment.

To repeat: a sudden punishment. Otherwise, nothing tells us that it's a punishment, unless there's a distinct one for each crime, which is impossible, and nothing similar would happen to any but those who committed this crime: for example, that all thieves were struck by lightning at one time or another, that the earth swallows up all hypocrites, but only thieves or hypocrites ever perished in these ways, otherwise the occurrence would remain ambiguous and lose its ability to frighten the wicked.

If human justice flogged, hung, etc. as many good men as it did thieves, murderers, poisoners, etc., it would certainly be useless.

These fine gentlemen, the authors of the books of legends, would have to show that those who refuse to carry their yoke are treated in an unusual manner, and that they suffer in ways that other people don't. Since the opposite occurs, and especially since lightning seems to fall and destroy many more churches than private dwellings, although there are a thousand of these for every church, everyone with any common sense is fully aware of the boastfulness and impudence of the wretches we've just spoken of.

The perfect justice of God, aside from what we've just said, requires that this feeble creature, exposed to powerful temptations, can earn forgiveness for his failings by repentance, provided this repentance is real and sincere, followed by the amendment and reparation of the harm done to others, as far as possible. This justice must also reward virtues and vices, and not constantly look for misdeeds with an arm raised to punish them strictly, without regard to the virtuous deeds which are so hard to accomplish: this is all the mercy and goodness of God, which is nothing other than true justice. For, as we've noted elsewhere, it would be unjust to place intelligent beings against their will in a violent situation, exposed to great suffering; this moderation restores everything to the rules of perfect equity. Do me a favor, M.R.F., and go back to the end of the third article in section I of the 3rd notebook, where this is detailed at length.

I remember reading somewhere in the works of these fanatics or these loyal party men, that God owes no justice to his creatures, so that they consider it one of the prerogatives of the deity to commit injustice, whereas the opposite is true. God can do so, but he never will. It's an absurdity or a sophism that comes from the word "duty", taken in a different sense than how it should be understood. Duty means two very different things: to be obliged in the sense that one can be forced, and to be unable to do anything without acting against reason and against what is best for oneself.

It's in the last sense that we understand that God owes something to his creatures, i.e., that he can't treat them differently without behaving in a way that is unsuitable for him; in this way, we say of ourselves: "I ought to take a trip this Summer". This doesn't mean that I'm obliged in any

way, but that I have reasons to do it. And God, who is wisdom and justice itself, when this wisdom and this justice require something, must absolutely do this thing and it is physically impossible for him not to do it, even though he could refuse. In the same way, it's very hard for a good man not to do certain things required by righteousness. I still feel deeply that I would forgive someone who offended me, even if I could punish him, if this person had a powerful interest driving him to commit this offending action, if I saw his sorrow before I was in a position to avenge myself and if he also made every effort to repair the harm he'd done. And I can't see this feeling as anything but a perfection and a kind of justice; consequently, it must be recognized in God. I have more arguments that it's God who made man with all these weaknesses, that he placed him in these perilous circumstances: that there is a big difference between the offenses that men do against each other and those they do against God. When I commit an action that is called an offense against God, it's improper to call it an offense because it does no harm to God. An equally strong argument is that God sees whether my repentance is true, while I don't know whether he who has offended me doesn't intend to take advantage of me to make things even worse for me. Let's add, if you like, M.R.F., for our consolation, and perhaps to flatter ourselves, that, although a perfect and sovereign justice would be indifferent and find equal advantage in punishment and in reward, we can understand that God is happier to give rewards, or at least that he would prefer only to reward and never to punish.

We might believe with even greater likelihood and security that God will give splendid rewards and will push these far beyond their due merits, but that the penalties and punishments won't exceed the precise proportions of exact severity. The reason is palpable: it's cruel to do more harm than is deserved, but neither humanity nor equity are harmed by giving more than is due. The comparison between a king who lavishes gifts on some favorite isn't proper, because, since the power of this king is limited, by giving beyond merit he gives too much, in that he loses the ability to give much to others; but since God's power is unlimited, he does wrong to no one with his liberalities. And, with all these incontestable arguments I find that, the thing properly examined, there is more good in a good deed than evil in a bad one. It takes great effort for the first, we are drawn to the latter, virtue is a leap, vice is a fall. God forbid that I should ever flatter the wicked, nobody on Earth would treat them worse than me, or more harshly.

It follows from this that God has no mercy and kindness according to our understanding, since for us these words mean forgiveness and condescendence without reason and coming from pure will. All is justice in God. In us kindness, as we usually understand it, is injustice, or at least weakness.

I think, M.R.F., that I've read in some of your works that you share this opinion; and that delights me, for I assure you that I've always thought this way, even from my childhood.

Trying to figure out what the rewards and punishments will be is to attempt the impossible: only one thing is for sure, that all will be perfectly and supremely just. An eternity of punishments doesn't seem plausible, no crime could ever be infinite. As for the rewards, it seems more likely, for the reason I've just given, that virtue might be so heroic, so great, so entire, so pure that it would be in some way worthy of an eternal reward with respect to the divine liberality and magnificence, although it doesn't deserve it with respect to its justice. Metempsychosis into the bodies of other men, even the bodies of animals and so many other worlds, the number of which may well be immense, is what comes most naturally to mind; but I haven't forgotten the wise counsel by which I so wisely started: I won't succumb to the temptation of saying all the obvious things that might be said on this subject, while I'm certain that there is absolutely nothing solid to be said, and it's enough for me to be filled with the clear and incontestable thought that I will be treated with precise justice according to my merits.

What they say about the pains of fire is a vision, as is the argument used by those who claim to refute this opinion. They say that the spiritual soul cannot be harmed by the action of a material being. Why wouldn't God make the soul directly feel the same pain it feels by means of the body? There's no reason why he couldn't; besides, there are a thousand situations in which the soul could be as miserable as when, united with the body, this body is in fire, such as certain pains, certain sorrows, certain troubles I've experienced while dreaming.

A very sensible objection that could be raised with the Christians is that, since the vision of God causes the felicity of their saints, the deprivation of this sight, with the knowledge of the loss incurred, must produce the misery of the reprobate. The Muslims, whom [Christians] criticize because their prophet promises them a material paradise where they enjoy coarse sensual

pleasures, could also claim that this is only said figuratively and that they will find similar expressions in their holy books as in the Qur'an; but in second place that, since Christians certainly allow sensual punishments as punishment for their crimes, they might also allow sensual pleasures to repay virtue. I can find no response to this other than terrible subtleties.

CONCLUSION TO THIS SECTION

As for punishments and rewards, it's for me to examine what might attract them, consequently what God requires and forbids me to do.

What might this infinite being require of me? As for what concerns him, nothing. My respect, my veneration, my worship are all useless to him, although I owe them to him anyway, and all of this follows naturally from the least thought we may give to the matter, as we've seen, and it's nigh impossible to refuse them to him. It's the natural and necessary product of our attention, just as fear comes from the sight of danger. And besides, this worship costs me nothing, at least so little that an inconceivable corruption of the heart could hardly lead to an offense on this subject. By worship I mean an inner feeling of respect, and not any external actions which are only follies to God and which require great effort by humans.

That wasn't the reason why God made, as it were, the positive laws; it could only be due to what men owe to each other. Their constitution is such that they need mutual support and society is necessary and essential for them, but a thousand incidents and above all else, their passions betray these obligations, and they can't properly fulfill them on many occasions except by hurting themselves.

This is what we should be paying attention to, this is where we should consult our reason, which God has given us to enlighten us, to know the essence of things and to draw the right conclusions; this is what we should consult our conscience about, this instinct with which God has filled our minds and hearts, which always gives the best reply when we call on it, which speaks to us without us having to interrogate it, and which criticizes us whenever we fail to follow its orders.

Neither my reason nor my conscience inform me that worshiping God means erecting expensive buildings, kneeling down with our face against the ground, killing and burning animals and even men, reciting set words at set times, etc. All these things are sheer human inventions, the product of their folly, their greed and their ambition.

It is true that, once we are imbued with these extravagant opinions, our conscience seems to urge us to obey them and loathe the faults we commit against it. But we have to try to rouse ourselves a little from our drowsiness, we have to open our eyes a little to see that our conscience only ever speaks in general terms, and that it's we who are applying these general laws to particular cases, whereby we mistakenly create laws which are against reason and lack the participation of our conscience.

My conscience and my reason tell me clearly that I should worship God, but I have only to consult my reason to find out how to do this, and my reason tells me that this worship consists only in an inner feeling of the greatest respect and the greatest veneration of which I am capable, and that anything more is folly which dishonors the human mind.

Reason and conscience tell me clearly that I must behave with all other men as I feel they should behave with me, do for them all that I could reasonably ask of them, and do nothing to them that I would rightfully complain of if done to me: on this subject I should consult reason in order to see precisely what I can ask for and what I can regret, i.e., where justice essentially lies, which is the principle of our duties and the foundation of our present and future happiness.

This virtue called justice, which contains all the others, of which it is the paragon, is palpable; reason and conscience almost make us touch it everywhere and at the same time, there is not the least doubt about it; a peasant senses it as much as the best educated man; nobody asks anyone else for advice when their heart is right; what is right can be seen at a glance; but when anyone tries to harmonize their greed and pride with justice, that's when they turn to the casuists.

I don't mean to discuss to anything here but true justice, in itself, for it's well known that civic justice, comprised of the various laws that men have made, which are sometimes right and sometimes wrong, requires the sort of study of which individuals are incapable, and about which

we have to consult those whose profession it is to understand and master these laws – a profession which has only an indirect relationship with our daily lives. Men ought to act justly with each other, this is the principle. A certain thing is righteous in a certain country, I must act according to the laws of this country when I'm there, but only assuming that this law is not against natural law and equity, or that it was made by unanimous consent; otherwise, I can, in good conscience, avoid it as much as I can.

It's not the same with the natural laws that God himself dictated to us, with which he has filled our reason and which he has engraved in our heart: let's do our duty with respect to these laws according to our different conditions, let's do them as best we can, no matter the cost, without considering the penalties we will endure and the pleasures we will lose. God will look kindly on everything we do in this field, he will approve and reward us with a splendor proportionate to his infinite power; he will disapprove of all contrary actions, for which he will punish us with exact severity.

Are we judges? Let's receive all litigants as we would reasonably want ourselves to be received and judged; let's not chase after the authority to judge out of vanity, greed or ambition; let's not refuse it out of laziness when those who have control over it commission us; but at the same time as we accept it, let's spare no effort to acquire the necessary knowledge to do a good job, and bring to the task all the time and effort we possibly can.⁴⁸

In a word, let everyone fulfill their role the best they can and as they would like it fulfilled for them. Let the king be kind, as he would want his king to be if he were a subject; let the subject be as he would like his subject to be if he were the king; and so on: let us be a good father, a good son, a good husband, a good master, etc.

⁴⁸ Here the Munich manuscript adds: "If we are captains, let's be faithful, true, humane. Let's treat our soldiers the way we feel we ourselves should have been treated when we were soldiers. Or, if we unfortunately live in a State where one can become a captain without having been a soldier first, let's treat them as we feel we would have liked to be treated, if we were in their place. Let's observe and have them observe the discipline that we would like to see observed with respect to us if we were civilians. If we are soldiers, let's respect our officers, let's be faithful, diligent, brave, obedient, let's earn our advancement without worrying about it, we will serve our country no less as a soldier than as a general. If we have some other intention: if vanity, ambition, libertinism brings us to the profession of arms, then we are criminals before God, lunatics before men, and wretches to ourselves."

I've said: "as we feel that we would reasonably want to be treated", because the usual expression, *treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself*, is not precise enough. The murderer wouldn't like to be condemned to be broken on the wheel, but he rationally sees that he deserves it; thus, the judge should treat him, not as he would like to be treated in his place, but as he would reasonably feel that he should be treated. We've already said it: the criminal is not indignant face to face with the judge who condemns him.

To this unique law of justice is also related a species of evil regarding the intentions of the Creator, which we cannot frustrate with impunity. We should not seek pleasures that cannot produce the effects for which God organized these pleasures. This is doing what we wouldn't want others to do to us. I wouldn't want my son to use up all the powder and lead I give him for hunting by shooting at targets or swallows: I want him to enjoy himself, but his fun ought to benefit the household in some way.

What remains, to give virtue its consummate form, to give it all its perfection and make it more meritorious, what remains, I say, is to pose it as an essential condition that we should always have an eye on approbation of the Creator, never do anything without having this in mind, always trying to earn this approbation which will attract his rewards to us, always be afraid that he might find something unjust in our behavior, which he will not fail to condemn and punish with perfectly fair strictness.

This doesn't mean that these thoughts should constantly fill our minds, it's enough to make a habit of this, that it should be something we do regularly. I mean that if we happened to dream about this, we'd find the same feeling in ourselves, something like the way a governor always wants to keep his position, although he's not thinking about it at every moment. Although we don't necessarily feel this sentiment which is truly in our hearts, God doesn't fail to see it continually, as he sees the greed in the miser, even when the miser is thinking about something else. This is how our life will be a perpetual prayer without any disturbance to its actions or interruption in the course of its duties.

If God had made us only for contemplation and singing aloud, he wouldn't have committed us by necessity to so many bodily functions or connected the preservation of life to so many

continual labors, from which so many scoundrels exempt themselves, instead of taking their share in others' efforts; he wouldn't have based the propagation of the species on acts that cause so much distraction and the outcome of which leads to so much trouble and toil for the maintenance and education of a family.

I don't deny that God might be content to be the object of contemplation of those creatures who make this their entire occupation. But he created pure spirits for this purpose. Perhaps he keeps in reserve such a fine and blessed function for human souls who earn such a great honor by heroic and constant virtues.

Alongside the dispositions I've just posed, which contain, in essence and in practice, all the virtues and all the ways of becoming holy before God, along with the way of gaining the rewards meant for those who have overcome their passions to become agreeable to him, we both can and should enjoy all the blessings that his wisdom and his power have spread so splendidly around the world, provided a legitimate and moderate use is made of them, especially if we never seize them against the laws of exact justice. We must gloriously renounce all sorts of blessings and pleasures, as tempting as they may be, when they come at the price of anything criminal, when they require the least act of violence or deception.

It is, therefore, sheer folly to harm oneself directly by mortifications, and to suffer such things without reason or need; such folly is like Don Quixote flogging himself a hundred times in honor of his mistress. I don't think it's too much to say that the wit who wrote this lovely fable intended to ridicule the monkish virtues.

Those philosophers who have denounced good things and pleasures have fallen into excess and delusion. This, in a way, is a criticism of the ways of God, or at least a refusal of his gifts and benefits; it is good to enjoy them, to take advantage of them, to delight in them, to spend one's life joyously in possession of them, as long as we don't have an infinite attachment to them and don't use them to excess. Seneca, as far as I can tell, was very rich, even very splendid, and yet he was a very wise and very good man; I believe he was a good citizen, a good husband, a good father, a good master, a good neighbor and that the human species would have seen its best days if he'd been in the place of that wretch who wasn't able to follow his precepts for very long.

Nevertheless, I confess that I find nothing to criticize in those who renounce all the world's blessings, all the comforts and all the pleasures of life, provided they live from what nature produces without human efforts; nor do I find anything to praise there: it means wasting that which the infinite wisdom did not make to be useless. Such resolutions often contain more weakness than strength, this, truly, is to "bury one's talents". As for those who renounce the world to serve God, reserving for themselves the right to serve him, who build hermitages in the middle of cities, where they enjoy all the comforts and delights of the country, at the expense of the poor and abused populace, these are true thieves deserving the breaking-wheel: I use this phrase decidedly, as crass as it may seem, and I maintain I'm speaking very accurately.

But the best thing to renounce is the burning desire for riches and all manner of other worldly goods, lest this burning become an unleashed passion that drives us to some injustice or other. It is extremely difficult to calm oneself about some strong drive, and so we must seek and even wish for these things without being carried away, just as we should enjoy them in moderation, work peacefully, and accept any success with a sweet and peaceful joy, and failure without impatience, without sadness and especially without anger.

This is a good spot to examine what we can ask God for in this life, since we have examined what he asks of us. What novelty could we expect from this infinitely wise, infinitely powerful and just being? He made all things in a supreme state of perfection and in the best possible condition; he won't change anything in his work, or in how it is organized; he has given us all necessary power and knowledge, he won't increase either of these. Grace for moral actions is a figment of reason, or rather of extravagance, just like miracles, in the chain of effects produced by necessary causes, are only chimerical.

But repentance is something we ourselves produce, like our bad deeds; therefore, we both can and should bring ourselves to this repentance, and, once we've achieved this, offer it to God along with our good intentions, our desires to do what is right and the small sacrifice we have offered him of our passions; we must present him with our positive resolutions for the future, adding to this reparation for the wrongs we've caused to others, as far as we can: with such dispositions as these, we can ask God to forgive our past faults with a good assurance of obtaining it.

As for the convenient, sufficient, effective graces and all that is regarded as new succor and means, human follies, all; we have all possible power for virtue, both our experience and our conscience assure us quite invincibly of this, and if not, God is an execrable tyrant or an impotent being.

To beg for health, a long life, fecundity, a positive outcome of a trial or a battle, etc.: what ridiculous illusions! But rather, the deception of the clergy in all religions; that's discussed in many places, especially in the 3rd notebook in the section on miracles, thus, in four lines I will say more than I need to in this place.

These sorts of things happen every day without any petition to God, because they are the effects of nature, i.e. the dispositions that God set in place when he created the universe; whatever doesn't follow from these dispositions never happens, however intently we ask him, whatever words we may use, whatever gestures we might try, whatever solemnity accompanies them.

Tell me, M.R.F.: if you ask for one of these things, you have a firm hope of obtaining it; you might therefore bet a small sum against a large one that you'll get what you want; but you wouldn't wager a pound against five hundred million gold coins, because you can see that you're asking the impossible, not of the divine power, but of its will.

When these hypocrites are pressed on this point, who make it their profession to ask God for miracles and promise them to men, who fill their books with those they have obtained, and who daub them on the walls of their temples, they tell you gravely that you must not tempt God: don't ask him, then, for any particular intervention, or any extraordinary and novel effect of his power, for you're tempting him no less by asking to be healed of a fever as by praying that he restore a man's arm, or resurrect a decapitated corpse with its heart torn out, unless you take your crudeness so far as to claim that one is harder than the other, and that you consider the infinite Being as something like a man with limited powers, who wants you to ask him to lift a hundred pounds, but not ten thousand.

I can assure Y. R. that I am quite firm on this point and far from the popular ideas, more than once I've found myself in the most urgent danger and in the most cruel situations, surrounded

by enemies, a prisoner, in shipwrecks, accused of a capital offense, without the least temptation to make any vows and prayers for my escape, even less to offer anything for this reason to the supreme power which holds everything in its hands. I saw my fellows in misfortune following the ordinary route, I contented myself with a mental prayer that could be expressed in two words: "My God, my Creator and my judge, have pity on me, excuse my weakness which makes me succumb to so many temptations, receive what little sacrifice that I might have given you, along with my good intentions, my profound respect and my sincere adoration; I ask forgiveness for my faults in all humility and with all the regret of which I'm capable for them. You read the depths of my heart, O my sovereign master, and you see my feelings better than I do; I will always call on your mercy and never your power, which made at once everything that needed to be made."

And this peaceably and without keeping me from doing what I thought necessary to save us from the storm or the other misfortunes; the danger and the misfortunes gone, I thanked God, just as I thank him for sunrise, for the fact that I'm better on a bed than on cannonballs, for the fact that, having smeared a drop of oil on the blade of my sword, it won't stick to the sheath, for the fact that, having opened a barrel, I get wine from it, and for the fact that, having put a plug in the hole, it stops flowing.

THIRD SECTION: A RECAPITULATION OF VARIOUS POINTS THAT HAVE BEEN INADEQUATELY DEVELOPED, FOR FEAR OF INTERRUPTING THE EXPOSITION OF THE SYSTEM.

FIRST ARTICLE: DECLARATION OF A SUBALTERN BEING AS THE AUTHOR OF THE UNIVERSE

If one wished to stop at the first step of knowledge of God and maintain that, content in himself, he made nothing outside himself, and so the universe can only be the workmanship of an inferior being:

1st) This is a contradiction: if this being is a creature, he can only be the workmanship of God; consequently, God acted externally to himself; if this being is eternal, it's an independent being, consequently a true god, and then we've fallen into the enormity of the plurality of gods, an infinite number of which would have to be allowed, since there is no better reason for two than for a hundred million of them.

2nd) It wouldn't apply in practice: it would still be true that this being would be of such immense wisdom and power, although less than infinite, that we should fear and respect it for the same reasons we've seen with respect to the infinite being. The excellence of its nature, such that we would be the result of its workmanship, would deserve our respect; being unable subsequently to refuse it at least as much justice as we feel within, we would be invincibly persuaded that he would reward the good and punish the wicked.

Justice is of the essence of all intelligent beings, like truth, of which it is a species. All intelligences necessarily see reality, truth and justice; when men stray from these, it's because passion drives them to do what they know is wrong. But there can be nothing like this in the subaltern being we're assuming, which can only be understood as a purely spiritual being. If it were a material machine like us, what size could we give to this machine, where would we locate the entity who set in motion the orb of Saturn and its planet, who placed such a great number of fixed stars of such immense mass? Common sense resists this: therefore, it would be a pure spirit, consequently beyond the reach of all temptation, consequently very just.

But where is the basis for this supposition? The only one with any semblance is in the idea of supposed flaws in the fabrication of the world, from which people draw the conclusion that it's not the work of a perfect being.

This conclusion would be right, if these flaws were significant. A response, or rather a full explanation about this would deserve its own book; here, a single thought will suffice. He who had enough wisdom to form the plan of the universe as it is must certainly have seen all the cases we see as defects and, since he was powerful enough to execute this plan, he could easily have made things differently. If these cases which are the subjects of our brazen censure truly were defects, then there must be no defects except in our eyes which, far from seeing the interrelations

between all its parts of the world in its entirety, are too weak to properly contemplate even the tiny part of it in which we live. How could we combine and grasp all the pieces of a machine without external boundaries, of which our earth and all we see around it, while vast and enormous, is only a small portion, if all our sciences, our meditations and labors have yet to enable us to measure its full extent or to gain a sure knowledge of its motions? We see very well that what we call an anomaly is only irregular with regard to us, and that the movements of the heavens and the stars is as exact in itself as it is marvelous to our contemplation.

Reason, therefore, would have us conclude that what appears to us to be defects are dispositions conformable to the entirety of the universe and to the just and wise design of the infinite and perfect being, – consequently, true perfections.

Another, worse reason comes from concern about the repose of the infinite being, which would be disturbed by the government of such a machine. That truly deserves no response; however, since this is supposedly how certain men called philosophers have thought, let's show its absurdity: it's not enough to simply call it false.

1st) The universe, having been formed by a simple act of his will, he no longer touches it and lets it go on, following the wise dispositions he made and according to the forces he communicated to each agent.

2nd) This is judging the infinite being the way we do limited beings, this is saying that there is nothing in him relating to more or less, that certain things tax him, that he might be upset, that he takes time and expends effort relative to the sizes of things and that like us he has to make an effort of attentiveness; this is a failure to understand that by a single act of intelligence he sees all things, that by a single act of his will he made all things, and that he wouldn't need more effort, time and trouble to move every part of the universe than to spin a single pin 180 degrees.

Finally if, contrary to all reason, and without reason, we wanted the whole world to have been produced by a being beneath the infinite one, there would be no risk in relating all things to this infinite being, both because he would be the author of the subaltern being who would be subject thereto, and because this subaltern being, as it must be assumed to be, would still be endowed

with too much intelligence and justice to be jealous of men for paying homage to the supreme being, its creator, at least its superior to an infinite degree. Even less could it blame us for this, who have our ignorance as our excuse; it would have to instruct us of its existence, its will and its rights. But in truth, this supposition is so unworthy of the human mind that I can't say how pale I have become while handling it.

SECOND ARTICLE: ON THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

The word "good", for us, is the most common epithet of the deity; it's the favorite epithet of hypocrites.

"Love for our good God, always", says a hooded crook as payment as he leaves the peasant's table. "The good God is good", says a bigot, "for tolerating so many libertines"; "Behold the good God", says a peasant to his child, showing him the image on a coin; "On your knees", cries a shopkeeper to his children, his neighbors and passersby, "they're carrying the good God." The doctor adorns the frontispiece of his thesis with a "Deo optimo".

I'm sure that the peasant thinks that God is good, like a gentleman who doesn't get upset when surprised, who is hard to annoy, who is easy to appease and who doesn't scrutinize everything.

It's not him I'm talking to, it's the professor, the theologian, the priest, this minister, that preacher. What, gentlemen, do you mean by goodness when you attribute it to God? If it's the goodness which is the essence of all beings, like unity and truth, then I have nothing to say. But if this isn't the sense in which God's goodness is vaunted, then it must be in the same sense as human goodness, failing to see that this sort of goodness is for the most part mere weakness. Would it not be an insult to a great man to say that he's a good man? Has anyone ever said that Titus, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius and Antonin were good folks? This entails a base and even flawed sort of goodness. Goodness was never seen as a virtue, only justice was. Our pure nature might give the label "good" to J.C. That's the most advantageous idea that we can have of him and the least shocking one for the Christians: he had praiseworthy intentions, but also much pettiness and little

capacity. I am sure that anyone who called Dominic and Ignatius “good folks” would have to answer to the Jacobins and Jesuits.

There’s no salvation in saying that God is good the same way Trajan was a good ruler, or that Turenne was a good general. Good, on this occasion, is taken by comparison, which can’t apply to the deity: here the word refers to a quality, not the person. Thus, Trajan is said to have been a good emperor and not a good man; God can even be called a good judge, a good artisan, but he should never be called a good god. Nobody calls the sun a good sun, although it might be called a good star. I’d like to think that this epithet comes from the pagans, who, having many gods, could call “good” the one they found most tractable, the word good as applied to God is therefore according to the peasant’s idea that I’ve described; the desire is for God to tolerate vice by condescendence, for him to be content with words, gestures, grimaces, compliments: trifles, all of it! They want him to love men like most women love their firstborn, at whose cries and begging they give them things that are unreasonable and even pernicious. They want God to be like weak rulers, who have neither the force to act nor the resolution to refuse anything.

They cry that God loves men, who are his finest work. What sense is there in this expression? God loves only himself, he cannot love anything else: love, properly understood, is the knowledge of what is good in an object, mixed with some admiration, along with a strong urge to possess it. If we take the word “love” to mean “to have consideration”, then God loves men the way he loves stones, which doesn’t mean that he can treat them like stones, since his justice would oppose this; the word love here has no connection to love or friendship, it’s only sight mixed with a kind of esteem or rather, God sees men, he wants them to be as he made them and nothing more. What sign do men have that he loves them, using the word “love” as it’s usually taken, the way I love my wife, my children, my friends? Is it by their creation? He didn’t create them out of a love for them, as we’ve already said, and I defy the most skilled arguer to give me the least proof that the creation is a blessing for men, i.e., the kind of blessing one might expect from someone who loved you. If we love existence, this is instinctual and not rational; if the divine wisdom hadn’t imparted this instinct, there would be no man who, at one time or another, wouldn’t long for annihilation, and nearly all of them would bring it on themselves if they could, as soon as they arrived at the age of reason. Where, then, is this gift of life, even for the happiest among us? To get a true sense of this, you only have to think about how much we enjoy sleep, without considering the

repugnance and boredom that make it burdensome to us, the illnesses, sorrows, troubles, vexations, the deeds that make men the most miserable of all beings, which is still nothing in comparison to what factitious religion adds to it, which renders it odious and detestable.

Even if all the fine promises made by factitious religions were true, the threats they make render life a thousand times worse, since these threats are a hundred million times more fearsome than the promises are hopeful, both because of the difference between pain and pleasure, which can't be compared, and the unlikelihood of a positive outcome. But God is just, perfectly just; he set us here among things both good and bad, we can enjoy the former and avoid the latter, with certain considerations and on certain conditions; we should at certain times deprive ourselves of the good and suffer the bad, this sacrifice will be rewarded magnificently, perhaps even an eternal happiness will be the reward for elevated virtue.

This is all the goodness that can be attributed to the perfect Being, if we care about understanding ourselves and being understood by others. From this it follows that we must worship the deity for its grandeur, respect it for its justice; we might in a certain sense say: "without fearing it", but since this word brings to the mind, in spite of ourselves, a kind of horror and hatred, the fear that flocks feel of wolves and the poor of extortioners: properly speaking, an upright man isn't afraid of the provost or the criminal lieutenant, but a thief fears them.

What we're talking about here is the first feeling a man has from the moment he starts to make use of his reason; at this time he's not afraid of God's justice, properly speaking; but once he has sinned, things are different, he's afraid of the divine justice with a fear that is not ordinary fear mixed with uncertainty, it's the fear of the criminal being walked to the scaffold rather than the fear of a man who's only been accused. There are, however, two major differences: first, that it's not impossible for the criminal to escape, although it's very hard, whereas the sinner absolutely cannot escape from God. The second is that the criminal has no hope of obtaining forgiveness, whereas the sinner is absolutely capable of gaining it. These two passions with regard to the execution, in the criminal who is simply accused and the one who is condemned, are as different as indignation and anger; the problem is that nobody has invented terms to express them differently, and so we call both of these things "fear". This paucity of words leads to an infinity of expressions that are everywhere misunderstood and especially in religion, where this abuse is

of far greater consequence; the same things are assumed whenever the same terms are used. I will try to explain what I mean.

We need a word to signify what we call fear, the kind we feel when we're about to fall into the hands of pirates, kidnappers, etc., and another to express the modification of our soul when it realizes it's in danger of doing something that will hurt a friend. There should be different terms for the kind of goodness that is in God and that which we agree is in men, for the kind of love we are capable of for him and that which we feel for our fellow creatures, for the kind of fear that his justice should inspire and for that which human justice gives us, just as we have the word "worship" for the kind of duty and veneration we feel for God, which means an inner feeling, of all our capacity, with all our strength, for the infinite being, caused by his boundless perfections; since this sense can't be suitable for any creature, an unusual word is needed. The terms goodness, love and fear only contain the ideas of what we feel for our fellow creatures, and consequently they fail to express the impressions coming from the Creator, or the actions of our soul towards his essence, or his actions; since we always take these terms in their ordinary sense, they always have a false meaning.

The word for goodness ought to mean only what is meant by "a good judge"; he's not the kind who pardons criminals and favors the poor man who's in the wrong; what we mean when we say "a good worker" isn't a man who fixes the ploughs of widows and orphans, who fixes the roofs of the needy; what we mean when we say that a certain thing is good for someone else isn't that this good thing loses anything and gives it to the other; we mean that the judge is a good judge because he executes justice with exactness, condemning whoever is in the wrong, absolving whoever is in the right; we mean that a worker is a good worker because he works hard and faithfully, we mean that a certain valet is good for a certain master because he suits him: a sugar-coated, honey-tongued valet is only fit for a hypocrite; a valet who is alert and bold, will be well suited to a gendarme.

These are nearly all the senses in which God is good, whereas it's usually taken in another sense, as a judge who pities a poor man who wrongfully brought a lawsuit, the craftsman who does a bad job, but freely and by commiseration, or the master who allows his valet to do as he pleases, debauchery, all manner of crookery, etc., as long as he praises and flatters him.

The term for love should have no other sense than what we think when we say we love order, truth, the various sciences, it's neither love nor friendship, it's something completely different, it's more than simple respect: everyone respects the sciences but very few love them; all men hold virtue in high regard, but they don't all love it, some even hate it. This term, in the sense in which we've just defined it, or rather in the sense we've just tried to convey, would express what is called the love of God for his creatures, which is only the glance, so to speak, with which he looks at them; it would express the action of which our will is capable with respect to the creator, which is only a feeling of admiration and submission. Surely the word love, which is used thoughtlessly, and even deliberately, to mean the way we feel about our friend or mistress, gives a false idea which only affects hollow or fanatical brains; these visionaries and ecstasies, these conductors of spiritual marriages cry that they love God in the same way as one passionately loves one's mistress, they adopt the most tender terms of real-life lovers, the most excessive poetic expressions aren't good enough for them, they forge new ones: hallucinations, all of it. There were once people who loved Jupiter, Neptune, Cybele, Ceres etc., even today there are people who passionately love Sommonocodom, the Sun, etc. and whatever else men are led to invent, but which give them far different signs of this chimerical love than what our visionaries and mystics can offer us.

These are madmen like Don Quixote in his love for Dulcinea. Love and friendship imply some equality, familiarity, a reciprocation of the pleasures involved. I bring joy to my friend and he does the same for me, I give pleasure to my mistress and she does the same to me, we would more or less equally lose both by breaking our union. There is nothing like this in what God feels for men, or in the feelings of men for the deity. We don't love those we fear, but in a way we fear those we love, i.e., we are always cautious about what might upset them: but we aren't afraid of them, but ourselves, we're apprehensive about hurting them, because we would have a hand in their suffering. The meaning of these two kinds of fear is as different as pleasure is from an insult. It's in the sense of a fear of doing something that God will see and condemn and which his justice must punish; a word is necessary that would mean something very different from our fear of displeasing a powerful man who would avenge himself, because we always assumed that we had a right to do what upset him, or that, assuming we're in the wrong, he would take this vengeance beyond the bounds of justice.

To conclude, God doesn't have the kind of goodness that he is often said to possess, he did not make us because of his goodness, he will never give us any boon precisely from his goodness, any more than he would cause us any harm from his spite, he will always act in both cases according to our merit or demerit. Note this well, M.R.F., there are two kinds of wicked people whom we distinguish in our thoughts and by different terms. Those who are absolutely evil are called purely wicked, but those who are only evil in a certain, non-dangerous way, are called malign; thus, we have wickedness and malice; in the same way, we ought to have different thoughts and terms for those who are truly good in an absolute sense, which is nothing other than perfect justice, and for those who are only good in a rather unjust fashion, which is, strictly speaking, a weakness; or the word "good" is understood in the second sense when it's an epithet of the person and not of their quality, as we have seen. It is quite obvious that the word good can't be appropriate for God, any more than we can say that the devil, given our idea of him as a supremely wicked being, is malign; a somber preacher would never say that from the pulpit, or a professor of theology in his writings, although a burlesque poet might say it in jest when referring to him as a creature of fable.

Moreover, as I've already said, there's no great harm in using terms like "fear" and "love of God", but the term "goodness" is dangerous in that it implies weakness and pettiness in the deity. It also conveys an inferior and incorrect idea of the supremely perfect being and, worse still, it leads to a disordered, excessive and pernicious sort of confidence.

It would also be good to get rid of the expression "offending God". The infinite being is not offended the way men offend each other: between men an offense is a real harm which makes them unhappy or less happy, just as caresses, help etc., which are the opposite of the offense, increase their happiness or diminish their misery. And vice does not make God any less happy, nor does virtue make him any happier; he looks upon both with equal calm and without the slightest alteration, without the slightest impact on his perfect felicity; he doesn't even feel indignation or satisfaction, but only simple approbation or disapprobation; he sees with a simple sight that a given action is just or unjust, good or evil, and that it deserves a certain punishment or a certain reward in some way. Just as, if we were told that in a distant land where we have no concerns, there is a very strong, long and wide bridge, we would naturally think well of it,

without any emotion or being gratified by this news; if we were told that in a similar place, there is one that is narrow and badly made, we would disapprove of it, without really caring, this clashes with our discernment and the rules of prudence, but it doesn't offend us as when we are hit, insulted, or robbed. However, it's on this false ridiculous sense that the preachers base their impertinent declarations and the theologians also base a thousand suppositions.

The word sinning and sin are singular, very expressive and well established; these are what we should stick to; so we never say: "this man offended God", "I repent of my offenses against God"; but, "this man sinned", "I repent of my sins". The faults we commit against men are offenses, we cause them harm, we upset their peace of mind and we often cause them physical harm or deprive them of certain comforts; those we commit and which we wrongly call offenses against God are only faults before God and not against God, they concern him in no way. The frequent comparison with a king whose laws are transgressed is inappropriate: the observation of a king's ordinances is a good thing for a king, it's a sign of respect and fear which flatters him, just as the transgression of these same ordinances is taken as a species of contempt, or at least of negligence which does him harm; as for God, it's only a simple sight of our action, of its injustice and the precise degree of punishment it deserves, while on our part, there is only an action against order and justice, it has nothing to do with rebellion or contempt. God, who sees things in themselves and as they truly are, sees none of this. We've said over and over again that "God requires", that "God wants", but this is only a figure of speech; properly speaking, it can be said that God neither wants nor requires anything: order is what requires certain things and the divine justice is what punishes and rewards those beings it formed with knowledge of order, according to their adherence to or negligence of it. People don't even sin against order from rebellion or contempt, even the worst wretches realize their beauty and necessity, they confess it, they hold it in high regard, but the passions lead them to act against it, although they can see that they're doing what is wrong and they feel that they could overcome these passions instead.

I've said that there is no rebellion in sin, either against God or against order; when inferiors rebel against their superior in a proper rebellion, it's because they dispute his authority and claim that he's abusing it, whether accurately or not; but the sinner recognizes the authority of order, he recognizes its beauty, he recognizes, if you like, the legitimate power and the justice of God, he doesn't contest this, he doesn't claim that it's been pushed too far. If a malefactor defends himself

against the provost, that is called rebellion, but this isn't quite right: he recognizes this officer's authority and his right to pursue and seize him, he confesses this in his heart, but he wants to defend his life, which he'll lose if he is caught. Therefore, this is a just offense according to the simple rules of natural self-interest, while remaining unjust in the laws of morality and politics; in almost the same way the sinner doesn't call himself innocent, he recognizes his failure, he only wants to excuse himself by pointing to his weakness and the power of temptation.

THIRD ARTICLE: ON GOD'S FREEDOM.

God is free, with the greatest liberty we can conceive of, and even such that we can't conceive of it and even less express it, since he is freer than we, who are perfectly free, although, as we've already noted above, he seems never to act freely because he always follows the laws of his wisdom and his justice.

It is easy to comprehend that these laws in no way constrain his infinite and perfect freedom, since he follows them freely and since he can, at any moment, infringe on them if he wants to. I am as free to stab my friend who just asked me if he could sleep at my house as I am to toss my hat on a table or a seat, but I don't do it, restrained as I am by friendship and horrified by crime, which doesn't have the least impact on my freedom.

To conclude, from the efficacy of God's will and freedom, that he can change real essences and natures, is to be confused. This is saying that God can make the same thing be and not be at the same time. God can't make two times three equal seven, or make bad what is metaphysically good, he can't make ingratitude better than gratitude. If it's true that Descartes said the opposite, as I think I've heard, I would bet everything, short of my eternal salvation, that he uttered a nonsensical and absurd statement which he knew nobody would accept, and which intelligent people wouldn't believe he himself accepted, as a way of escaping the outcry of the priests, who would denounce his philosophy as unfavorable to religion. What to do with such people who are headstrong and have the prince's ear? We shut their mouths as best we can, just as we throw a bone to a dog to keep it from barking. God is free with respect to his actions — which is the only

freedom possible — and he is as free as he is powerful: he can certainly make a circle from a square, but he won't make a squared circle.

Trying to delve deeper into the essences through reasoning is to wear oneself out seeking after what one already has. But why is this so? What exactly are the essences? Something can be or not be, but when it is, it is a certain thing. Could it be otherwise?

It's the simplest things that are most easily and clearly comprehended and yet they are the hardest things to explain. Everyone, children included, know distinctly what time is; the most profound philosophers can explain it. Without realizing it, we talk now about things, now about their qualities, now about annexes added to them. To change essences is to change the things; thus, the term *change* is inappropriate here: it's to destroy something to replace it with another thing, which God can do without difficulty; but, as long as the thing remains, its essence can't be changed, since this is the thing itself. A circle, in itself, is nothing but a shape all the diameters of which are equal: God cannot make a circle some of the diameters of which are smaller than others, although he can make something that was a circle to be one no longer, but only by destroying the circle.

Once more, the rare genius I've just mentioned wasn't concerned that his authority might lead good minds to believe that the essences are arbitrary, and that God can make half of something equal to the whole; he had to satisfy people who care little for reasons; he answered the fool according to his foolishness. These people accept all sorts of impossibilities provided they get what they want; he gave them nonsense, which was jarring according to their tastes.

Whatever exists is a certain thing and not something else. If you take from an even number the property of being equally divisible, you aren't changing, but destroying it; but, since the essences are independent of existence, they can't be destroyed and even less changed. God can destroy existences, but he can't change them, for existence, taken simply as existence, has no opposite but nothingness. When existence is reduced to nothing, there will be no more existence, existence can be said to be destroyed, but not changed; a circle is always a shape without angles and without parts that go in a straight line, or it isn't one at all; 4 is always the simplest square, or there isn't any such thing.

The more eagerly we handle, delve into or try to shed light on these matters, the more mixed up they become, and the more our natural idea is obscured, which was quite initially quite clear and distinct.

FOURTH SECTION: THE SOLUTION TO THE OBJECTIONS.

I have set out, M.R.F., to explain the enigmas that have made so many fine geniuses sweat, invent extravagant systems and cast many a fine mind into a species of atheism or Pyrrhonism; I hope to fulfill my commitment without much effort. Don't accuse me of temerity until you've seen my arguments.

The most important of these enigmas are the distribution of good and evil, providence and nature, the cause of moral good and evil, the efficacy of God's will, predestination, fate and chance.

I've heard these problems discussed when I was very young and, although I didn't see how they were resolved, I felt that it wasn't as impossible as they say, I saw the light vaguely through this obscurity which didn't seem impenetrable: at least the arguments that were offered didn't seem solid to me; I have sought to dispel the shadows and various reflections have completely chased them away. There are many additional problems that vanish naturally after all that has been said and established above, so that it would be superfluous to return into any detail on these subjects like foreknowledge and freedom, election, reprobation and the goodness of God etc., which have no other nature than what would be forged by seeking to harmonize nothingness and existence, the circular shape with an inequality of diameters, etc. What surprises me is that the doctors and true savants have brought so many bad arguments to save providence with respect to fate, that they have gone searching so far and wide to find them, while they had good ones already in their hands.

FIRST ARTICLE: ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF GOODS AND EVILS.

Just as we've already seen, God placed, at the moment of the Creation, all things as they would be, according to an infinitely perfect wisdom; he didn't distribute everything [to each person], they are within reach of all, everyone can grasp them, more or less easily. God, at the same time, conferred the knowledge of the rules of justice, and consequently of the conditions on which one might seize the goods with which he filled the universe. Then, from this moment he left them without touching anything again, he no longer does anything, except perhaps overseeing the continuance of motion and creating human souls, which I won't examine, and which I'm quite sure that the rarest geniuses would fruitlessly examine; besides, this has nothing to do with the issue at hand: if motion must be maintained by a continuation of action or will on God's part, this is indifferent as to its success as if it had all been impressed on it all at once. If God creates souls that are similar and on the same conditions whenever a body is formed, is also the same as if he'd created an immense number of them at once.

Let's come to the precise subject of this section: what leads to human happiness, which is called prosperity in this world, terminates in health, splendor, wealth, and pleasures; it's sufficient to know that God placed all this in a just balance and equally within reach of all men to justify his conduct and his providence, and dispel all that is alleged to the contrary. But virtue is not the path to all that; it has, as it were, only one string in its bow, it has only the weakest of all means, while vice has a thousand very strong ones. Why, then, should we be astonished to see utterly wicked men in the midst of all the blessings of fortune and good men crushed by misery? Should we also be surprised that a young and vigorous peasant can glean a large bucket-full of acorns, while an old cripple gathers almost nothing? Let's go into detail.

With respect to health, it's very improper to cry: "It's not true that the wicked fare better than the good, since they find it easy to maintain their good health, prevent diseases and rid themselves of these with medicine". As for an original health-state, all things are equal; and, with regard to everyday life, an immoderate use of pleasures usually ruins the constitution of these happy criminals; they become languid, large, fat, heavy and subject to a thousand afflictions: there are ten thousand such people for each sorry fellow with gout. It's the same with longevity: debauchery precipitates half of the opulent into an early grave. Thus, there would be nothing to

say on this point when it's examined properly, for with respect to the help lacked by the poor, this relates back to wealth, which will be discussed soon hereafter.

As for honors and everything flattering to human vanity, ambition and the spirit of superiority, by what means can a man of honor attain these? By merit alone. Truly, can we climb this particular slope? Who will discover this merit, who will promote it, who will highlight it? Almost nobody. And a thousand jealous men, a thousand ambitious men will resist it, what's required is patrons who aren't won over by schemes, flattering, groveling, gifts and often crimes; you have to be a talker, impudent, brazen, insensitive to refusals and insults, sparing neither treachery nor bad practices, nor lack of faith, nor betrayals, all must be sacrificed, friends, parents, the public good, etc. Virtue doesn't allow any of this and, consequently, it leaves its man where it found him; but if, in an unusual case, merit manages to be disinterred and chosen, it's the good fortune of the republic and not that of the virtuous man: he will be opposed, he will make enemies of all the wicked, who are always in the majority, he will be exhausted, he will wear out his health, he won't have a moment's rest and he won't die rich, whereas vice has a brow of steel, a heart of marble and claws of iron and brass, it will ruin a whole province in two or three years and depart with a mountain of gold.

Let's count up the ways to become rich legitimately; I only know two: labor and trade. The first is nearly useless in this respect, i.e., with regard to what is called fortune; laborers are lucky to make a living, and it's far less common to find a savant or a skilled artisan in a whole century who leaves a large sum to his family. What remains, then, is business, which not everyone can do, and which is subject to so many risks, losses and reversals, which takes time, talent and so many lucky breaks that the number of those it enriches can only be small by comparison with the rest of mankind. Who, then, will become rich with virtue? Nobody. Whereas, with vice, a fortune can be made in an instant and with great probability on its side: all you have to do is plunder, steal, sell your wife, your daughter, your female neighbor, grovel to the powerful, flatter their disorderly ways, play their minister, go bankrupt, etc.

It is essentially useless to speak of pleasures, after discussing wealth, since the latter is the source of the former; it's enough to say that most of the great pleasures are the fountainhead of crime: despotic and arbitrary power over men, notorious affairs, debauchery, vengeance, excessive

luxury; the rest can only be gotten with silver and expenditure, i.e., by riches, which have just been shown to be nearly inaccessible to honest people.

Why then should we be surprised to see the wicked enjoying prosperity, honor, joy and all the fine things, while the good groan in obscurity, often in contempt, in poverty and sadness, any more than if a child pushed a ball a long way, while a strong man could only turn over a cube of the same weight a few times? It's only natural, it's based on clear and necessary reasons, it's based on the essence and even the nature of things. To be sure to leave nothing untouched, let's attack one more problem, which is the last one, I think, that might arise in the mind on this subject.

Someone will say: "It is true that virtue is not the path to temporal prosperity, which is equally within reach of all men and would be nearly equally shared if honest men had as many ways to access it as the wicked." But what is the reason why he is born as king and I a slave, whether God created a set amount of souls which he circulates through all bodies as this supply runs out and he forms new ones, or whether he creates them for each new embryo? God sees a pregnant queen at the same time as there are a thousand other women whose embryos are equally capable of receiving the infusion of a soul. God also sees an embryo with kidney stones, gout, hydropsy, sciatica and other similar diseases which eventually manifest at one time or another, while we see many with absolute dispositions for perfect vigor and health, even in spite of all sorts of debauchery: "Why, then", the poor black man will ask, "didn't God put my soul into the flanks of a certain queen or duchess, who became pregnant at the same time as my mother?" "Why", the man with gout, with hydropsy, with paralysis, might ask, "didn't God place my soul in the body of this or that one which enjoys perfect health, who are so stunning, so amazingly vigorous? We were conceived in the same instant. This complaint contains two questions; the first concerns God, that is: who can control things on this occasion, since there seems to be no difference between souls aside from simple indivisibility?

I reply 1st) that this question is simply a curiosity and we have no interest in it; 2nd) that it is absolutely sure that this occurs, therefore there is a good and solid reason for it that we don't know.

The second question concerns us: the poor and infirm might say that they are unhappy that their souls weren't united to machines formed in other women.

By examining all these things closely, I find that there is a just compensation and that the whole thing comes within the course of a perfect justice, in that it is easier to benefit from adversity than prosperity: wealth and health lead to a disordered way of life, poverty and illness protect us from nearly all vice; it is hard not to become prideful amid honors and not to abuse great power, nothing is easier than to live in a lowly and moderate way where only minor situations arise; a king has a thousand imposing temptations to endure for each one faced by a slave. Finally, the life of the poor is in a certain way a perpetual state of merit, without many other virtues, for what little they suffer patiently; the life of the epoch's rich is nearly a perpetual reward for their virtue, even when they add vices into the mix. There are very few enlightened and judicious kings who, on their deathbed, wouldn't rather have lived as a slave. Not any slave capable of a little thought who, in this moment, would wish to have lived like a king. I confess that it's the prerogative of kings to expect great rewards, but that it's hard for them to deserve them, that it's hard to be a good king. I don't know if Epictetus, as wise, as holy, as enlightened, as well intentioned as he was, wouldn't have thought he had lost something by trading his miserable lot with that of a Roman emperor.

SECOND ARTICLE: ON PROVIDENCE AND NATURE.

A thousand places in each of these notebooks have explained this subject enough, so that I can leave it there, but there are things that are so famous and on which people's biases are so strong that they need to be handled directly, since people often drift right past everything concerning them, without noticing it.

Neither in God, nor in the conduct of the universe, is there any providence as most men understand it and as nearly all wish it were true: what they want is a providence that is human, indeterminate, and which grants their senseless wishes, that men should gain, by their prayers, through ceremonies, through friends and corruption, a providence that is vague, lavish, prodigal and human, such that the cleverest and most important might profit by it at the expense of others.

This is the providence of most of humanity, due in parts to ignorance, weakness, passion. We store up in one instance only half of what is necessary, and in another more than is needed: he who has nothing cries out but gets nothing, he who has plenty to spare wastes it and has ways of obtaining whatever he needs.

Again, a good king or a wise and powerful prince gives what people need all at once, as far as his foresight and his means allow; he doesn't wait for this person or that to ask for what they need; if, by some misfortune, he is forced to change his mind or to overcome certain obstacles, it's always because of human frailty, it's because he couldn't foresee this or that problem, or, while anticipating them, he didn't know what to do, or perhaps his means were insufficient to improve matters; otherwise he's in the wrong; it's well known that princes are respected or criticized and despised according to their adherence to these principles. It is manifest that the sort of providence attributed to God is precisely the same thing we would criticize a prince for doing. They hold that, while aware of all problems and all solutions, and holding the means of applying the latter to the former, he waits for each problem to appear and for each individual to ask for the solution; it is even clearer that nothing is more completely opposed to the idea of the perfect being: madmen and libertines don't examine things or bother about them, they act nearly at random, only making preparations for their most basic needs, in response to complaints and according to whim. A wise man prepares for the future as best he can, as early as he can, and spends all he can to put everything in the best possible state, but since his wisdom is limited, something will always need to be revisited to restore order after unforeseen accidents, and since his power is limited, he can only act successively, rushing where the need is most urgent and leaving many places imperfectly cared for.

But God, whose wisdom and foresight are infinite, who saw in a single instant all possible circumstances and all the combinations of these circumstances, who in a single moment saw all possible problems and all possible solutions, God, whose power is infinite, prepared in the selfsame instant all the remedies that were possible for these problems. God brought the highest possible perfection to all his works, he didn't make a machine with which he would have to go on tinkering; what a rare invention and a rare masterpiece, what a credit to its maker would a pendulum clock be if you had to set the balancer back in motion twenty times a day and push the

needle to the right hour with your finger, which would stop one day and run another without any rhyme or reason, such that you'd constantly have to have it repaired by the clockmaker!

And yet this is how they want the universe to have been made, they want him to have overlooked a thousand things, that a thousand others should go wrong and that, to obtain the former and to find remedies for the latter, the deity has to be called on and made to act in individual cases, distinct from the universal act by which he both produced and still maintains the universe in the perfect state it enjoys.

Here rain is asked for, there a dry spell, here victory in battle, there success in court, and the satisfaction of any brings about the dissatisfaction of the other. In London, they wish health on a prince, in Paris, they say masses for his death. Didn't God foresee the possibility of all these things? Did he not foresee what was most just, most expedient and most rational? What kept him from reducing given possibilities to certain facts at set times? Who kept him from deciding and tipping the scales? It's disagreeable to have to repeat the same thing so many times: his wisdom determined and produced everything at once, at the instant of Creation all the motion necessary for material beings; he distributed to the spiritual beings all appropriate knowledge and power; this is how an infinite being acts, and then everything plays out according to his plans, i.e., according to his impression of motion and according to the use made by intelligent beings of their freedom.

Our desires and our mad prayers don't obtain any change, or any novelty: it rains or it's dry, or rather it must rain or stay dry according to the dispositions of nature; things die or are healed when their disposition is such as to endure a disease or to succumb to it. One man wins his trial if he explains things well, if he has a good case and good judges; another loses the battle if he is the inferior general, or has worse and fewer troops, along with the other disadvantageous circumstances. Finally, all things being equal otherwise, he who lost the battle would have lost it just the same, no matter what prayers, vows and sacrifices he had made. He who won his trial after having many vows and prayers would still have won it if he hadn't done all these things, to which I can attest: I ridiculed these vows and prayers, I've won, I've lost. If I had gone along with the ambient mania, I would attribute the victories to my vows and, disregarding the scoundrels who wanted to swindle me, I would attribute the loss to my negligence and my lack of religion.

The common run of humanity, incapable of grasping the solidity of arguments, is satisfied with facts; to reply to this crass and stupid part of humanity, we only have to show them the legends of all the other religions which they condemn and hate. Okay, Christian, okay, papist, you say that processions, relics, masses etc., brought you rain, I maintain that the rain would have fallen all the same if you had burned your bones and attacked all the mass-sayers: you deny this, then grant that the Chinese, the Siamese, the Turks and many pagans in America also obtain rain with their vows, their sacrifices and their processions, which must be effectuated by the tenderness and power of their imaginary gods. Consider their legends, where you'll find a hundred thousand examples of this just as in your own.

For all that, we can still say that everything happens according to God's pleasure, because it does indeed please God for things to happen as they do, i.e., that it's the course he foresaw that they could take and that he allows it without opposition: it's no less true to say that, if God wished, things would go this way or that way, in this or that manner, because God can effectively change everything and guide all sorts of particular things and in all possible ways: he can make a man who is currently ninety years old die at the age of six, he can make the rivers flow upstream to their sources, shave off the mountains, make the whole sphere turn eastward; but he will never do any of these things.

God lets the material and necessary powers act freely, as when I spin a top and it keeps going without my doing anything more, however, only as long as I like and as I want it, because I can absolutely stop it, speed it up, slow it down and change its position. God allows the free play of the free powers, as I do when I let my children play; I can always stop them or make them play other games.

It's the same with the very common expression, "God willing"; doubtless nothing happens without God's permission; this means that he would stop it, or change everything if he wanted to, and that, for anything to be, God must have allowed it and not opposed it, but that doesn't mean that any particular action by God was required, as distinct from the general order and action. It's by God's permission that the water in a broken glass spreads everywhere, i.e., he made water of such a nature as to flow through all openings from where it is contained, and he doesn't

oppose it with any other action. There is no other permission on any occasion whatsoever; whereas we can understand something as very true *per se* which is very false, i.e., a positive action as a particular cause of the thing in question. A conclusive sign that these particular actions are an illusion and that only the first, universal communication of God took place, is the fact that I would happily show what providence will do on a thousand occasions, I'd make it do as I pleased despite so many vows, processions, masses, sacrifices, prayers and whatever religious acts you prefer. Put me in charge somewhere, give me ten convicts and ten good men, I guarantee that providence has resolved that the ten prisoners will die of hunger, although I grant them the liberty of exhausting all their schemes and tricks to steal purses; I assure you that providence has provided for a reasonable upkeep for the ten others and an adequate food supply: and yet, I'm no prophet, I don't know the secrets of providence, but I can see clearly by the universal action of God and I know that he gave me the forces I'm able to use, without his ever augmenting or diminishing them, without his pushing them or opposing their free play.

Thus far, when I've referred to nature, I haven't meant a substance, I have only used this word to express God's arrangement of matter and the motion he impressed on it along with all the other necessary dispositions and the force he has communicated to all beings. I haven't claimed that nature was a thing, but I call nature the modification of all things; this is its accidental essence; the essence of matter is to be impenetrable, capable of rest and motion, of division and various shapes; the accidental essence of that matter is the division, motion and arrangement which makes a particular body from it. Subsequently, the universal motion and all the other dispositions of all the parts of the world constitute a second accidental essence, full of relations and connections, and these two accidental essences along with the pure eternal and necessary essence are the nature of the material universe.

The nature of the intelligences is also their real, eternal and necessary essence, which consists in seeing the truth and drawing conclusions from it, and being able to love and choose, along with their accidental essence which results from the impressions of the bodies with which they are united. With this said, all beings act by themselves, i.e., by the power they have previously received from the Creator, some necessarily, others freely; and this power of moving with the first direction of motion which is diversified in an infinity of ways is nature as far as material

beings are concerned, and this power, previously received by intelligences, of seeing the truth and acting freely, is the nature of spiritual beings.

Thus, when I say that nature is what causes plants to bear seeds capable of producing their own kind, I only mean that God has configured a certain portion of matter and gave it such a motion, or, if you want another philosophy, that God gave it forms and qualities enabling it to produce its seed.

I don't reject your occasional causes, M.R.F., you base them on strong arguments, but whatever scope you give them, your will must still have something that is its own absolutely, despite being a gift from the creator. I grant you that I can't move my arm because it's really God moving it according to my will, but you must grant me that it is a will that moves Him: the will is determined by itself, it's the very principle of its modifications by the force of its essence which is the work of God. It's an act of his power, made only once, which needs nothing else, as when an artisan makes a spring and gives it the proper tension, this spring, when compressed, opens and extends by itself, without any additional interference by the artisan; or as when my father gave me money when I joined the army, I used it as I pleased, for better or worse, without him urging me, helping me or giving me any suggestions about how to use it. Combine the meanings of these two comparisons and you'll get some idea of the power of our will, of a real power which belongs to it after it's been received. But I don't think that there is a perfect equality in these comparisons, nor do I think it possible to find any such thing; it's plenty if they shed light on what I've said, which is quite appropriate and tangibly real. Thus, I say that I act naturally and by my natural forces which I was given previously by God, consisting in the power of contemplating the truth, of making judgments, of loving, of wishing and of choosing in perfect freedom when action is required. Those on whom the reveries and pedantic arguments of the scholastics, based on words and not on sense and reason, have made an impression they can't shake off, can maintain their contribution. God, having established that he will contribute with his power to the operations of the wills of all intelligences, it's enough if the first act of the will is absolutely free, that it belongs to and depends on him entirely and uniquely; after that, whatever evil or good may come from this act comes from its own heart and is made on its own account. One day, when this subject came up in a group which included a professor of the Sorbonne, I was told: "You would," he said, "give everything to nature." "If by this word," I replied, "I meant

some power distinct from that which God has impressed and which was independent of him, I would be mistaken; but since I mean it as I've just tried to explain, I pay tribute to the power, the wisdom and the justice of God: I'm saying what is true and what can't be otherwise."

These Gentlemen must conceive of a being distinct from the deity, of great power, such that it would be the efficient cause of most events; and they must worry about God's jealousy, since they so forcefully repeat everything people say about nature; that seems obvious, but it's a very pernicious error.

It would be quite possible to make a clock that would work for a long time after being hit hard with a fist in a certain part, without springs or weights; then, the arrangement, the proportion, the number, the shape of this clock's parts, its motions would be owed entirely to the engineer: all of this will be the nature of this machine and I'll say that it marks the hours naturally, that is, it has in itself the power to move the needle and the accuracy to track time, without any engineer setting his hand to it, without the aid of the least addition. Would that hurt the reputation of the engineer? Would that be insulting to the inventive subtlety of his mind and of his skilled workmanship? Quite the opposite. The difference between this machine and our will is that this machine does the actions of necessity only, and those of our will are free. Thus, the machine is only the work of a man, and our will is the work of God, whose masterpiece and final effort, so to speak, it is. A stone that isn't held up falls down, cork floats on water, iron plunges through it, and it all happens naturally, i.e., it happens thanks to the dispositions that God has placed and established there, and by the forces he imprinted thereon at a prior time. Even if there were nothing but occasional causes in all crude and necessary agents, God's decree of acting in a certain way, in certain circumstances, would still be nature; I would be no less right to say that these things happen naturally and if anything happened contrary to this general and primitive decree, it would be supernatural. Assuming accidental causes, God has resolved to push bodies forward on the occasion of another body in motion which bumps into it; when this happens, it's a natural event; but if this touched body went backward instead, it would be a miracle, as millions are reported. Most of these miracles are factually false: that the sun was stopped by Joshua, that the arrows of the Sarrasins who were besieging Spaniards in certain caves turned back against them and wounded them; others may be factually true, but the miracle's attribution is false, the henchmen of factitious religions don't fail to profit from the occasion: no illnesses that were cured

naturally would have gone away without their prayers, victories in certain battles came thanks to them; they have also put another ruse into practice, they have taken over the natural forces and attribute all their effects to themselves.

It's by natural means that the waters of Bourgogne, near the city of Sainte-Reine, healed many diseases thanks to the qualities of the corpuscles mixed in them; monks have planted their den there and boldly preach that this virtue comes from the fact that a certain girl lost her life in this spot for a certain reason, that faith in the holy martyr is necessary, along with cash to bankroll her ministers by her side.

One might, in some way, consider the words artificial and natural as equal and univocal, although they are used in opposite ways. There is the art of God and the art of men: God's art is what we call nature, it's that which God has added to all beings in addition to bare existence; what men add to things that exist and are endowed with what God had added beyond bare existence, we call art. Thus, nature is the art of God and art is the nature of human productions. The little carriage we just saw going by moves artificially and this artifice was its nature; a horse walks naturally and this nature is the art of the creator. The difference between the divine natural and the human natural, between the divine artificial and the human artificial is that God draws the power he gives from himself, whereas men borrow and only place and apply that which God has created; thus, once in place, the artificial machine works independently of its maker, and the natural machine, by a simple act of God's will can be halted, changed or destroyed. But God will never do this, with respect to simple creatures because their nature is the most perfect possible; nor with respect to intelligent beings because they are formed according to eternal and necessary laws, the inviolable rules of infinite wisdom and justice, which are the essence of things and in a certain way they are God himself. This nature is a truth along with the fact that no change can come to it without leading into falsehood. For example, if God turned my mind so that I saw four and four equaling something other than eight, that it is better to insult one's father than to respect him, etc.

THIRD ARTICLE: ON THE CAUSE OF MORAL GOOD AND EVIL.

God knows good and evil; in his justice, he created beings to whom he communicated this knowledge and whose essence was to have this knowledge, as well as the power to freely choose one or the other.

He issued neither a conditional decree, nor an absolute one; there is one as eternal as himself: it's his justice, by which he must treat everyone according to their works. Does a good judge have a decree, a resolve to punish this or that man? Does a good king have a decree to hang this soldier and to elevate that one as Marshal of France? There is none but that of pursuing justice; he will have the deserter or the thief hung; he will advance whoever is wise, obedient, brave and faithful.

What could be more pitiful than to say that God is the author of evil because he conferred the power of doing it, or that, having foreseen it, he didn't prevent it? He foresaw only its possibility, and, although this possibility was a moral inevitability, it is still only a physical possibility, which doesn't preclude the possibility that no man would commit evil. Odds are a hundred million to one that all men will sin and that many will commit great sins, but finally, it's not physically impossible that no man won't sin.

But let's assume it's certain that all men do what is evil; God is not the author of these acts, or of the moral evil contained in them: good and evil are qualities which are eternal, necessary and essential to the actions of the intelligences, they are the properties thereof, like straightness and curvature are properties of lines, like commensurability or incommensurability when I draw a square and derive its diagonal.

To speak precisely, God gave neither commandment nor prohibition, as we've already said in passing; he made intelligences capable of seeing the eternal laws and the essences of certain things: he will deal with men according to the regard they've had for these things. It's not God's commandment that a curved line is longer than a straight line running between two identical points, it's no transgression of God's commandment to take a curved route instead of going in a straight line, this is against order and reason, relative to the action's consequence, as when I reprimand my son for taking a detour instead of a straight path, although I never gave him any guidance about how to travel.

Even if men were befuddled about the fact of God's existence, they would still have the idea of good and evil, but they wouldn't have the same motives guiding their choices.

It's possible to say that God is not the author of evil taken metaphysically, but that he is the cause of physical and actual evil, since he created the beings who commit it. 1st). He didn't create them with the need to commit it but only with the power to do so, with an equal power and a great reason not to commit it.

2nd) The handicap of being able to give in to vice is compensated for by that of being able to embrace virtue.

3rd) These beings, capable of good and evil, have no reason to complain, since they are treated with perfect justice, all actions and their circumstances, the weakness of the agent, the power of temptation, etc., are all combined perfectly.

It's in the system of the Christians, and maybe in all the factitious religions, where the deity cannot be justified; they preach that he deals horrid and eternal punishments for a single crime to which men are led by temptations that are very hard to overcome, for involuntary failings, for the crimes of others, for transgressing unknown and dubious laws, for failing to believe incredible things, without the least reason to believe them; finally, here it is preached and maintained loudly and in a thousand texts that God buries in eternal abysses of inconceivable suffering, by sheer whim, nearly all men without regard to their merits, and, worse still, in spite of their merits.

But what is it that drives the henchmen of these religions to spout so many horrors? It's because the masses need to be dazzled, frozen by fear and their minds must be burdened with monstrous ideas to subject them to opinions which bring all the blessings of fortune on these unworthy men. If God is just, what need do I have for your folklore? He'll judge me based on what he himself has told me, on what I know: far from giving you my ear, I run away; even if you were telling the truth, I refuse to assume new duties and expose my salvation to new risks: in the natural law my salvation is easy, in the artificial law it is nearly impossible and, in addition, it makes me your slave as long as I'm alive. This is why they cry out so loudly that God will make you answer for

things you know nothing about and for reasons which you don't know; hence the need for teachers, for the honors they must be given, and for the large sums they must be paid.

Everything that God has done is very just and very good; he made beings capable of good and evil, he gave them knowledge of both, he gave them the power to choose between them and the motives behind this choice by instructing them in what would happen either way. Reason and conscience say all these things.

Let us note that God wants to exercise his justice, that his wisdom demands this, that he can't do this within himself only and that it is therefore a useless perfection, unless he creates beings outside himself to judge, to reward or punish; that judgment requires a difference, it requires things with contrasting properties, and that for rewards or punishments, crime or virtue are necessary; that beings were therefore utterly indispensable who would be capable of opposite things, and good or evil deeds.

Divine justice, properly understood and considered in itself, is equally content with the punishment of one and the reward of another; it is satisfied once it has given the power, freedom and motives for choices. What alarms and repels the mind is the difficulty of fulfilling the duties prescribed by factitious religions.

In natural religion, in the true religion that God dictated to us in a manner worthy of himself, of his power, of his wisdom and his justice, in a clear and incontestable manner, in a manner that requires neither study nor consultation, or even attention, our duties are very easy, very simple and few in number; our reason sees their fairness, utility and necessity; only an excess of corruption can keep us from them. Must we then harm ourselves in such a way in order to worship the Supreme Being and respect our Creator and our judge, to succor those we find in misery and need, to keep our promises, to pay our debts, to refrain from killing, from stealing, from taking women by force?

Nobody would blame a father who, with many children, gave each of them horses, weapons, money to join the army and win glory, uphold the honor of their house and earn advancement by serving their country. If this father keeps them at home until he's exhausted all his wisdom

and tenderness in exhorting them to virtue and winning them back from debauchery, showing them the happy and glorious consequences of the former and the dire and shameful consequences of the latter, if these young men make some mistakes, if they indulge their weaknesses, if they spend their money partying, gambling, chasing women, if, impoverished from this chaotic way of living, they turn to robbing others, can the father be regarded as the author of their vices and of the misery of his children when they're shamefully punished by the law?

God, they say, could have not given liberty to men or could have made them in such a way and placed them in such circumstances that they would only have done what is good.

The first case, destroying all vice, destroys all virtue; it means making automatons, marionettes and machines that are absolutely useless to the divine attributes, and consequently rendering all the rest of the universe vain, of which the free man, knowing good and evil, with the power to choose either, is the final cause. The second case was impossible, for as long as liberty remained intact, men could still commit evil.

Only one complaint might remain, which is that God could place men in situations where evil would be less overpowering and even such that it would have been very hard not to abstain from it: that is true. Assuredly a man of ninety years who sees nothing but old and unattractive women is quite sheltered from sexual depravity, but virtue would also be absent in proportion as the vice disappears; perhaps nobody would have been wicked, and nobody good, which wouldn't have suited divine justice and would have ended up making this a useless perfection; and so, it makes no difference for humanity, since God takes account in his judgments of the force of circumstances.

Don't object, M.R.F., that I'm flattering sinners and giving them pretexts and excuses, that my doctrine is very dangerous and that, since the threat of eternal punishments for the slightest failings have no effect and are inadequate to stop the wicked, lesser fears have no impact at all, so that they rush panting to wickedness.

These criticisms would apply best of all to the doctrine of predestination and the need for grace, but all recrimination aside, I want to justify myself positively.

Falsehood is always falsehood and should never be employed; for every good effect, it also has a thousand bad ones, and even if the proportions were the other way around, lying should still never be used, which is always criminal. But far from falsehoods and exaggeration having more good effects than bad ones, they completely extinguish the light of truth and suffocate all its beneficent effects.

*What nonsense is Satan,
Hell is just a fable;
Fairy tales to frighten
Morons and the rabble!*

This is the sort of thing our degenerate youth sings. To say too much is to say nothing at all. People might be somewhat afraid of the truth, but not of lies and absurdities. Since people see so clearly that things can't be this way, instead of drawing the conclusion that things are different, they conclude that there's no reality at all in it: all the most horrid and extreme things people hear make almost no impression, or only a temporary one. The mind which confusedly sees the falseness of it all immediately covers all traces of it. This is why the particularists, the Calvinists, the Jansenists and all the rest behave in daily life like the Molinists, the Universalists, the Arminians and the Pelagians; the partisans of predestination, of grace and such things live like those who laugh at them. The great St. Paul, who was taken bodily up to the third heaven, lived no differently than myself, a common lout who has only seen a portion of *this* planet; he ran away from danger, he appealed to Caesar when condemned by the lower judges, he sometimes resorted to begging, threats and flattery, he made promises just like those who honestly recognize God as justice itself, who consult their reason, their experience and their inner feelings and believe themselves perfectly free.

Reason, despite any reticence, gets the upper hand and nature speaks so loudly that nobody can ignore it, unless external impressions manage to completely overpower the mind and render one completely mad and fanatical. Proof that the simple truth is better than this pile of false and ridiculous visions is the fact that children, savages and philosophers are infinitely worthier than any doctor and any devotee of any factitious religion on earth. You will not dare, M.R.F., to say

that a pope believes neither in grace nor in predestination nor in Hell; his faith cannot fail: J.C. said as much to St. Peter, their universal representative; two thirds of [the saints] were no less abominable than all men and even the most wicked of all, it's possible that not even one of them was a man of probity: you know better than I do about the sort of men whose feasts we celebrate: they were cowards, flatterers, self-seeking political schemers, greedy, ambitious men, perjurers, deceivers, etc.

FOURTH ARTICLE: ON THE EFFICACY OF GOD'S WILL.

Another chimera men have created to burden and spook themselves: the will of God, it's said, is efficacious, nothing can enter his will that isn't instantly realized; thus, if God wanted all men to be saved, they certainly would be; but they aren't, therefore, he wants some of them to be damned.

Firstly, it is false that God wants all men to be saved, he simply wants justice to be done, he doesn't positively wish to save or to damn anyone, he does not want, with a fixed or conditional will, or whatever label you want to give it, his justice to act by rewards or punishments, but only for it to treat free beings according to their deserts. And this is how his justice and his power are in accord.

God wants to punish those who are vicious, and this will occur without fail; he wants to reward those who are virtuous, and that will unfailingly come about; his will shall never be frustrated, it is active and absolute as to what is possible, without making God an execrable tyrant, as the Christian, and perhaps many other kinds of theologians, do.

If I have many holes to plug and pegs of various sizes, of all colors and all types of wood, my will shall be effective, it won't be frustrated, it has no other aim than plugging all these holes; without worrying about whether the pegs are black or white, made of oak or elm, I would use the ones that fit the holes the best.

Just the same, God wants justice done; he makes no plans about punishments or rewards, he will take the penalties and the rewards and use them as appropriate, according to merit: his will is efficacious and has all possible effectiveness, his intentions are entirely fulfilled. I can't think of anything easier to find and comprehend or anything as satisfying as that. Nothing could be more natural or more plausible. Why go looking for so many detours and digging abysses to fall into? Is there anything in this that clashes with our highest ideas of the perfect being? This is a natural idea which appears to all minds of itself, at least dimly, which the mind readily accepts when it's explained, the alternative is elaborated by the sort of sophistry which clashes with common sense and which produces, at best, bewilderment.

As for me, I find what I've just said so reasonable and obvious that I fail to comprehend how there could be anything in it that needs explaining; the one thing I can think of, and which I confess is quite beyond my grasp, is the way we balk at the idea that God could be absolutely indifferent about punishments and rewards; our interests might speak louder here than we realize; natural and sympathetic feelings of compassion for others also affect us; if we look closer, we might find that this is the only thing that bothers us, although, properly grasped, it does absolutely no harm to us.

However, I myself feel this idea too intensely and I can't give in to this absolute indifference about causing pleasure and pain, however justice might play a part; I cannot resist a torrent that forces me to the opinion that God would like all men to render themselves worthy of his benefits and that none of them deserves to feel his severity; but it's because I am a man and I see that it would be better for me and for other people if things were this way, and by the natural connection we have with each other, which won't allow us to see others suffering violently without also suffering like them, I wish for others what I wish for myself.

But they'll return to the charge, saying that in God there is no more or less, that he never takes any pleasure and that there would need to be more in virtue than in vice, that God would lose, at least, some quantity of pleasure by punishing, since the pleasure of punishing isn't equal to that of rewarding. But all this is specious. Still, I see a reply which seems quite apt and adequate to me:

1st) It is certain that there is more in virtue than in vice, as we've said above; virtue is more beautiful than vice is hideous, virtue is an action requiring great effort, vice is the simple relaxation of this effort.

2nd) There are many things that I can do without any difficulty, that I would like to do but which I nevertheless don't do. I once organized a raffle in which nobody was present on the day of the drawing; I really wanted one of my friends to win the horse as his prize, nothing prevented me from helping him win it, there wouldn't have been any risk if I made him the winner; but I didn't do it, equity standing in the way: these are two acts of my transaction, wholly distinct, which neither harm nor contradict each other. The act of drawing the raffle within the rules has done no harm to my power and freedom of drawing it fraudulently so that my friend would get the horse he needed.

Why wouldn't we recognize the same thing in God? I think that here, as on so many other occasions, the whole problem lies in the lack of words; if there were only one to express each of these two acts of will, there would be no problem, but we attribute to each of these two acts of will, as different as they are in themselves, the same essence only because we use the same word for both. False judgment, subject to countless errors and most of the disputes that are humanity's greatest misery. If, instead of borrowing the imperfect subjunctive of the verb *to wish*, to express its present tense in the sense that I want my friend to draw the ticket, another term had been devised, nothing would trouble the ideas or disturb them; truly, using the word *to wish* for both acts because it truly is wishing, but the former is a simple wish for my raffle to go down impartially; I conditionally wish that my friend gets the prize, which assumes that I can make this happen without being fraudulent; this last conditional and suppositional sense is expressed by the imperfect of the subjunctive, instead of the present indicative.

To avoid the problem coming from using the same word in two ways, let's make a new word; in the schools they use that of *velleity*, but aside from this still recalling the idea of wishing, it's only a noun without a verb form; besides, there is something wispy about it which wouldn't suit the deity if we wanted to attribute it to him. Let's call this conditional and suppositional wish "shiw" (*olouvir*) and retain it for both the verb and the noun, as we do with wishing (*vouloir*). I'll say that I wished for my lottery to be fair and that I "shiwed" that my friend would win it. You'd similarly

say that God wishes to exercise his justice in its utmost perfection and that he “shiws” for all men to be happy.

Thus, you can say that all of God’s wills and “shiws” are absolute, I concur; if you add that they have an unfailing effect, I deny this as to the “shiws”. My “shiw” in certain cases is, so to speak, absolute like God’s; it is absolute as to power: in the example I just gave, I might distribute white tickets to all the participants in my lottery and save the black one for my friend; but this “shiw” still has no effect, it would be the same with God’s “shiw” in the distribution of punishments and rewards, he could give only rewards and no punishment, but he will inflict punishments on those who deserve them. Thus, things will happen as we understand they must happen, without any diminution in the scope of God’s power, which is infinite.

The Christians in particular have nothing to oppose to this doctrine, if they follow the principles which are received by them without question: in the prayer J.C. left to them, they ask for the will of God to be fulfilled on earth as in heaven; he therefore thought that some of God’s wishes either weren’t or might not be fulfilled. Nobody hopes for what is inevitable: nobody firing a cannon through a window ever hoped it would break, although this was his plan; hoping relates only to what is uncertain. If J.C. had asked in his prayer that God’s happiness should continue uninterrupted, that his power should meet with no opposition, what would you say, M.R.F.?

The intentionally created problem of the theologians could also be explained, the fog could be dispelled which they strive to bring from all quarters to blind themselves, in another way, although we’d come back nearly to the same thing. Here’s how.

People want different things at the same time with positive and absolute kinds of will; each is entirely capable of having its way, but the simplest will is the strongest one, it wins out. I want to preserve my life, I want to preserve my honor at any cost: the latter will is the simplest (I want something at any cost), the first is less so (I want to preserve my life, but not at the cost of my honor); I rush to the attack, whereby I put my life in clear and imminent danger.

That seems clear to me as far as men go. As for God, a little commentary is required: if we don’t want to lose sight of the feeling which is so natural, perhaps well-founded, that God would like

all men to be saved, then let's say that God has two true kinds of will, which are efficacious in themselves and which cannot be frustrated, one of saving all men, the other of following the rules of his infinitely perfect justice. The latter, which is the simplest, wins out: he punishes the sinner, he only wants all men to be saved while also wanting them all to be virtuous. In two words, let's not say that God wants all men to be saved, let's say instead that God wants all men to be worthy of salvation; this is enough to satisfy the feeling of the preference of good over evil, which we can't abandon, and it seems to me that the partisans of the misunderstood efficacy of God's will should also be content, since they agree that this efficacy lies in power: my will is as complete, as absolute and as entirely within its rights relative to what I want and then to what I could do, although I don't do it.

Those who fail to comprehend what I understand by all these explanations and these examples only need to hold onto the pure idea of justice, which is equally content with the punishment of the bad as with the reward of the good. That is very obvious and cannot be combatted directly by the least plausible argument. We would see this without quibbling if we were perfectly just and disinterested; we would see clearly that God wants men to be free, that they can be good or bad, and that he wants to reward the former and punish the latter.

It will be found that God no more wishes for all men to be saved than he wants them all to be damned, that he simply wants them to receive fair treatment for their actions, which, again, is completely equal for us and includes all that we can reasonably desire.

There is no room for the objection that, for this reason, God is indifferent to virtue and vice; a good or a bad painting is not a matter of indifference, even if I don't care whether Peter is a good or a bad painter. God sees virtue as something that merits approbation, vice the opposite. He sees virtue as something that bears a relationship to the truth and to being, vice as bearing a relationship to falseness and nothingness; but in either case, he is equally content with punishments as with rewards, just as a good or a bad painting is not a matter of indifference to me, even if I am equally content to praise a good painter and to criticize a bad one.

Civil justice is established to punish the guilty; I approve of its establishment, I'm content with it, I respect it, I'm not worried about it; if there were one aiming to award prizes to virtue, I would

have the same reaction to it; the difference I find in it is that I might flatter myself with some merit and complain that this justice would be ill-used if it fails to give me what I think I deserve, but since this isn't the case in divine justice, I am sure to be treated with precise justice, of which I myself will be convinced and about which I would be perfectly and admirably satisfied.

There remains a terrible objection that I can't conceal; anyone can say: "Why has God created me? To send me such horrible suffering? There is no justice in a choice between pains and pleasures; if God had offered me his rewards and his punishments, along with the suffering required to obtain the former and avoid the latter, I would have preferred to return to nothing or a state of unconsciousness. His power is harmful to me and is, consequently, unjust. I doubt that even the most passionate lover would agree to flip a coin where heads meant twenty-four hours of enjoyment with his mistress, tails the same number of hours under torture; anyone who would accept these options has nothing to complain of, but I, who wouldn't, have a right to object." There is only one possible reply. This [divine treatment of men] is certainly and incontestably true, as we've seen; therefore, it is just and we will see this justice clearly without any shadow of difficulty when we see it carried out.

I have used the words "damn" and "save", according to custom, which is ultimately inconsequential, since whatever we might think about the judgments of God as to punishments and rewards, we can still call damned those whom he condemns for punishment, whatever this may consist of, and saved those to whom he rewards. By these terms I still mean the state in which God will place every man after his death according to his works, combined with and compensating for each other, according to the different circumstances that might affect their goodness or their evil, and constitute the degrees thereof in the presence of his infinitely perfect justice and the lights of his wisdom, which comprehends all things.

FIFTH ARTICLE: ON PREDESTINATION, FATE, AND CHANCE

Christian predestination with respect to salvation has been discussed in particular by what has been said of God's foreknowledge and justice. The horrors of this predestination have been highlighted, and its impossibility and vacuity have been demonstrated. As for the popular error

on the course of life — “the days of which”, it’s said, “are numbered” — it is quite true that God sees from the moment of conception everything that a man might experience according to an infinity of hypotheses, he sees in a determined fashion all the movements of the life of this subject, he sees there all the times of health, sickness, even death, but the freedom of this subject, and that of the others among whom he will use it, means that God is not pre-determined as to any of these hypotheses; he only sees all the possibilities along with his real uncertainty concerning each of them. It’s the same with all the beings within reach of men. God doesn’t know the duration of a window-pane in my study, because I or someone else might break it, either deliberately or by actions done for some other reason; he certainly sees, absolutely and in a determinate way, what the duration of this window pane must be in itself with respect to its force and that of all the necessary agents, he also sees all the possible hypotheses according to which the pane might remain unbroken or be broken, such as how many pieces it will break into and what lines and shapes will result (which is an infinite knowledge, incommunicable to any but a perfect being), he sees the uncertainty of all these hypotheses with respect to their execution, but this is another perfect sort of knowledge which fulfills the possibilities, for there is the same degree of perfection in seeing uncertainty where all that’s required is to see what certainty there is, as well as nothingness and existence.

There is no difference in doctrine as concerns all the incidents of this world, prosperity and adversity, sickness or health, the length or shortness of life and, in general, everything that might be susceptible to interference by the free acts of men; it’s only ever when overwhelmed by misfortune that people have recourse to fate, necessity and the stars, it’s for the sake of consolation that people say that misfortune was inevitable: it’s to exonerate oneself, it’s to avoid chastising oneself for the failings that brought us our bad luck.

We don’t attribute our prosperity to fate and the stars, we love taking credit for our own prudence and talent, but as for the prosperity of others, we’re content to point to good luck, whether from envy or to stifle the sorrow coming from our inability to get the same for ourselves. Indeed, he who attains similar honors and wealth after having been equally far from them will no more say of himself than anyone else would say of themselves that it all came from a spin of the blind goddess’s wheel.

It is even more ridiculous and more opposed to common sense to want the fate of states and republics to have set limits, for them to have, like plants and animals, a time of birth, a time of growth and then to perish. On what basis can this be grounded other than whim and ignorance, or perhaps lack of attention, and reflection, since all these things are subject to human freedom? Republics ruin themselves by negligence, tyranny, luxury and bad government, or they are ruined by other potentates which prove to be more capable, more enterprising and stronger. However this may be, it's no different than in the goings-on of the least individual.

The life of an individual depends on the organization of his body, on its temperament and on the wear of the springs and parts that activate it; these things wear out, consequently it must eventually run down and stop. The life of a republic depends only on the moral union, on the will of men; in its physical aspect it is a multitude of men who are replaced by others like them as they perish, such that it can always be the same thing. When Polichinelle leaps and cavorts, a thread will break, a hinge will come off, but a new one will be attached, and the whole marionette show can go on forever.

Therefore, in the birth, continuation, growth, decline, decadence and destruction of political bodies, there is no destiny, no fatality, no influences or any other illusory causes. The Roman empire perished because of its disorders and collapsed under its own weight, due to the introduction of Christianity, which sowed discord and rebellion, because of the ventures of the northern barbarians who had certain advantageous dispositions at the same time as the Romans had other, opposite ones.

Even if the heavens and all the stars had been in a different position, if the number of years of the duration of this enormous power had been greater or less, it would have gone the same way, these things are obvious, which our reason comprehends and sees without repugnance and which experience doesn't allow us to doubt at all. To go looking for other reasons is to indulge in fanaticism and to betray one's senses and judgment, it means giving preference to what can't be seen or understood over what is easily sensed and grasped.

This isn't pride speaking; you might think that, having succeeded in winning a fortune and holding on to it with great difficulty, I have ended up believing that others are less fortunate only

by their own fault and that our fate is in our hands. Nothing could be further from the truth. Few men ought to be more stubborn about fate than myself; my life has been a perpetual string of disgrace which human prudence seems to have been unable to foresee: I currently live in poverty, close to destitution, although with a few talents on my side, the respect of most of my acquaintances and perhaps without any enemies; none of this blinds me or means I don't see that I've brought a portion of my misfortune on myself, that I've simply failed to avoid other problems, in part because I was too rigid, in part too weak and lazy, and that the rest happened according to the natural or ordinary ways of the world and men's conduct. I can easily see that the opposite could equally have happened and that small trifles could have changed things in a thousand ways.

Chance might well have led to the arguments that I've just fought against, which are assured of victory in every rational mind. Since chance tends not to be understood and its effects are unseen, some have imagined that there is an external cause controlling what is fortuitous; with this fine discovery, they have gone on to extend the power of this chimera to everything that bothered them or seemed extraordinary.

To dissipate this dire illusion, we need to anatomize chance, or rather, demonstrate its non-existence; we must show that, properly and truly speaking, there is no such thing, for, with respect to us, if there is such a thing, men have fallen into error and into disorder for failing to make this distinction.

There is no chance in the very nature of things, whatever we may believe; it's the same as colors, tastes and sounds: in themselves, bodies contain nothing like these things, although we sense them; all things go according to the impressions received from the causes that move them. When these causes are set beside their accompanying circumstances, it is, therefore, physically impossible for things to go otherwise. All that we say happens by chance is the outcome of a concatenation of events that is as sure, as efficacious as any of our actions made with all possible deliberation; we would see this series and this concatenation and we would foresee their effects if we knew the causes and could envisage all the circumstances.

To tell the truth, there is no more chance in shaking and tossing dice than when I set one down deliberately with my hand, or when it comes to rest at a certain spot on the table. This paradox will vanish when we realize that, given the position of the die on this or that face, along with its fall from a certain height, the material and shape of this die, that of the table, its hardness and its smoothness, for, with all this accounted for, it is impossible for the die not to land on a certain place on the table and that the comparative hardness of the die and the table, combined with the degree of force with which it is cast, the die will roll a certain number of times in a certain way, consequently it will stop in a certain spot and on a certain face; I am persuaded that not only God, but even a pure intelligence, a human soul without a body, can see how things will turn out from the moment a die is cast. This is assuming that spirits can see bodies.

But with respect to us, it's all fortuitous, which only means that we can't know all these circumstances, compare them, even less can we combine all their forces; thus, these things which are very sure, very regulated and very determined, are uncertain for us.

When we see someone standing on their threshold, putting on their sword and adjusting their cloak, we don't know which way they'll turn their feet; they will go right or left, randomly with respect to us, but with respect to themselves, their path is determined and sure.

There is no difference between a composite action and a simpler action, the problem lies only in the fact of our very limited grasp of things and our lack of insight. We can completely judge the bounce of a ball in a game of *jeu de paume* ["real tennis"], it's the same thing, without the least difference, as a cast of the die, we judge the height of the bounce and to which side it will continue since practice has given us an adequate knowledge of the angles of motion with which the ball is moved, the force of the bounce when the ball meets the pavement stones, and because this practice also informs us about the proportionality between the path of the ball and where it must rebound. If the ball were cubic or had many sides and the paving stone were uneven, then we'd be unable to guess the height of the bounce or which side would be on top; we'd be unable to judge the ball, even though it bounced according to rules that are no less sure than those of the round ball on a flat surface; this is why we call the unusual movement of the ball chance, which however comes only from unevenness in the ball or the pavement, which we're ignorant about; on the contrary, we expect regularity in both things.

I think I've simplified and clarified this so that even a mind wholly inept in speculative thought can see it clearly; but still, let's also give an example or two that will utterly satisfy any lingering doubts.

= > I have an appointment with Peter who's staying at Saint-Martin's Gate, I'm on the bridge of Notre-Dame. I find Peter on the corner of the rue de Saint-Merry: he started out at the Gate of Saint-Honoré and is on his way to Lyon, from where he won't return anytime soon; I conclude my business with him; lo and behold, an amazing event and a great fortune: there was only one point in time and space. A hypocrite won't fail to say that this is a miracle of providence, especially if some monkish interest is concerned, but at bottom this turn of events, truly a fortunate one for me, was inevitable. Assuming the free determination of our will, Peter left his house at six o'clock, he went 40 yards a minute; there are 2400 yards between his house and the gate of Saint-Honoré, therefore he arrived precisely at seven o'clock, he stayed there for an hour, leaving at eight, from there to Saint-Merry it's 1,800 yards, consequently he was there at eight forty-five. As for me, I left at 8:30, going twenty yards a minute and it's 300 yards from my house to the corner of the rue Neuve-Saint-Merry; I must absolutely be there at 8:45 and consequently meet my man. The whole thing was inevitable, but since I didn't know any of this, with respect to me it's random, i.e., it's something I couldn't either expect or foresee, but no so-called providence has any more of a hand in it than when I empty a vase by tipping it downward. Destiny or fatality are empty words that mean nothing; it's all within the natural order, according to the essence of things and according to the power of free and necessary agents.

A savage who crossed the Pont-Neuf various times and noticed the changing positions of the hand on the clock at the Samaritaine would attribute it to chance that he sees it sometimes high, sometimes low, sometimes even, since he doesn't understand the creation and power of the machine that moves it; he might even believe that eclipses happen at random. We cast a dice that lands now on one face, now on another, we can't measure the degree of motion we've given it to make it flip, we don't know its shape or hardness with any precision, any more than that of the table, we say that it rolls 6 or 4, etc., by chance. If we possessed the necessary means to judge all these details precisely, we would positively know how the dice would land, and we wouldn't call it chance, for the same reason that we don't call it chance when the clock's hand points a certain

way at a certain hour, that is, because we know how the clock is made and understand its power of turning the needle twice around the dial precisely while the sun is moving the world around. In the same way, an astronomer with a precise understanding of the motion of the sun and the moon doesn't say that eclipses are fortuitous meetings of these two stars.

I haven't forgotten that I have based demonstrations of the utmost importance on chance; we must fend off the partisans of the foreknowledge of free actions and of the human and tyrannical providence of God. They would shout for joy at what I've just said; proofs are based on chance, but we're also saying that there is no such thing. They would declare it a miracle: see how God allows those who combat such holy sentiments to be blinded and contradict themselves so blatantly and pitifully!

They should lower their victory trumpets: chance as it has been explained above and as it truly is contains all the uncertainty my demonstrations require; it's not a question of chance in itself, but of chance in us.

I've said that chance is not uniform, and by taking this as a clear and incontestable truth, demonstrated *a priori* by our feeble knowledge and the multitude of circumstances, which our mind can never combine, and *a posteriori* by eternal experience; thus, I've been able to use the ordinary term, although the simplification thereof is false in one sense, it is true in the way I'm using it.

This also provides me with a reflection which will complete our conviction about chance, which is that the same thing can be chance for one person and not for another. It wouldn't be impossible to mark a spot on the wall in a game of *jeu de paume* so that, by bouncing a ball there from a certain angle, it would bounce on all four walls and proceed from there to break a glass in the gallery; the whole assembly would think that the glass had been broken by chance, and only the man who marked the spot and threw the ball would have been aware that this was inevitable. It is, therefore, only our ignorance that leads us to see things which in themselves are entirely predetermined, as fortuitous.

Let's come back to my demonstrations based on chance: the acts I think of can't be uniform, since they're done without sure principles. If I say that the emperor of China is currently standing and this is true, I only told the truth by chance, since I have no reason to say that he's standing rather than sitting, and for the same reason, if I'm questioned many times on a similar matter, I will often give a false answer. A man who is not an astronomer can't accurately predict the eclipses that are due in the next dozen years, although nothing is surer and more determinate *per se*.

It's truly by chance for me that, when I throw three dice, since I can't measure the dice-shaking that would be required for this, relative to the materials and shapes of the dice, of the table and of the positioning of the dice in the cup, the contours and combination of which things governed the determination of this chance. And, with these things in mind, the chance itself is no longer random, it was physically and absolutely determined, thus it follows that this shaking of the dice cannot be uniform, since there is no rule to measure it, and consequently it will always be uncertain and will produce a different result at different times, not because it was uncertain *per se*, but because we lack any way to gain certain knowledge about it.

Let us conclude that there is no chance in the things themselves, which is the object of this section, but there is indeed chance for us, which is enough to show the certainty of my demonstrations.

FIFTH SECTION: ON INSTRUCTION IN WORSHIP.

The whole thing will be very glorious to God and very easy for men, without fear of any bad, execrable and pernicious effects, like those that are necessarily part of factitious religions, which render the face of the Earth desolate and are the shame of mankind. The father will be the professor for his family, he won't exactly teach it anything, he will only point things out, everyone will be a priest, will carry out his own sacrifices, etc.

FIRST ARTICLE: ON INSTRUCTION.

The catechism that this professor will need to compose consists in very few reasonable things, of which all human minds have a more or less clear idea; they will be accepted in a true, enlightened manner and will be truly consented to inwardly from the first proposition onward. People will know their religion just as they know they have five senses, and a thousand other things that one will have seen for oneself to be the case: after hearing things a single time: one feels no inner resistance against them, there are no objections, there is no need to burden one's memory, renounce one's judgment and deny common sense; there will be no need to shackle one's liberty, abandon one's reason and one's goods to others on the weight of authority alone.

Very few lines will contain this entire catechism. By the plan I've followed for myself in this notebook, starting from "Who made us, my son? Who made the heavens and the earth, etc.? Don't you see that there must be a being of supreme wisdom, of supreme industriousness and unlimited power, don't you understand that this being, so wise and just must, consequently, punish the wicked and reward the good? What do you think it means to be good and wicked?", a three-year old child will reply of his own accord that the good are those who do harm to none, and the wicked are those who harm others. "Yes, my son, that's right; the good do no wrong to anyone and do good to all, as much as they can; the wicked seek only their own satisfaction without worrying whether they're harming others."

"But, my son, what do you mean by good and evil?" The child will reply again of himself that good means sharing food, caresses, etc., that evil is fighting, taking what others have. "This is true, my son, but when you're older, you'll see the different kinds of goods and evils even better. To know all of them, you have only to examine yourself on all occasions when you deal with others; consider the way you feel they should act with you; all that you feel they should do to you, is good, is merit with God and men; all that you feel they should not do to you, is evil, is what is meant by the word sin, including one's omission of giving God the adoration we so entirely owe him."

"What should you do then, my son, for this infinitely wise, infinitely powerful and infinitely just being we call God? Respect and revere him as he deserves, as much as we can: that is what we call worshipping God; it means having the continual idea and intention of doing only what is right

in order to earn his approval and his rewards, of never doing evil for fear of being disapproved of and consequently punished.”

“But, my father, what will these rewards and the punishments be?” “We know nothing about this, my son, don’t trouble yourself about it. It’s enough for you that everything will be perfectly just, that you will be treated after your death just as you’ve deserved during your life.”

“You also understand very well, my son, that it is very hard not to do any wrong and you will understand this even better when you are more experienced in the world. When you have done something wrong, for which I castigate you, you ask my forgiveness, you reject what you did; we must act the same way with God and before God, we must ask him forgiveness and make up for the harm we did to others, as far as we can.”

“But, my son, note well that, when you ask me for forgiveness, I don’t know whether you are truly upset about your mistake; it’s not the same with God, he peers into the depths of our hearts and sees our most hidden thoughts, thus, it’s not anything you might say that will satisfy him, but the sincere repentance which he’ll find in you.”

All this might be paraphrased somewhat, as children grow and increase in discernment, but let’s stick to general principles as much as possible, nothing is more important: if an individual goes astray, the problem is a minor one; when a professor errs, many others are misled, discord is sown when one is stubborn about his insane views and blames those of others, and burns everything down. If a thousand people draw up general principles for their own lives and misapply them, this is nothing in comparison with what happens when the views of a madman are published.

This catechism, which is so succinct, so easy to take in, and which can be absorbed and retained on the first reading, which isn’t susceptible of any contestation from other men or any opposition from our minds, will make more honest men and true servants of God than all our courses in theology, all our casuists’ books on morality and doing *quinquenniums* in the Sorbonne.

Then let us stick to the general incontestable principles that there is a God, author of all things, who will reward virtue and punish vice, that there is no other virtue than worshiping God inwardly from the bottom of one's heart and with all the effort our mind is capable of, and in second place to act on all occasions with other men as we feel that we can reasonably desire them to act with us, all with the aim of deserving God's approbation. Finally, that the opposite is vice, which God condemns and punishes: in a word, that there is no religion but that which pure reason, without passion, without self-seeking and without suggestion, without being told, and no virtue but justice, and no vice but injustice.

Nothing more is needed to give God all the glory he can receive from creatures or, to speak precisely, to fulfill the aims of the creator and for the happiness of humanity, as well as for the government of republics along with lesser societies and families.

There is no virtue in nothingness, nor consequently in the omission of any action, except to the extent of the criminality of this action; far from it, it's a frustration of the creator's intention, it shows contempt for his generosity and is a kind of criticism of his wisdom. There is no virtue in useless actions, even less so in those which are bad by nature, such as sacrificing oneself or others, whether by dying or by suffering, without need; there is a great deal of vanity, folly or self-seeking in it. There is no virtue and holiness in reading lots of pages in a book or in singing any words, whatever these may be: words either contain our thoughts or they don't contain them. If they do contain them, I mean if we really are thinking what our words signify, we're not telling the deity anything it can't already see, these words are as superfluous as if a courtier said and repeated three or four times a day to the king that he resides at Versailles. If our words are different from our thoughts, it is an abominable and execrable situation.

There is no claiming that a unanimous prayer opens the heavens and this power is nonsense, at least the weakness of a small mind which judges God like men, who has seen a magistrate submitting to the wails of a populace after previously resisting the supplication of a few individuals. There is only one kind of prayer, unanimous or individual, it doesn't matter, it's adoration and the begging of forgiveness for sin; when this prayer is made in public and conjointly with many other people, it might be edifying to some extent, i.e., it can make it more evident and help people feel the need for it and show them how to pray, but this doesn't add an

ounce of power or efficacy. It might also stir the will more strongly and produce more intense feelings, which is basically pointless when dealing with God, who sees things as they really are. God can tell if we worship him, he can tell if we're repentant; words are absolutely useless, prayer about anything other than the forgiveness of sins can only be a bad thing, and even worse if we make it communally or as a multitude, as the Christians principally do: it is impossible for this prayer to contain the feelings of each person, nor does it suit their particular state of mind, and it's certain that in these recitations of public and unanimous prayers, as they're called, there is always someone present who is shamelessly lying to God.

These four last thoughts don't belong to the general catechism, but they are necessary in countries where men groan under the tyranny and superstition of factitious religions, where monks, priests, bonzes, imams, mullahs, talapoins, etc., are present.

SECOND ARTICLE: ON WORSHIP.

No external worship is required; an individual, inner worship is not necessarily indispensable, the mere habitual feeling of the adoration of God and the intention to do only what he approves is sufficient; but it is good to give a quarter-hour to daily recalling these principles to strengthen our resolve to be faithful to him, above all to incite ourselves to true repentance on our failings, making evenings preferable to mornings.

The head of the family might sometimes deliver this short meditation aloud in the presence of his wife, his children and his household servants, then he will ask everyone to pass in review their own deeds and sincerely repent for their misdeeds, leaving a few moments for this purpose, during which time he will examine himself, finally he will pronounce the prayer in order to give the children and the simpler members of his household some sort, not of a model which is always dangerous, but of an example to imitate and not follow to the letter.

Let him never omit this act, which is the only necessary religious one for him, and let him do it in such a way that, without affectation, his whole family will see that he is scrupulous in this matter:

example is a strong motivating factor for most people, everyone will be edified and confirmed as to the usefulness of this practice.

There is the entire religious worship, all the ceremonies, the sacrifices and the whole external religion. God accepts nothing else. There are the priests; God doesn't want to be served by any attorney. There are all the ministers, God has no use for them, since his power is infinite; they would be pernicious for men, whom they wouldn't fail to guide according to their own interests.

As for the inner religion, which is the true and only necessary one, it should be perpetual, without the least interruption; it's this habit, deliberately created and immanent, this continual desire according to which we've seen that man should act so as to merit the approval of the perfect Being, his Creator and Judge.

The question that might be asked about the posture one should assume during the external act we've mentioned deserves no consideration; everything that's completely physical is indifferent *per se*, however it is quite fitting to have one peculiar to oneself, and being on one's knees seems suitable enough, provided it's without affectation or putting on a false face. The best move is to close one's eyes, with face hidden by the hands, leaning on elbows if convenient: whatever is purely physical should be eschewed as far as possible, since the addressee is God who sees our thoughts in themselves. Positions, ceremonies, all the outward signs are only meaningful to human beings, who cannot reach as far as each other's souls, and who only perceive their modifications in the material signs, which are often so inappropriate in matters of tartuffism [hypocrisy] that the public laughs at them instead of seeing the lofty idea of devotion which people pretend to assume before our eyes.

THIRD ARTICLE: A REPLY TO THE OBJECTIONS.

Someone will certainly cry out that all is lost if there are no people entrusted with teaching and leading the public in worship, that men will forget all sense of religion and lapse into atheism; to which I reply:

1st) That it is false that men lapse into atheism when there isn't the least hint of worship, whereas we've just established a good, sufficient one, without reproach or any drawbacks.

2nd) People know nothing more clearly than the deity, or any desire more intense than that which leads them to think about the subject. Even though few men study logic, nobody draws a false conclusion for a correct one, no matter how little they may use it; without being a lawyer, everyone knows justice and defers to it; if they violate it, they retain sight of it; without a master of ceremonies, a child defers to grown-ups; without a police-judge, women endure male superiority; without professors of economy, husbands and wives unite their attention to the prosperity of their family and govern it very well; without professors of rules and duties, fathers work to provide for their children, mothers give them milk and perform a thousand hard and unpleasant tasks; savages, without books, without learning, without preachers, do all these things and they aren't atheists; far from it, their ideas about the deity are more correct than those of any Christian.

If professors are set up so as to nurture children and if professors make money by multiplying the laws and their own precepts, they'll invent a thousand useless follies and preach their necessity so forcefully that the most essential things will be forgotten.

This is precisely what happened to justice and religion: jurisprudence has established and introduced bickering, questions are dragged out for twenty years, which are proposed simply and in natural terms; theology has introduced a thousand beliefs and authorized a thousand ridiculous ceremonies, it has covered true piety and morality, the way an eruption of Mount Vesuvius covers the surrounding fields with rocks and ashes; these fields become useless and even unrecognizable. The more prevalent this kind of theology is, the less virtue and holiness there is. Visit the countries of the Inquisition and you will see, M.R.F., whether I'm exaggerating or mistaken.

Therefore, the worst that could happen in an obscuring of the natural lights, a kind of forgetting or rather a negligence, a lack of attention to the deity; few people would dream of paying him their respect, few would think of asking it to forgive their faults, promise to reform while worked up in his presence and gain a firm resolve with respect to it; this is more or less the state many

savages are in, but nobody would fall into positive atheism, which is to deny the existence of a Being which is necessary, perfect, eternal and free, the author of all things.

But I maintain that this state would be infinitely better than that of factitious religions, which produce positive atheism with their nonsensical words about the deity, with the tyranny they wield in its name; hence so much discord, which sets the whole earth ablaze, strips men of all humanity and arms the strong against the weak with all manner of cruelty and perfidy, whereas the state of the savages allows peace, concord and humanity to reign in society. But the form of worship we have posited, as simple and easy as it is, cures all problems; however, while there isn't any need for public worship, I don't deny that, if well-regulated, it might be of some utility: unfortunately this utility is an Epicurean atom in comparison to the infinite danger of its tipping into idolatry and all the absurd superstitions which inundate the face of the earth as well as in the cruelest chains of the most avid and unworthy tyrants.

If, in spite of these considerations, which are so naturally convincing, and despite the universal experience of all times, a public rite and an external face for religion is desired, let the whole thing be limited to gathering on certain days to hear a discourse on the greatness of God along with an exhortation to virtue, according to the principles we've seen, followed by a brief, unanimous prayer to beg forgiveness for human weaknesses, offering the deity one's adoration and repentance with keen and apt thoughts, expressed solidly and unfigured, no long compliments in oratorical style, but in the natural, simple and candid style, which has a very different sort of nobility and a very different sort of loftiness. When truth and pure intentions are present, nothing but clarity and brevity are needed, and in such a situation we might truly say: *Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit brevitati clarum*. This is the real and true eloquence; ordinary rhetoric is only used to dazzle and mislead, above all, these speeches and prayers must necessarily be in clear terms, not susceptible of any ambiguity.

To sing hymns and psalms is folly, even when these songs are beautiful; poetry is only for lovers, madness is permissible in love, but nowhere else; poetry has ruined everything, it has corrupted princes through flattery, to which it gives a pleasant, insinuating and bearable turn; extreme nonsense is said right in the face of people, a quarter of which they wouldn't dare say in prose; it has corrupted religion by giving false ideas of the deity and winning assent for a thousand follies

that would be horrific without these dangerous ornaments. I can't understand how a *bel esprit* [a wit] wouldn't allow that, in our operas, which are pure entertainment and where, consequently, every indulgence and extravagance is permitted, provided nothing criminal is involved, how this *bel esprit*, I say, wouldn't allow people on a theater stage people to get upset, hurl insults, become enraged, sigh while singing, while he himself in the temple brought his adoration to the fearsome throne of the omnipotent one and cut loose against sinners and the profane with wretched poetry and utterly dreadful music.

The simple form of worship I've just described might certainly meet with some success, but these are the sort of fine metaphysical propositions the practice of which should not be attempted. Preachers and prayer-writers will never fail to mix in some of their fantasies here. Gradually vanity and self-seeking, along with ambition and the desire to make a name and rule others, terms like "clergy" and "laymen" will be invented and perhaps in less than a century we'll be surprised to find ourselves belonging to the religion of Gaspard, of Gautier, of Durand, etc., instead of that of humanity, instructed by God himself.

This religion, coming from the brains of individual men will have no limits, and this clergy will be a troop of tyrants and public thieves. The poor people, because of the word which only means "people" in Greek, will find itself a people no longer, but brute beasts in some places and in others vile slaves submitting to a certain treatment, ready to offer their back for a blow and possessing nothing for themselves. The name of God will no longer mean anything more than what king means to the republican bloodsuckers.

No conjecture is more reasonable or better grounded than to think that this is how idolatry came into the world; it is obvious from historical fact that this progress is how the metamorphosis from Christianity to papism happened, which ultimately set up the Inquisition to suppress all light and all liberty which might have been able to prevail. Who would have believed a farsighted philosopher who assured them that these apostles who were supposedly so humble and simple, so subject to the powers that be, would be followed by audacious rogues who would excommunicate Emperors for serving them inadequately, and stir up the masses and even their own children against them?

As for inventing laws and precautions to avoid this misfortune, I will confess my inadequacy; if someone, contrary to reason and experience, chances to find any foolproof ones, then public worship will be the best thing on earth, but the chance of success will never equal the fear of failure, and the blessing of success will always be a grain of sand, while the evils of a false success will be as wide as Saturn's globe.

Jews, Christians, even Mahometans have less of a right than others to regret the abolition of public worship, since their holy books state that the world did without it for the first third of its existence and even longer, since up to the time of Moses the holy nation was governed in each family with respect to religion, as in its domestic economy. Finally, since the problem is inveterate and universal, it seems unlikely to be overcome. Let those, therefore, who cannot let go of public worship be aware that above all, the necessary thing is that nobody should make a career in the ministry, i.e., make this their means of subsistence, let alone the establishment of an abundant and splendid fortune.

Let the wisest, most virtuous and most enlightened men be chosen, especially one who is aged, who is only in office for a little while, three months, six or a year at most in smaller places; but who receives no compensation or the least imaginable amount. A good man is too content with God's rewards, along with the pleasure of serving humanity; only a rogue who mocks God and man would want to serve God by making a profitable contract with men; the vain pretext of study has no weight here.

Then, everyone must be allowed to look directly at and publicly and instantly reprimand the preacher in cases when his flights of fancy escape him and he adds something of his own to the universal doctrine: at least there must always be certain people set up for that purpose, if there is any fear of confusion by entrusting this task to all individuals generally.

The whole people will judge the matter at once and will treat the preacher in a fit manner according to his folly or wickedness; it will be even better in the numerous assemblies, as in the parishes of the large cities, where the preacher will be changed on a daily basis, choosing him one day for the next one so that he can be ready and, to prevent that long verbiage that leads people

to say such awful things, limit the speeches to fifteen minutes, with a clock on the table, and the prayer half that long (six minutes should be enough).

A model or a formula of both might also be composed which, after being unanimously accepted, will pass, along with the short catechism seen earlier, for the course of doctrine, adoration and penitence, with nothing else to be added. The whole thing should be written on marble or bronze in the place of gathering, and the safest method ever used would be to read these three pieces which would only take half an hour, to which fifteen minutes of silence could be tacked on, for personal meditation, reserved for thinking deeply on the greatness of God, especially his justice, confirmation in one's resolve never to act outside the manner he is known to approve of, and to ask his forgiveness for the faults one has committed against these feelings. To preclude any occasion for change or disorder, it would be good to place, at the end of every century, new tables beneath the first ones, leaving them in place along with the same pronouncements and the same words and in perfect equality. Every hundred years, the first will be removed and the third ones set in place, and so on to infinity. But, just as languages change, these table must be duplicated, one word in the common tongue, with another one above it, in the most common dead language of the land. In addition, a separate table would be necessary to define the words that require definition, where certain dubious and obscure meanings might cause confusion. With all these things, and all that the most capable people might add to it, greed and ambition will sneak in to play their game; inaction, laziness, stupidity will be deceived; it's only a matter of time.

EPILOGUE

This system, M.R.F., is natural and I believe it will seem judicious to all free minds; it is based on the divine essence and perfections, on the intentions of the infinite being as discovered by the inspection of its works, by attention to the feelings of our conscience, and finally, by the path of simple and clear reasoning, with an end product that is unified and consistent. This system is not only incontestable, but all the peoples on earth currently acknowledge it; you too, M.R.F., can never combat its essential parts; a definitive sign that all the rest are false is that not one of them remains uncontested and all are considered abominable by nearly all of humanity, which is obvious proof that all these systems are only disguises of the truth or suppositions, additions, and changes that have been made to it. This single thought is so weighty that paying any attention to it reveals it is sufficient to open the eyes of deceived mankind and return all the henchmen and ministers of factitious religions to nothingness. All religions are based solely on the principle of the existence of God; but it's on the erroneous conclusions drawn from this principle and on the false explanation of our duties to the supreme being that the external cult, the sacrifices and so many ridiculous practices which have been labeled "devotion" have been based on; then, the prideful and the greedy, having seized control of this external cult and made a distinct profession of it, each of these wretches has imagined and invented everything they thought capable of making this profession better and, when anyone ventured to touch these follies, they shriek that the holiest and most sacred parts of religion are under attack. But religion cries out even louder and more truly, although less effectually: "Miserable scoundrels, insane maniacs, impudent rogues, why do you hold up nonsense and even crimes as the holiest and most sacred of all things?"

The idea of heroic virtue, so inherently respectable and so well regarded by humanity, led them to place illustrious men in heaven and make subaltern gods of them; in the end, folly and egoism distorted the finest principles as they liked, sparing neither suppositions nor deceptions and supporting impudence and hypocrisy, all the odious train of the different religions, this burlesque pile of ceremonies, images, robes, grimaces, childish and ridiculous observances, and as the

summit of horrors, the worst of all crimes, acts declared godless and abominable by reason, which nature abhors and the mere telling of which makes everyone shiver, became acts of religion and holiness.

The truth leads all men to the same point, their whim and interests make them take a thousand different roads away from it, from which the conclusion is natural that there is nothing true in all religions but what they have in common, of which I claim this notebook is a faithful relation, albeit paraphrased, proved, explained, illustrated by the discovery of its sources and the description of its progress.

All religions have always been more complicated as they've become more prominent, another clear proof of their falseness: the truth is one, simple, incapable of more or less. Dogmas have always been heaped upon dogmas, mysteries upon mysteries, grimaces upon grimaces, the whole thing turning into clear profit for those who preach it.

I bet, I'm sure, as I'm sure that Paris is larger than Vaugirard, that there isn't a single religion in the universe where he who preaches it gives something and doesn't take anything; all the ministers of those I know of don't give anything, take a great deal and never as much as they demand.

I expect, therefore, M.R.F., until I receive your reply, that my system can be neither reversed nor refuted, that this is the very one that God has, so to speak, planted in all human hearts without books, without ministers, without interpreters, without commentaries, even with the deprivation of all the senses, finally in a manner worthy of his justice and of his power.

God, in this system, will be worshiped to perfection, in the most perfect manner men are capable of, consequently in the manner in which his perfect wisdom and his perfect justice require. All the true virtues will be easily known by the simplest imaginable means, without doubt or trouble, without fear of suppositions, false prophets, corruption, poets, monuments, without commentaries, without interpreters, without trials, without study, without learning any sciences, without any need for consultation or foreign judgment. The stupidest of all men will know as much as the finest *bel esprit*, as the profoundest genius, as the greatest theologian, as the oldest

casuist. The blind man will be as learned as he who has grown pale over his books, the deaf man as much as he who has spent his life between catechisms and sermons, as must necessarily be the case, religion being equally necessary for everyone and for each person in particular.

Truly, M.R.F., do you think there is more virtue among us with our mountains of books and our legions of preachers and theologians than among the philosophers and savages? True holiness, simplicity and justice shouldn't be looked for in the Sorbonne, in convents or in the bigots' houses; candor, uprightness, frankness, the true purity of heart should not be sought in Paris, in Madrid, in Lisbon, in Venice, in Rome; it's in the villages furthest from the episcopal city and from the parish, it's among children who know only nature and haven't been corrupted by any education.

The philosophers who have risen above the prejudices and nonsense they were nursed on, who, like a man in the sea only gets back to the air with immense effort, after a long time underwater, then breathes the purest and most essential aliments of life, have scattered the obscure clouds that blinded them: they have shaken off the enormous weight of the falsehoods that crushed them and find themselves in the simplest truth where they refresh their minds, and enjoy the keen light which is their life and satisfaction; they know no other religion than the one dictated by right reason.

Ask a wise man with any experience in the world and who has discarded his biases, who he would rather deal with, a man who laughs at all forms of devotion or a devout man; as for me, I swear before God that nothing good should be expected from a man attached to the practices of religion; I speak from experience: I've foreseen on two important occasions what would come of these, although they were cases of blatant injustice, effects of the most cowardly greed and of the most unworthy faithlessness.

Oh, if there were any republic which knew no religion other than the one we've just seen, or rather, if the whole world only heard preaching about worshipping God and true morality, how flourishing and peaceful it would be! All virtue consists in extravagant opinions, in grotesque practices, in crime, in the omission of good and necessary actions. What could, indeed, come of this but cruelty, brigandry, desolation and depopulation, horrors and execrable abominations?

I do believe, M.R.F., that you will agree quite a bit with what I've established positively, but you will deny that this is the whole story and that much could be said in addition, referring me to the *Summa* of St. Thomas, to your *Conversations chrétiennes* and your *Entretiens métaphysiques*. I've seen all these things; far from convincing me, this is what dealt the final blow to my convictions, to my prejudices, to the residue of my education; this is what set my mind free, it's what pulled the blindfold off me.

It's naturally up to you to establish your rights and to prove what you intend to impose on me beyond what I find that God has told me; I am ready to submit: start by responding solidly, philosophically, not oratorically, by argument, not words shaped and arranged into fine phrases, to my second and third notebook.

Look over all the theologians' arguments on the positive side of religion, what is unique to religion and in addition to the natural religion; reduce these to syllogisms, they will all be in a form of which the premises are false, so false that a fifteen-year-old peasant boy would see through them: so many manifest suppositions, so many fairy tales, ridiculous propositions, question-begging, etc. It's as simple as that.

Why can't I say here: *iamque opus exegi, quod nec papae ira, nec ignes, nec poterit furtum, nec edax abolere vetustas*⁴⁹?

But if these fifty sheets were given to the public, they would be contradicted by a hundred million people, since they preach the truth, but a truth that's odious to the poor, abused people, and even more odious to the wretches who make their fortune from this abuse.

If it were possible to establish this truth while keeping each of the ministers of error in possession of their usurped goods and honors, to overthrow factitious religions without dethroning their henchmen, the true reign of God would meet with few obstacles.

⁴⁹ "Now my work is done, which neither the pope's rage, nor fire, nor theft, nor the gnawing teeth of time can abolish" (a quote from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with a few modifications).

This writing would therefore be received very differently if it came before the public, some would keep silent, most would obey the common proverb: "We are very happy without too much intelligence and science, we'll listen instead to our Priest, our Rabbi, our Imam, our Mullah, our Talapoin, our minister, our Ganga, our Gongis, etc. All these reflections, all these arguments are too much of a bother, let's go our way without such refinements." O poor masses, who let yourselves be shackled by your own doctrine; those who are in a wrong religion are outside of the path to salvation: how can you ever be at peace?

It isn't reason, justice or truth that keep you where you are, it's laziness, cowardice that keep you in this danger; you are exposed to the same misfortune that you deplore in others, and whom you mercilessly damn. Check to see, therefore, whether they're wrong and whether you're right, all you need to do is open your eyes. What do some of you have that others lack? Nothing. It's all the same, sheer accident of birth and education decided everything.

Both your body and your mind have been tormented in order to mislead you, you've endured long speeches, you've been forced to go and listen to them and believe them despite the objections of your reason and without understanding any of it; your memory has been burdened with a thousand articles that are all the harder to retain as common sense rejects them; you are still led every day by the ear to the places where all that is recited, to keep you under the yoke and in the shackles of those you pay an infinite amount to mislead you and make you miserable both in this life and after you die. For ultimately, who knows if God will be gratified by one type of good faith which might be offered to him, versus that which reason so clearly dictates, and whether we will then see that we have neglected through laziness the lights which are so secure and easy, which we received from the deity to guide us, by submitting to the first impressions of people whom we can clearly see have an interest in deceiving us?

To break these irons, as heavy and dangerous as they are, nobody will ask you for laborious attention, tiresome meditations or libraries to rummage through: a quarter-hour of reflection, a little conversation with yourself, a moment of audience with your reason and your conscience will suffice. Nobody will ask you for pensions, tithes or other taxes, you'll be asked for no special shows of respect, immunities etc.

But those who make a great living from error, those who receive from its hand unlimited honors and excessive opulence, those who, without any merit and whose crimes are covered by it, find themselves adored by its means — the Popes, the Muftis, the Mullahs, the Rabbis, the Bishops, the Priests, the Talapains, the Imams, the Monks, the Bonzes, the Dervishes, the Marabouts, etc. — will shout that I'm ungodly, an atheist, a seducer, a poisoner, and the Inquisition will send all its familiar officers and light fires. I admit that nothing can withstand that and that it is the shortest and surest way of responding! In the same way, you would also shut up Euclid, Archimedes, Proclus and Diophantus, the coarsest opinion of the lower populace will be based on the proposition of extension, on the object of the senses and on the fabrication of the universe. The amazing thing is that if I had gone after all the religions as I've done the Christian one, I would be universally applauded, everyone would condemn me only in the case of their own faith. To truly grasp the falseness and absurdity this entails, nothing more would be needed.

However that may be, with God as my witness, who is my Creator and my Judge, I have no ill intention. I pride myself on my fairness and uprightness, I even feel a tender humanity which is only a virtue of the temperament; I would joyfully make a sacrifice, not of my life, for which I care little, but of the peace in which I strive to spend the remainder of it, to bring perfect harmony and happy peace to mankind, which would render them all content in each other's company; I would have them love each other and treat each other justly, as nature so strongly and clearly obliges them to do.

I believe in and fear God and I would be quite pleased, no matter what happened to me, if I could contribute by the use of my meager talents so that humanity might give to the perfect being, its Creator and its Judge, all the glory for which he created it. I seek neither wealth nor renown, I consent to live poor and unknown as I am, this Supreme Being knows that it's my heart speaking here.

My utility only, or rather my need only, has led me to this task, which I've only undertaken on my own account. The power of education is so great that a thousand arguments and a thousand lights shining from time to time and which gave light to my mind, were only like a bolt of lightning that dissipates a moment of obscurity in the night but which can't be made use of, on the contrary, it only dazzles and startles a man; I always fell back into the traps laid by the

fearsome threats we are all nursed on; I tried to recall these arguments and these lights, but they had vanished.

I decided to put down on paper everything that came to mind as it struck me, I added all the reflections that flowed naturally from these, on which I have since then meditated with all my might; then I organized the whole thing as best I could, and I finally managed to compose this work, arranging everything under four headings and joining them up as best I could, to consult, on this matter, the author of *La Recherche de la vérité*.

But there will be no more external rites, no more processions, no more Masses, no more burials with candles in broad daylight, no more sacrifices, no more prelates, no more priests, no more people above the laws, venerable without virtue, rogues; without fear of punishment; people will live only by their labor, actually contributing to the needs and maintenance of life, and with goods acquired according to the laws and not as the gains of charlatanry. An immense income will no longer be the wages of uselessness; the profession of chastity will no longer be the shortest path and the surest way to debauch women, girls and boys; God will be available everywhere and will not be won over by anything but virtuous deeds; gifts, vain words, refined compliments by all the rules of rhetoric, the smoke, the posturing, the massacres of men and animals will be completely discredited and even regarded as abominable; nonsense will no longer be retailed at high cost; doing nothing at all will no longer be the best of all occupations. Everyone can weigh these drawbacks and these miseries for themselves.

That is what alarms the henchmen of factitious religions, that is what brings them out onto the battlefield and leads them to such artifices and cruelty; they are tyrants to be dethroned, they are Denys, they are Phalaris, names odious and insufferable to all those who know them. This is what makes them so keen to discover those who see the truth and what led them to find ways of doing away with all those who spoke up for it. This is what produced the Inquisition: no tyrant has ever pushed injustice and inhumanity so far, because no tyranny ever had such rotten foundations and no tyrant ever benefited so greatly from his tyranny.

The princes' minds are filled with these things, their childhoods are abused to bias and infatuate them, the walls of their dwellings are covered with tapestries and paintings which represent, in

the most touching way that art can furnish, the fables of religion, in order to fill their imaginations with a thousand suppositions, these daughters of ecclesiastical politics; shamelessly having them gaze on things that are manifestly false; whether it's Constantine seeing a cross in the sky, his baptism by Pope Sylvester with all the paraphernalia and pomp of the modern papal court, or [a dragon] driven back by St. Paul's sword, or a dove bringing oil to anoint Clovis, etc.

The rulers are made to capitalize on the abuse of religion, in which they are taught that all virtue consists; true virtue is not preached; they are even gladly allowed every vice; the books given to them are of the same sort as these tapestries and paintings, and if they're ever given a historical model to imitate, some fool is carefully selected who willingly bowed for a beating and who dropped his breeches before an insolent rogue who, with cross in hand and mitre on head, sang the praises of the concubine of a prince who is firm, enlightened and resolute. Then, these princes, who are concerned only with looking after their state or pursuing their pastimes, only lend an ear to the ministers of either of the two, which causes are taken up by those ambitious men who present themselves; they don't feel the burden that crushes their subjects, for them money is a trifle and all the rest of religion is handed to them, provided it doesn't clash with either the pride or the greed of the head and his subalterns.

Let's rather say that all the rest of religion is left to them in a way that won't upset this pride and greed; it's through exemptions that presuppose the authority of these gentlemen and the dependency of the rulers, it's by means of the profusion of these princes' wealth or the permission to plunder their subjects.

I dare to hope, M.R.F., that so many strong arguments and so many brilliant rays of light won't seem unworthy of your attention; I might add certain thoughts later which will contain even more material to challenge your metaphysics and theology, although on problems that are less essential; I will organize them like these four notebooks, distinguishing those related to the third one into different classes, on Christianity as a whole, Papism and Protestantism.

I'm putting myself at great risk and I may well be headed for the dungeons of the Bastille, but I can't question the probity of a man of quality, whatever his commitments may be; I communicate my views and my discoveries to you in secret and in confidence, with candor and honesty, hoping

to benefit by your lights if I am mistaken. Besides, I don't affect to dogmatize or become the chief of any party, I'm neither brave nor mad enough for the dangers of such ambitions as these; so, I hope no Papist zeal stirs in you, I hope it will not put you in the unworthy and infamous role of an informer. Remember, M.R.F., that you are a man before you are a Christian, Papist, and priest, that I have no malignant intentions, and that nobody respects or esteems you more sincerely than I do.

To wrap things up, I am ruminating on several other short treatises: a refutation of spirit apparitions, one on the existence of the evil spirits or devils that are preached about, magic, sorcery, enchantments and possessions by demons, the origin of idolatry as far as it can be conjectured, what it is most plausible to think about Moses, J.C., and Mahomet, the theological and moral inscriptions, the speeches and prayers I mentioned in the second article of the fifth section containing the external rites, and finally, a censure of the forms of devotion of factitious religions, their mysteries, and what they regard as holy and sacred contrary to reason and conscience, as well as what they consider profane or vicious against the voice of nature and common sense.

The whole thing will be so succinct that it won't be a tenth as long as these four notebooks, and thus you shouldn't worry that it would keep you from your sciences and studies, M.R.F.